

CAVTL Seminar: Initial teacher training and CPD for adult vocational teaching and learning

A response from Higher Education Institutions

Vocational teachers have been trained and developed through Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) since the 1940s and many HEIs maintain a strong commitment to this provision. We are therefore very supportive of the Commission and its aims and we welcome the emerging themes. There are distinctive elements to what HEIs can offer initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD) for vocational teachers. We have framed our response to the Commission's themes under two questions.

Initial Teacher Training: What does a new vocational education teacher need to know and be able to do?

The emerging findings of the Commission indicate that new teachers of vocational education need to have,

1. The high levels of practical and theoretical knowledge and occupational and pedagogical expertise demanded of a dual professional (p.4, paragraphs 17-20, p.7, and paragraph 29).
2. Well-developed capacities for systematic situated practical problem solving i.e. the capacity to respond effectively to unexpected developments through collective learning in order to share and solve problems together (p.5, paragraphs 21-22).
3. A strong commitment to becoming a professional vocational teacher, enacting educational values in practice, with a clear sense of pride in supporting the achievements of students, apprentices, teachers and trainers (p.6 paragraph 27, p.10 and paragraph 43).

HE ITT courses support the development of high-levels of practical and theoretical knowledge and academic challenge that can extend or contest what new teachers learn through experience. This challenge encourages new teachers to develop their practice by encouraging them to engage systematically and critically with key ideas and research evidence. These courses also develop vocational teachers' capacities to respond effectively to unexpected developments in their teaching contexts through individual and collective reflection on practical problems and theoretical issues and by developing their capacities to systematically research their practice. In these ways vocational teachers can gain their own 'deep knowledge' of pedagogy and learn more than how to cope in busy circumstances. HEIs provide professional development pathways for vocational teachers. We have a strong record in taking teachers who do not have traditional academic backgrounds and moving them on from their ITT into BAs, MAs and Ph.Ds. in vocational education as well as in higher level study in their occupational and subject areas.

Continuing Professional Development: How can teachers continue to develop?

The emerging findings of the Commission (p. 7 paragraph 32) indicate that teachers and trainers of vocational education need,

1. Time, encouragement and support (on and off the job) to nurture their own professional expertise.
2. Opportunities to see what cutting edge vocational teaching and learning looks like together with a chance to try out new ideas.
3. Spaces within (and beyond) their workplaces to share ideas, solve problems and learn collectively.

HEIs conduct research in vocational education and training to create new knowledge about the field, which can then inform ITT and CPD. They are uniquely placed to support research and innovation in the sector not only because of their expertise in research in vocational education but also because of their deep understanding of practice through their close connection with teachers and trainers across the sector engaged in programmes of ITT and CPD.

For example, the LSIS-SUNCETT Research Development Fellowship (RDF) programme has developed an approach to CPD using the principles of Joint Practice Development (JPD), which has successfully enabled significant numbers of sector practitioners to research and improve their practice in sustainable ways. The JPD model takes as its starting point pedagogical problems raised by sector practitioners in the contexts of their own organisations. It then provides time and spaces (on and off the job) to explore the nature of the problem more carefully, share ideas, solve problems and learn collectively. Over the past four years the RDF programme has helped teachers, trainers and educational managers engage with cutting-edge research and practice in vocational education and training¹. The RDF programme has supported sector practitioners in trying out new ideas including innovative uses of formative assessment, creative teaching, and approaches to whole organisation improvement through CPD with a clear and positive impact upon practice.

The University of Huddersfield along with its partner colleges run a BA in Education and Professional Development. This part-time honours degree is a top-up qualification from the Certificate in Education which allows vocational teachers and trainers to enhance their knowledge and skills in three broad areas; critical reflection, policy and practice, and research and scholarship. In an effort to rationalise the provision, and in recognition that new teachers should have had experience of web-based learning, the course is now delivered using a blended learning approach. This has five different elements; an induction day school in year one, three day schools in each year, online learning and networking, online and paper-based assessment, a teaching and learning festival in each year and online and face to face support at the college or university. This approach is new and it has had difficulties. However, it demonstrates how web-based technologies might be used to promote scholarship and professional development amongst vocational teachers and trainers. It has also encouraged closer collaboration between learners and staff across providers.

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It is important to note that this is not a straightforward brokering transaction which simply links the teacher and the educational issues and practices in question to the relevant research literature. RDF involves the creation of spaces where 'the problem' and its potential 'solutions' are held tentatively as part of a **contextualised social process** which involves challenging taken for granted world views, theories and practices and making sense of things in different ways.