

EDITORIAL

Vocational education and training: Educators' perspectives on VET training

Welcome to issue 13(1) of the *London Review of Education* (LRE), which takes as its theme vocational education and training (VET) in the UK, and reviews some related areas. There is currently significant interest in the VET landscape and the myriad of new policies and curriculum innovations being adopted within the sector. These new arrangements are largely in response to expectations of successive UK governments that the VET sector will meet the needs of the labour market and prepare students more fully for employment.

In late 2014, in the context of a stubbornly high though falling level of unemployment among young people, the Office for National Statistics revealed that around one million 16 to 24 year olds are not registered in education, employment or training. The VET sector has been charged with alleviating this situation through managing the boom in apprenticeship provision, with further education (FE) colleges able to create their own apprenticeships in their role as employers (Association of Colleges, 2014), while groups of colleges can band together to operate as consortia within a private business model. Colleges are also expected to manage and accommodate their share of raised-participation-age students, catering for those aged up to 18 who will be remaining in education or training or entering the workplace by June 2015.

Throughout this period of expansion and innovation, the skills agenda remains highly pertinent. There has been a curriculum review of study programmes containing maths and English at level 2 in a bid to boost students' progress into further study or employability and to improve the UK's levels in these essential skills. Many employers require highly skilled, numerate and literate employees and are increasingly interested in 'tech savvy' candidates and/or graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) who can demonstrate commercial understanding. With employers reportedly failing to recognize many of the existing qualifications that are on offer, repeated calls for a Baccalaureate-style qualification are emerging, from bodies such as the Royal Society, the UK's national academy of science. A move towards employer-led innovations has fallen under the remit of the Educational and Training Foundation (ETF), the professional body intended to act as custodian of sector standards and codes of behaviour. The ETF's promotion of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning's (CAVTL) principles of good vocational education involves the collaboration of employers in supplying work-based placements and advising on the curriculum that is, in turn, delivered through FE and by private training providers.

While the involvement of FE in the VET landscape is overt, where does HE fit in? Universities are getting involved in the expansion of University Technical Colleges (UTCs), which provide for 14 to 18 year olds studying STEM-type courses, with 43 UTCs due to be open by 2015. This year will also see the beginning of 'career colleges', aimed at provision for wider, traditionally 'vocational' subjects, preparing students for work in fields such as catering, caring, and the cultural and creative sectors. Proposals for new 'earn and learn' technical degrees have also entered into the political discourse (see Grice, 2014). This issue of LRE aims to indicate some other key areas where VET provision involving HE is evident.

The UCL Institute of Education in London, and particularly the Department of Lifelong and Comparative Education (LCE), which deals with post-school and adult learning, forms connections, undertakes research and consultancy, and advises on policy with bodies such as

the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the UK Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Through its research units – the Centre for Post-14 Research and Innovation and the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy – LCE also works with employers and training providers on learner progress and transition, curriculum reform and qualifications review. There is an increasing emphasis in LCE's initial teacher education remit on training in vocational and STEM pedagogy and a move towards facilitating on-the-job training opportunities for VET teachers-in-training. The department offers a bespoke module on VET policy and practice and is involved with *Teach Too*, a project in which occupational experts, based in industry, collaborate in teaching and curriculum development within VET training. Departmental members publish on related topics – for example, Hilary McQueen's (2014) book *Roles, Rights, and Responsibility in UK Education* appeared in December.

In this issue of the LRE, researchers and teacher educators based in LCE provide some viewpoints on VET-related issues and topics. Ann Lahiff analyses the learning and development afforded by in-action observations on VET teachers in the classroom while Janet Broad considers what constitutes valuable CPD for VET teachers and dual practitioners. In considering new forms of learning in the creative industries within the VET landscape, my own article attempts to outline the need for curriculum review in order to foreground wider employability skills within the teaching and learning of acting. Finally, within this VET landscape, Andrea Creech and Sue Hallam describe the increasing recognition of our ageing population and the emerging, distinct group of older learners in HE, FE, and community based and work-based contexts that are providing learning opportunities for older people, as evidenced, for example, by the focus from the Association for Education and Ageing and the growth in such programmes. Their article considers both the new challenges related to meeting the specific needs of older learners and support for the professional development of teachers and facilitators who work with groups of later-life learners.

I hope you enjoy this VET-themed issue.

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References

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