

The logo for the University Vocational Awards Council, featuring the letters 'UVA' in a stylized, overlapping font. The 'U' is red, the 'V' is blue, and the 'A' is red. The letters are set against a background of red and blue geometric shapes.

Responding to Government Expectations:

Vocational Education and Training

Proceedings of the
University Vocational Awards Council
Annual Conference
York, November 2003

Edited by Professor Simon Roodhouse and David Hemsworth

UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL

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UVAC 2004

Introduction

The University Vocational Awards Council annual conference continued its engagement with the debate on vocational education and training by providing a unique platform for leaders in the field to explain policies and influence practice.

The trilogy of New Labour Green and White Papers in 2003, *14–19: Opportunity and Excellence*, the Skills Strategy, *21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential* and *The Future of Higher Education*, have not only determined the contemporary policy climate for UK vocational education and training in private training/ voluntary organisations, employers, schools, further and higher education. Significantly, these papers have also highlighted the workforce development role required of institutions. The progression expectation – often articulated as the ‘joined up’ policy component – to meet earlier lifelong learning ambitions and economic imperatives articulated by Cryer¹ and Blunkett² in the late 1990s, is continued by Clarke, Johnson and Lewis today. As Swailes and Roodhouse have pointed out³, these concerns are neither party political or new. In 1986, nearly two decades ago, the issues are best described in an extract from the Conservative government White Paper, *Working Together*, Education and Training, which focused its attention on the need to co-ordinate training, education and qualifications for all people to ensure a competent workforce in Britain for the 21st century:

“Qualifications and high standards are not luxuries; they are necessities, central to securing a competent and adaptable workforce. Economic performance and individual job satisfaction both depend on maintaining and improving standards of performance. This applies from the boardroom to the shop floor. It applies as much to adult training and re-training as to young people starting off in life.”

The rationale for change seems remarkably similar to New Labour justifications for action today:

“A recognition that the UK needed to raise levels of competence in the workforce, in order to maintain and enhance competitiveness and its position as a highly skilled, innovative and technologically advanced nation state, reinforced the requirement to reform an archaic 19th century training and qualification system which had lost touch with the needs of employers. By the 1970s, both the British and US economies faced strong competition from nations using the similar production technologies but with much lower manufacturing costs, particularly labour. Government concern about falling competitiveness stimulated reviews by the then Manpower Services Commission (MSC, 1981) which underlined the need for a flexible and skilled workforce that could respond to global economic changes.”
(Swailes and Roodhouse 2003)

1 First report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, November 1997, Chair: Professor R.H. Fryer

2 Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning, White Paper, June 1999

3 *Structural Barriers to the take-up of higher level NVQs*, Journal of Vocational Education and Training, volume 55 number 1, 2003, pp 85-110. Additional information can be found on www.simonroodhouse.com

The economic imperative continues to be reinforced at every level with, for example, the recent introduction of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)⁴ and the Skills for Business network (all of which are expected to resolve the UK skill and productivity gap) replacing the earlier National Training Organisations (NTOs) and NTO National Council (NTONC) which in turn were born out of industry training organisations/ industry lead bodies and even earlier industry training boards established in 1964.⁵

The introduction of regional and sectoral policy, and delivery agencies with remits to influence the further and higher education curriculum, increases the potential for confused policy formulation and ineffective delivery. This is particularly the case when placed in the context of the workplace – potentially the biggest untapped student market for higher level vocational education and training. How, for example, can the relationship between SSCs and higher education be brokered? What is the future for initiatives such as Graduate Apprenticeships in this brave new world?

To add to successive government interest in targets as an accountability mechanism, higher education is expected to increase “participation in higher education towards 50 per cent of those aged 18–30 by the end of the decade.”⁶

This drive to achieve the 50 per cent target, to increase access to higher education and to embed Foundation Degrees continues as a major policy outcome. Where, for example, does this leave awarding bodies such as Edexcel and City & Guilds?

Progression also resurfaces as an explicit government requirement linked to access and widening participation largely driven by the higher education 50 per cent target. However, the interpretation of progression is limited to a concept of school to further and/or higher education with hardly discernible recognition of progression through learning at work. This has led to recent Learning and Skills Council (LSC)⁷/Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and DfES initiatives such as Partnership for Progression and Aim Higher.

4 The SSDA strategy suggests a greater interest in up-skilling the existing workforce, rather than entry provision, as the vast majority of those who will be in the workforce in 10 or 15 years' time are in work now

5 National Skills Task Force concluded in its final report, 2000: “The work over the last two years to rationalise the number of NTOs and raise their capacity has been very welcome, but we do not believe it has gone far enough. There are still in our view too many NTOs, leading to confusion for employers and to organisations that are in some cases still too small to undertake the full range of responsibilities we believe is necessary.” There is also a useful paper on the origins of the NTOs, Time to Overhaul the National Training Organisations, Martin Jones, Working Brief 120, December 2000 – www.cesi.org.uk/_newsite2002/publications

6 The Future of Higher Education White Paper, Expanding Higher Education to meet our Needs, January 2003

7 The Learning and Skills Council for England was established as a result of the Learning to Succeed: the New Framework for Post-16 Learning White Paper presented in June 1999, to drive forward improvements in standards and bring greater coherence and responsiveness to all post-16 education and training, excluding higher education. In particular it took over responsibility for further education funding, the funding of workforce development, Modern Apprenticeships and training targets

It is disappointing that the current review of admission to higher education chaired by Professor Schwartz, Vice Chancellor of Brunel University, has so far ignored the Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA), despite a target of entry for approximately 14 per cent of 16 to 24 year-olds following AMA, for these are precisely the type of learners who have not historically progressed or benefited from higher education. It is also worth noting that GCE A levels were conceived and designed as a university entry qualification. MA was designed as a workforce development tool for employers with very little HE involvement in policy formation. There was even limited HE involvement (with some notable exceptions) in the inclusion process for technical certificates (TCs) despite TCs being introduced largely to strengthen the knowledge component of frameworks to support progression to higher education. The need to introduce TCs symbolises the lack of an integrated approach to workforce development and the void between the world of work, further and higher education.

So where does this leave higher education? How is the new agenda to be funded? Who is to take the lead and co-ordinate the resources needed for further and higher education to respond? Who is to take the lead on the expansion of the work-related/work-based agenda, the untapped marketplace? Does the NHSU provide an imaginative and mould-breaking partnership model? Is this simply an English agenda, and are there lessons to be learned for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

These timely conference proceedings capture a spectrum of informed opinions from those engaged in government, further and higher education, Sector Skills Councils and Regional Development Agencies.

Professor Simon Roodhouse
Chief Operating Officer
January 2004

White Paper not White Flags – Putting the ‘E’ and ‘S’ Together in the DfES

Steven Geary, Divisional Manager, Department for Education and Skills

Industry and society have changed significantly since the industrial revolution. Even during our own lifetimes technology has had a dramatic impact on the way we work. The future will bring further significant changes. Is this technological change too much? For most people ‘raising the white flag’ is not an option. Advances in technology and working practices are about developing new skills and approaches. Instead of lifting white flags we have seen the emergence, helped by the merger of ‘E’ and ‘S’ in the DfES, of a set of strong policies in White Papers which put education and skills together. The key ones I will talk about today are 14 to 19 (technically a Green Paper), 21st Century Skills and Higher Education. I should also mention Success for All, focused on the further education sector.

14 to 19

Statistics tell us that school can be very good for some and boring for others. Hence we have problems with participation and attainment. So the 14 to 19 reforms, alongside Success for All, are setting an agenda that will improve choice for young people. In particular they will lead to improvements in the vocational routes, in practical skills development and in understanding the demands of work and enterprise. Last September we saw the introduction of GCSEs in eight vocational subjects that offer professional routes beyond school up to and including HE. Two more, in construction and performing arts, will be added next year. We also saw the launch of the Increasing Flexibility for 14–16 Year-olds programme. Now in its second year, it will involve 280 partnerships which will meet the needs of 80,000 pupils from 1,800 schools. These initiatives have helped more schools to take up vocational learning.

More flexibility has been developed in the curriculum at Key Stage 4, with an emphasis on areas such as personal development and progression. Maths, English, science and ICT will remain compulsory: every young person will have an entitlement to study literacy, numeracy and ICT up to the age of 19 if necessary, until they reach [QCA] level 2.

There will also be a statutory requirement for all young people to have work-related elements at Key Stage 4. In response to the Howard Davies review, from 2005/06 £60 million is set aside to help secondary schools deliver enterprise learning. The enterprise learning pathfinders are piloting new approaches to help schools meet the commitment to provide five days of enterprise activity to all learners, with the national rollout planned for 2005/06.

Central part of both 14 to 19 policy and the skills strategy is the commitment to continue to develop Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) as the primary work-based learning programme for young people aimed at meeting the needs of employers. Progression pathways will continue to be developed into MAs from vocational provision in schools and colleges and to implement a quality improvement strategy to improve MA outcomes. There is an employer-led MA taskforce that is helping to improve and promote MAs to employers. The government and the LSC expect to meet targets that were set for expanding the MA programme that will include

28 per cent of young people by 2004. All of these changes mean that schools and colleges will need to work more closely together with other partners, including public and private sector employers, work-based learning providers and HE. Through local links between colleges and schools and employers we are starting to see that they are now becoming a necessary fact of life. We need to make significant improvements if we are to see consistency across the country.

New types of partnerships will need to be developed in learning institutions to make a reality of the rhetoric around improving choice at 14 to 19. We have 39 pathfinders testing different models of collaboration from which good practice will be disseminated. Collaboration may lead to structural change. As part of Success for All, local LSCs have started to engage with post-16 education and training across the country in strategic area reviews. These SARs will play an important role in developing the collective capacity of local providers to increase the choice of high-quality learning opportunities for young people during 14 to 19 phase.

21st century skills

The skills strategy is being developed in response to key changes that we face as a nation, as employers, as individuals and as providers. Although unemployment and inflation are currently very low, there are challenges. Productivity and competitiveness remain well below our competitor countries. One of the reasons for this is serious skills gaps. We can't compete with countries such as India and China on the basis of low wage costs. Therefore we need to look at different ways of adding value to our products and services. The White Paper aims to develop our skills base through a range of actions aimed at supporting employers, employees and individual learners. To highlight a few of them, there is the further development of the employer training pilots, better employer guidance to good training, improved management and leadership training, more coherent support for businesses and expansion of the network of Union Learning Representatives.

For individuals action includes creating a new guarantee of free tuition to level 2 for any adult without a good foundation of employability skills. There will be increased support for level 3 qualifications in areas of sectoral and regional skills priorities. We are also looking to safeguard provision for adults in areas such as culture, leisure, community and personal fulfilment. There is an ongoing need for better information, advice and guidance for adults. We are also seeking to help adults gain ICT skills as part of the Skills for Life programme. Alongside this support for individuals there is a further strengthening of the infrastructure to support the skills agenda. The Sector Skills Councils are being set up to improve productivity and skills on a sectoral basis. We are seeing a drive for greater collaboration and integration at the regional level with the development of regional skills partnerships to complement the work of the National Skills Alliance. We are also seeing work to reform the qualifications framework so that it becomes more flexible and responsive to the needs of employers and learners. We are also working to raise the effectiveness of FECs and training providers through a whole range of measures set out in Success for All. So I believe that we have the strengthening of the 'S' in the Department for Education and Skills. This overall strategy is starting to show signs of success. We have seen a growth in the number of vocational

A Levels and GCSEs, rising by over 40,000 to 128,000 in 2002. The number of Advanced MAs has increased from 88,000 in 1997 to over 113,000 in 2002. In all we have over 234,000 people on apprenticeships. Since April 2001 1.8 million adults have taken up basic skills courses, with 400,000 achieving national awards.

Higher education White Paper

You will be familiar with the emphasis being put on research, teaching, expansion, fair access, funding and HE business links. I am working in the area of FDs, employability and progression. I'm very excited to be involved in this area as we see the expansion of FDs. Last year we had about 12,000 people on FD courses and we recently announced a further 10,000 places available from next year. By 2005/06, if we include the planned replacement of some HND programme with FDs, there will be about 50,000 places and, taking into account part-time provision, around 70,000 people benefiting from these courses. There are businesses in both the public and private sectors that are very enthusiastic about FDs. They include BP, BMW, Radisson Hotels and KLM; and in the public sector the police, navy, civil service, health service and LEAs. They like the way that they can work with universities and colleges to develop courses that meet their needs. For students they offer greater flexibility in the way they learn and are attractive to both young people starting their careers and more mature people wishing to upskill or return to work. They are also a great opportunity to forge better partnership-working between universities, colleges, LSCs, SSCs, RDAs, employers and employer bodies. FDs have the potential to mix the best of an academic approach with a work-based approach. We are working with Leslie Wagner and the FD Task Force to identify potential barriers, and also to identify best practice with regard to employability across higher education. There is a programme of just under £1 million that is being run called the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT). The programme is bringing together information about how HEIs can enhance student employability through learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum practices. This is being disseminated to institutions through the Learning and Teaching Support Network and other routes. Finally, there is work in hand between the department, HEFCE and LSC to promote progression into and through HE. So there is a lot of work in train and it is important to look at the suite of policy initiatives I have outlined which put the 'E' and 'S' of DfES together and not focus on any one in isolation.

Panel session: Is the Focus on HE Vocational Education and Training and Widening Participation simply an English Agenda?

1. David McAuley, Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland

Background

There is a lower employment rate in Northern Ireland than on the mainland. There is also a different balance in terms of qualifications, with good comparisons with the UK average at the higher levels. Below level 2, however, the balance changes and there is a depressingly high percentage of people who don't have a qualification. That is something we have to tackle.

Researching skills needs

We have been working at this for five years, having set up a Skills Task Force in 1998 supported by a skills unit at the Department and a priority skills unit at the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre. The first task was skills monitoring studies. A study in 2000 covered nearly 4,000 employers which demonstrated 21 per cent vacancies (almost triple that of two years previously) and a high demand for vocational and craft skills. Skills forecasting in sectors of IT, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering showed shortages at level 3 and graduate levels.

Meeting skills needs

The response is additional places at FE and HE levels, concentrated in priority sectors, and expanded Modern Apprenticeships from 3,000 to 6,000 places. We also have graduate conversion programmes – one called the Rapid Advancement Programme with around 200 places to turn unemployed graduates into software specialists; another to develop management skills in unemployed graduates (about 250 places). To put numbers in context, you need to factor everything down by about 30 from the English level.

Widening Participation

We have a very similar suite of initiatives to those in England. We have avoided a 'postcode premium': there are premiums to help institutions support people from disadvantaged backgrounds but we do that on the basis of those who get their fees paid through student support, as opposed to through postcodes. We do not have a Partnerships for Progression structure as it is too complex for our size, but we do support programmes where the universities, colleges and employers work together. For example, the Step Up to Science programme at the University of Ulster, which has gone to disadvantaged areas in Derry city with employers, has used a summer school approach to introduce people to HE with considerable success.

We are ahead of England in terms of non-repayable support, having brought back means-tested bursaries currently of up to £2,000 for family incomes of up to £15,000. Future policy will take account of policy in England on fees and access agreements. Until that is settled we will keep these policies under review. Because of this and the lack of devolved government at the moment, our policy on widening participation is somewhat in suspension.

14 to 19

We are reviewing 14 to 19 provision. 'Joining up' departments is an issue because FE, HE and training are a separate department from schools, but are making a start on the review. A complication in Northern Ireland is that we still have grammar schools, all with sixth forms, various other types of other schools and a large amount of work-related learning in FECs and other training providers. This makes for many complications in integrating 14 to 19 provision.

Further education review

We are reviewing FE and want to orientate the sector more clearly on its economic role. FECs should be primarily about supporting the economy, including supporting priority sectors and SMEs. We are also developing proposals to involve employers at sub-regional levels to complement the work of the Skills Task Force.

Foundation Degrees

We have our own Foundation Degrees, based on broadly the same model as England. All are delivered in FECs. We have 5,700 'HE in FE' places, 200 Foundation Degrees in our pilots, a controlled rollout targeted very carefully on the priority skills areas of construction, IT, tourism and hospitality. We are evaluating the pilots with a determination that there will be clear progression to honours degrees and good work-based learning by working closely with sector skills bodies. We do not have a target to increase participation in HE in Foundation Degrees because we are up to about 50 per cent already.

2. Meri Huws, Head of Department for Lifelong Learning, University of Wales, Bangor

Background

Because of the size of Wales, there is a very short journey with policy initiatives from innovation, through implementation to effect. Feedback, therefore can be gathered quickly and judgements made on their success or otherwise.

There is great interest in education in Wales, from the funding councils, the politicians and the civil servants, and this has produced a plethora of policy initiatives. Economically Wales is suffering depopulation and regional shifts in population, particularly from the north to Cardiff. This is having a huge impact on debate about skills. We are left with areas of high skills deficit, often people who are extremely skilled but in the wrong industries.

The Assembly is very driven in terms of the whole education agenda, including the reconfiguration and collaboration agenda in HE. Initiatives launched by the assembly include means-tested learning grants, which are making an impact.

Finally we now have children coming through primary and secondary sectors that are bilingual. This has a huge effect on planning for the future.

Planning

There are a plethora of planning bodies. Some years ago we established one post-16 funding council, ELWa. That reflected a notion of comprehensive, collaborative post-16 planning, provision, delivery, evaluation, monitoring and review. We have just gone through a period of trial separation which has led to divorce. That body is now separated back into its constituent parts. We have moved back to two funding councils, a National Council which is essentially the old further education council, and HEFCW. That is a pity because we saw this as a way of addressing the funding issues that faced us, with a mismatch of funding that did not meet aspirations.

Foundation Degrees

We have them, but not the additional funding. HEFCW says, “Welsh Higher Education Institutions are free to offer and develop FDs, but they have to support this within their existing funded numbers.”

Widening participation

This has been grasped by the minister who has led very much on this. As a result this financial year we have had £2 million released in four regional consortiums in Wales to deliver Widening Participation activities. Consortiums are typically partnerships of FE and HE. There is a shift of Widening Participation activity towards partnership consortiums, well funded, working in regional settings rather than an institutional base.

Large-scale consortiums are focusing on school-based activity, generally working with the younger age groups in secondary schools. Activity includes a 10-year scheme to work with parents to bring through children who would normally not aspire to HE.

Employability

For the last three years every HEI has been required to produce a work experience employability plan. This is not the same as HEFCE-funded institutions. This year that requirement is now being folded into the HE economic development plan that needs to be developed for each institution.

Developing and accrediting the vocational skills of employees within the Modern Skills Diploma framework⁸, driven by a personal development plan, is a significant part of the employability agenda. During the last two years, there has been funding in Wales for 700 candidates. The diploma provides a great opportunity for individuals to think outside traditional boxes of vocational qualifications and traditional university-based qualifications. The development is one that is welcomed by employers. Perhaps looking at Foundation Degrees hand-in-hand with the development of Modern Skills Diplomas will enable employers to see the value of these qualifications.

Conclusions

Wales is a small nation which is initiative-rich at the moment. We have a series of key players – the Assembly, two funding councils and the community consortiums for education and training which are being set up across Wales to enable the stakeholders, the deliverers, the planners and the providers in each area to plan post-16 education. We are now talking about having 14 to 19 area networks. We already have four widening access consortiums and the Welsh Union Learning Fund (WULF) partnerships.

We do not have enough finance and there is an absence of coherence in relation to funding. Unless this is addressed, initiatives will never deliver. One key message is to be wary of false democracy generated around these initiatives. In Wales at one time you could be certain that you could go out and ‘fall over’ a minister. Similarly there are seemingly ubiquitous partnerships that claim to represent a series of stakeholders and have a planning function. That threatens the whole widening participation agenda. My plea is: we may have the initiatives, but can we please have the planning and delivery mechanisms and the funding that will make them work?

⁸ The Modern Skills Diploma framework in Wales offers work-based learning to people aged 25 and over and leads to the achievement of an integrated package of qualifications and work experience to level 4. The package includes the appropriate vocational qualification(s) and/or units, and, where appropriate, Key Skills and other relevant workplace qualifications

3. Nicky Brunker, Deputy Director of Communications, Learning and Skills Council National Office

The skills agenda

Our agenda regarding the skills White Paper is moving and is continuing to move at a pace. The difference now is the recognition that employers hold the key to success. Our job is to unlock and release that potential. We do that through workforce development at the highest possible level within different types of organisation so that we set new standards and create a culture of learning within different organisations. Excellent examples already exist, including corporate universities which have close links to the world of work. We also need to show them how working with us will produce a business benefit – something they need to do for their very survival.

Skills deficits

A fundamental problem with our businesses is lack of skills. They recognise the need but do not know how to get there. We want to create a holistic approach to learning, a one-stop shop, or 'no wrong door'. Particularly around strategic area reviews and the whole planning process, we and HE are all in the same market, essentially. We have to raise aspirations and deepen our understanding about employer needs and build esteem in terms of learning.

Modern Apprenticeships

We have a vested interest in MAs because we have a public service agreement target. We have to build them and make them a success in all sectors. We have to invigorate MAs from what is currently there and build a higher credibility towards them and an acceptance throughout the system that they are here to stay. We need to make them work framework by framework so that we make them deliver the vacancies or jobs that young people want.

All too often there is a mismatch between the MAs that are available and the types of apprenticeships young people want to move into.

Our job, collectively, is to change that. We do this by prioritising those sectors we want to build and grow, including those where frameworks have yet to be developed. This is where we need to work with the Sector Skills Councils and HE. The FE sector has a significant role to play in this, as does HE.

Following a hiatus of activity on MAs, the government are committed to making MAs work through the MA Taskforce, and we need to be helping them. One of the keys to that is around progression. If you market MAs just as MAs we will not progress in the way that we need to. There needs to be a better and more clearly understood system which makes it easier for everyone to see the type of learning they do and where it is going to take them in the future.

Currently there are too many barriers to that. I am interested in some of the work UVAC has been doing in taking AMAs into Graduate Apprenticeships, for example, and the work that QCA are doing on utilisation and credit transfer has to unlock the potential here. What would that success look like if we all managed it in the same way? Universities UK broadly support proposals in the 14 to 19 green paper and again this will unlock potential and promote progression.

More than funding

It is vital for universities to understand this agenda so we can create a seamless system with FE, other providers and employers that we can readily communicate. It is very hard at the moment from a marketing and communications perspective. We need to show that all learning counts. It is not necessarily about funding. The LSC is also a planning body. You can argue that beyond level 2 qualifications, once employers see the value they will want to make an investment in it. It is our job to show them how radical learning can be and how radically different it can make their businesses. There are good examples of where this has happened but we are not very good at demonstrating this. For example, in the employer training pilots, while the money has been the hook, what the employer values most is support that does not involve them in all the bureaucratic processes that are attached to some of our activities.

Branding

Clarity and employability are critical. We should build a branding architecture that is designed around learners and employers, not around our funding system. This should offer a purpose and clarity that shows the benefits of skills and where they can take you. This process is closely linked to accreditation and transfer. We are currently working on a model, working with QCA, DfES and other partners, that is not about creating a new brand but is about clarity and purpose.

Partnership with HE

Finally, the LSC is committed to working with UVAC and the HE sector. We have to work together with true strategic partners, otherwise our future will not be as bright as we would like it to be. We have a big English agenda, but we also have to be 'UK' because employers know no boundaries. It should be international as well, because we must be world class in whatever we do. The issue is not about desire, but how we do it.

Higher Education and the Vocational Learning Agenda

Dr Liz Beaty, Director of Learning and Teaching, HEFCE

HEFCE structural changes

The last year has seen major structural change at HEFCE, of which my appointment was part. HEFCE now has four directorates, each of which has a regional as well as a policy brief. That change is indicative of a change in style and approach to join up the development of policy with its implementation and the way it impacts on institutions and regions. In HE terms there shouldn't be a gap between research and teaching. So how do we link research and knowledge transfer with the learning and teaching agenda? That is mirrored in the connectivity we are discussing today between HE and FE in schools and HE and the world of work.

The policy agenda

We have increasing and widening participation in HE, moving over a relatively short period of time from what was perceived to be an elite system to a mass HE system. The connectivity between HE and the rest of society is much stronger. There is a huge policy imperative to take seriously the whole education system, of which HE is now a very substantial part. We must meet the needs of the economy and of employers. We must also meet the needs of individuals for their personal development and growth for the purpose of society. We must do this within institutions who have other key drivers for their work, including research and knowledge transfer, as well as teaching and learning. It is much more transparent in our policies that HE is seen as a regeneration tool because HE has a direct impact on employment in the area. Where HE takes place is a regional issue. Connectivity between education and employment and lifelong learning takes us beyond a view of institutions into a view of provision. This changes how we think about funding and how we put it into place.

HEFCE strategy

HEFCE strategy is now much more concerned with the notion of regional policies (though it is not obvious what the regions are). Geography is increasingly important to the policy and funding of HE, despite increased mobility, e-learning technology and globalisation. For example, we are giving careful consideration to the substantial concentrations of funding in research which have a marked regional bias away from the north.

Our second strategic priority is that of progression routes into, through, back and forward into HE. We need to put a lot of effort into how we facilitate that. The third area is that of diversity and flexibility of provision to meet learners' needs. This acts at the institutional level as well as at the micro level of learning and teaching modes and methods. We need to consider institutions and ask, "What is their specific mission and how can we fund adequately to meet that mission?" rather than spreading the cake thinly. We are looking at different kinds of modelling which might shape how we spend money in the future.

Wider strategic issues

As a sector we have to take seriously how we achieve a balance of supply of HE and the demand for it, including the demand from employers. Perhaps we should be stimulating new sources of student demand. The shape and size of the sector is important and the connectivity and co-operation required to deliver what is required by society. A lot of our funding streams require bids that are competitive. We are now asking ourselves where these are appropriate and where it would be more appropriate to develop funding streams which reward co-operation and partnerships based upon complementary missions. We are working with the LSC and the Department for Education and Skills to encourage more structured partnerships between FE and HE.

Foundation Degrees

We need Foundation Degrees as a brand. There was already a lot of connectivity between HE and work. The strength of the Foundation Degree is in its branding. There is a lot of emphasis being put not only on younger students and their need for education, but also on the notion of lifelong learning. We are interested in all sorts of progression routes where people may come in and out of employment in their lifetime. Many Foundation Degrees are aimed at people in employment who have previously 'missed out' on higher education. This requires partnerships with employer and HE for the delivery and design of Foundation Degrees.

The 10,000 new places available for Foundation Degrees can be bid to start in 2004/5 or 2005/6. Instead of running two competitions, HEIs can bid for both of them now. This implies that some Foundation Degrees are quite long in design. The 10 per cent premium in the latest bidding round is an acknowledgement of evidence that partnership-working is where the extra costs are. We have also got development funding to help HEIs with the aspirations to move towards Foundation Degrees – £5.5 million this year and £3 million next year. We will be increasingly reviewing what is happening, evaluating it and producing good practice guides. We have allocated the funding regionally because we want the brand to grow across all regions and to be established in the places where there are skills shortages. The roles for RDAs and SSCs will be important in helping articulate demand, including demand in critical employment sectors, and in developing regional bids.

Foundation Degree Forward

Hosted by Council of Validating Universities, Foundation Degree Forward organisation is going to involve all the major stakeholders, including employers, HE and FE sector representatives, SSCs, UVAC and Edexcel. It will be a national centre for expertise in Foundation Degrees and disseminating good practice. Responding to demand for support in developing Foundation Degrees, it will also be a broker for validation services for FE colleges. Opportunities in HEFCE funding to enhance the quality of vocational education include centres for excellence and learning and teaching, through a bid going out in January 2004. Some centres will, I expect, focus on

the vocational area; we are interested in the pedagogies that support vocational education – excellent, innovative practice that will enable you to invest in learning and teaching, rather than just do more of the same. We are looking for five years of development in relation to the kind of mission and investment structure that the institution wants to have. So there is an opportunity in the vocational education area to go for substantial extra funding to boost the connectivity between HE and employment.

Enhancing the quality of vocational education

The HE academy is a good opportunity for all those involved in vocational education to act in synergy between the areas of development and research in teaching and learning and the development of vocational practice. On our strategy for work-based learning, we have decided that we want to take a long hard look at this and do it properly rather than quickly. We are also going to put our work in this area inside a broader revamp of our learning and teaching strategy. We have had quite an effective learning and teaching strategy for the last five years. It has been spending money called TQEF (Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding). That has had institutional learning and teaching strategies funding, money at the subject level for the LTSN and funds for the development of teaching and learning, individual focus money through the National Teaching Fellowship Schemes. We want to redo that learning and teaching strategy so that it includes the centres of teaching excellence and the e-learning strategy and the work-based (or ‘flexible’) learning strategy.

Engagement with employers

HE has got to increase its engagement with employers. There is so much good practice out there at the moment, but there are various new areas that are going to help this connectivity be a bit more structured in the future. The SSCs have a lot of work to do here. We have our own SSC, the Lifelong Learning SSC, that will be working closely with the HE Academy regarding its own internal employees. We are also hoping for some brokerage between the SSC through the Learning and Teaching Support Network. We are looking at whole new models and the NHSU is an example of a very exciting development which brings a range of areas together. We have this increasingly important third stream funding in HEFCE not only to support research into business but also professional development. Universities have had a lot of focus on research and teaching as key areas of activity, with business support a poor relation for lack of funding. These funding streams are now beginning to be substantial and there is a commitment to make it continue, not one-off. It has become an increasingly important third mission and institutions will variously focus on it. There is a huge opportunity to connect vocational education with research and reach-out, and connect those things together regionally, nationally, and indeed internationally.

Supporting Progression

This is where I begin to look forward and be somewhat speculative on how we are going to meet the challenge. There are broad aims, not just HEFCE aims, to support progression through HE and all sectors. We want to be developing integrated policy, planning and delivery to increase opportunities. HEFCE has a problem here because we are not a planning body, although we can use our funding in a planning sort of way, but people do not want us to destroy some of the basic building blocks of how HEFCE currently works – the block grant. This gives to institutions the opportunity to invest in what they believe to be most appropriate. You have to ask who are the most appropriate people to plan. It has to be iterative. If you do too much at the centre you're going to get it wrong. If you do too little at the centre then it's going to be totally uncoordinated. So HEFCE needs to consider where the balance lies. We don't have powers to plan like the LSC and that is a significant way in which funding is different in different parts of the sector. But we do have the aspiration to join up. We also want to reduce the bureaucracy and barriers there are to partnership. We have been looking at areas in the past year or so where this is difficult for institutions who have more than one funding council, for instance. There is work going on here in the quality area involving work to co-ordinate and integrate the work of ALI, Ofsted and QAA. Other areas include funding, which poses particular challenges. We are also wanting to fund collaboration, looking at what we can do to take the barriers away or to create opportunities for collaboration in the way that we fund things. We have got a practitioner group of FE colleges and HEIs which is taking forward this alignment process of funding and planning. So there is a lot of work in the background which has yet to show itself in effect. At the front end of that is a steering group of the LSC and HEFCE to support this whole area strategically.

The challenge

This is the challenge: we want a robust network structure which will support the growth and development of knowledge and skills throughout life, provide flexible, customised learning opportunities and seamless progression into and through HE. All with less bureaucracy, and above all focused on learner needs and for the benefit of society. Principles underpinning a network structure will be fair access, recognition of past achievement, responsiveness to employer needs, effective progression opportunities from basic skills to degree level and clear and systemic structures between and within institutions. The features of a network structure will be common information and guidance, a common credit framework, a framework of curricular pathways, shared delivery, learning and support environments and subject collaboration, joint quality assurance mechanisms, joint management systems and processes and shared staff development. Key to joined up working at national and regional levels will be collaboration between HEFCE and the LSC, the work of the National Skills Alliance, and the development of regional partnerships.

The Role of QCA in Higher Level Vocational Education and Training

Dr Ken Boston, Chief Executive, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Partnerships

Steve Geary spoke about the suite of initiatives currently embedded in several papers from government, all part of a single strategy concerned with building human capital – the workforce development of the nation in its broadest sense.

In trying to work out how QCA fits into this jigsaw, I have looked at what role each of the major partners has within this integrated strategy. It seems to me that the main purpose of the LSC and further education is to grow demand among learners and employers, and to do this through funding and the leadership of change.

The LSC through its regional arms will promote the growth of ‘skills ecosystems’. These are interconnected and integrated relationships between employers, employees, funding authorities and education institutions in a complex which is self-sustaining, exists at various levels of hierarchy and which can be promoted and sustained by funding and cultural change. Canary Wharf, the Midland car industry and Heathrow Airport are skills ecosystems.

The SSCs develop occupational standards – the skills required for particular industries in 23 occupation sets. The awarding bodies develop the qualifications, or ‘training package’ as we would say in Australia, which provide those skills and lead to the qualification being awarded. QCA’s part of the jigsaw is to accredit these qualifications into the national qualifications framework. FE and HE are of course there to deliver the qualifications.

So I see our task as quite clearly defined, working in partnership with – not stumbling over – other bodies, accrediting qualifications put forward by awarding bodies in order to meet demand which is growing within skills ecosystems, and to meet that demand by providing qualifications that meet the occupational standards of each industry. All this seems to me to be co-ordinated and conceptually sound.

Accreditation

QCA is the custodian of the National Qualifications Framework which excludes degrees. Our strapline has been ‘Guarding Standards’, but we want to be seen as far more proactive than that. We want to use the National Qualifications Framework as a flexible and agile tool to anticipate and respond to skills shortages: a tool which we use for the strategic development of the workforce.

We want to coach rather than cox: to drive this forward by working with partners and showing them how it can be done rather than policing the system. We want to be preacher rather than priest, not guarding the sanctity of the national qualifications framework, but being evangelical about it, promoting it and wielding it as an instrument which can lead to the development of the workforce.

Vocational/academic

This dichotomy has reared its head several times today. The example that comes to mind in dismissing it is what can be seen at the World Skill Olympics. For example, a complex task in joinery, far from being a soft option, required high-order problem-solving, cognitive and conceptual skills. It was a process that cannot be classified as somehow different from other subjects. The manipulation and thinking was as skilful in some ways as a piece of surgery. The task embodied the essence of a vocation – the co-ordination of hand, mind and eye.

In my view, therefore, the classification of subjects as ‘academic’ or ‘vocational’ is irrelevant. The notion of ‘parity of esteem’ is a nonsense. The young man who won a gold for England this year in the Skill Olympics hardly lacks self-esteem. For me, a qualification is ‘what it says on the tin’; further classifications are pointless. These vocational subjects, wherever they are taught, beginning in school, should be genuine first steps on a ladder which could lead eventually to that occupation.

When we have young people at age 14 studying French or romantic poetry, we expect that curriculum to be referenced ultimately by university knowledge and tradition. Similarly, in my view, vocational education in schools should be referenced essentially by industry. This does not mean making them work-ready, but providing a genuine experience rather than something that is perceived as remedial because the young person cannot cope with maths or chemistry.

Unitisation and credit

QCA has a remit to produce a new set of vocational qualifications and to do that in conjunction with government departments, working through the committee which has been set up which I chair and whose membership includes the LSC and SSCs. Our remit is to produce a set of vocational qualifications of which a central characteristic will be that they are unitised or modularised and credit-based. This will be in place between 2007 and 2010.

What we see conceptually about the set of qualifications is, returning to the tins analogy, a box containing these tins. Some of the tins will be bigger than others; some will be opened before others; some can be taken from different boxes. For example, somebody pursuing a course to be an electrician could also take a ‘tin’ of small business management from one box, one on taxation from another box and one on marketing from yet another box – all, put it in a qualification. There will be a diversity of options within the qualification. The number of boxes, however, will become fewer as the total number of qualifications will be reduced.

It seems to me that the clearest link between the schools strategy and Tomlinson needs to be made on the basis of this system of credit and unitisation. Mike Tomlinson's task with his committee is essentially to increase retention and attainment in years 14 to 19. That will only be successful – baccalaureate, diploma or not – if we sharply increase vocational education in schools. 14 to 19 school education needs to be unitised and credit-based, and be a genuine first step on a ladder which leads sequentially, progressively and seamlessly to the higher levels. It needs to open up opportunities for young people and not close up behind them as the current system does. Young people at the end of their sixth form should have opportunities lying ahead of them either in university, or in industry, or in FE. All will eventually lead to employment.

Seeing the obvious

In Australia there is a character known as 'Blind Freddy' who has the capacity to see the obvious. For Blind Freddy it would be obvious that we should have one single four-country national qualifications framework, which should include every qualification, including degrees and higher degrees, regardless of which body accredits the qualification, the type of institution in which that qualification is delivered or the way in which it is funded. That is the conclusion I draw from the discussion today.

Skills for Business: Meeting Employers' Skill Needs through Workforce Development

**Professor Mike Campbell, Director of Policy and Research,
Sector Skills Development Agency**

The challenge

Skills for Business – ‘Business’ covering all sectors of activity – is not only the ‘brand’ name of the Sector Skills Council network; it also increasingly characterises the purpose of further and higher education. The challenge is as much an economic agenda as it is an education and training one. Although the UK has made substantial economic progress over the last 10 years, success has been fuelled by employment growth, not economic performance. In GDP per head, the UK is ranked 12th out of 15 in the EU and 18th out of the 30 OECD countries. US productivity is 30 per cent higher than the UK. Unless we narrow that gap, we will be in difficulties.

Skills make an enormous impact difference to productivity and economic prosperity. In the UK the economic returns to degrees is the highest of all OECD countries. About a fifth of all the productivity differences between UK companies concerns human resources. Similarly, a fifth of the productivity differences between the UK and other countries is attributable to workforce skills. Despite the enormous expansion of further and higher education in the UK, we remain a relatively skill-poor country. Nearly 30 per cent of the workforce are not qualified to [QCA] level 2. Skill inequalities, particularly regarding ethnic minorities, are substantial at a time when half the future workforce growth in the next ten years will be from ethnic minorities.

The demand for skilled people continues to grow apace. About three-quarters of all UK jobs require [QCA] level 3 skills or above. A recent report of the Higher Education Policy Institute demonstrates that achievement of the 50 per cent participation rate would only just meet the rising employer demand for graduates. Imbalances in skills supply and demand have created skills shortages, skills gaps and people with redundant skills. About a quarter of all UK employers are experiencing skills gaps. HE engagement with the current workforce is therefore very important.

The role of Sector Skills Councils

Skills for Business – the new network of Sectors Skills Councils – articulates the skills of employers and tries to ensure that education and training provision is responsive to economic and employer-led priorities. The role of SSCs is best articulated in the government’s skills strategy White Paper published in July 2003. The hallmark of the strategy is the demand-led approach, to ensure that learning provision is more appropriately connected to the skills employers need now and in future years. SSCs are recognised as having a central role in taking forward this agenda. Engaging employers is crucial. An important measure of success will be the articulation of employer needs nationally, regionally and sectorally.

SSCs are UK-wide sector bodies with four key objectives: to drive up productivity, reduce skill gaps and shortages, provide opportunities for all and ensure that provision is more responsive to demand. The SSC licence is granted by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. We now have four fully-licensed SSCs, five ‘trailblazer’ SSCs going through the full licensing process, and a further ten SSCs in development. The aim is that a network of 20 to 25 SSCs covering approximately 85 per cent of the UK workforce will be established by June 2004.

SSCs have three key priorities – to secure broader and deeper employer engagement than hitherto, with a clear focus, strategy and action plan to achieve that; to influence government policy and work closely with partner agencies; and to drive forward and sustain the ‘demand’ agenda. This involves increasing employer commitment to skills, embedded in their business strategy, and ensuring that graduate skills, for example, are utilised effectively. We are seeking to generate a virtuous circle, moving from a low-skills to a high-skills equilibrium.

Skills priorities for SSCs are:

- qualifications, supported importantly by continuing workforce development
- management and leadership skills
- ‘intermediate’ vocational skills (QCA levels 3 and 4)
- employability and generic skills
- widen participation.

The role of higher education

In a high-skills equilibrium, HEIs will be key economic development organisations. Higher education will be critical in delivering the agenda for change, in which UVAC and its members have an important part to play. Over the next year SSCs will be developing sector skills agreements between employers and learning providers, and HE has a key role in this policy innovation.

To complement the work of HEIs in developing vocational degrees generally and delivering continuing professional development, SSCs will be working in partnership with HE to develop sectoral frameworks for Foundation Degrees. It is also important for HE to be involved in Regional Skills Partnerships, which will set the agenda at regional level for skills development.

Finally, the availability and use of skills and labour market intelligence by education institutions are critical. The SSSA has made an important contribution to improving the intelligence available to institutions through the ‘One_Stop’ LMI portal; through the ‘Skills Matrix’ to identify the evolving skill needs of major sectors of the economy; through SSC market assessments; and through the technical components of sector skills agreements which will provide outstanding skills intelligence.

Jointly, therefore, SSCs and HEIs have a key role in delivering the government’s ambitious plans to re-skill Britain and create a 21st century economy in which both organisations and individuals can prosper.

Case studies:

How are individual institutions responding to the government initiatives?

1. Professor Graham Henderson, Vice Chancellor, University of Teesside

Widening participation

The University of Teesside pursues its mission as the 'Opportunity University' in an area with very low participation (24 per cent). We are committed to widening access and undertake a significant amount of activity to raise aspirations among young people in the region. 1,200 11 year-olds come into the university on the Meteor programme. They are picked up again at 14 through the Student Ambassador mentoring programme, and then encouraged further at sixth form/FE in the Passport programme. We have also developed flexible admissions practices with bridging courses where necessary via (FE) Summer College and Summer University. There is extensive community-based delivery of 'small bites' of learning. There is also a Credit & Access Pathways (CAPS) Framework, run in partnership with the Open College Network to examine how we can credit different experiences to provide an HE entry package. Such activities have played a significant part in the university's growth from 8,000 in 1992 to 19,500 today, the part-time proportion having doubled to about two-thirds of the student population.

Partnership with FE

We have an excellent relationship with our eight further education college partners. Some 1,600 students are now studying on collaborative programmes in partner FECs. It is a true 'preferred partner' arrangement based on mutual commitment, transparency and inclusivity. For example, the colleges have representation on planning groups and committees, and all FE staff involved undertake learning and teaching HE programmes at the university's cost. Only one college now holds any direct HEFCE funding. Apart from Durham's Queen's Campus in Stockton and some teacher training, Teesside is the only HE provider in the sub-region.

Other examples of developing partnerships include working on problems of recruitment in business, including an emerging decline in IT/computing, and exploring the feasibility of involving school-based staff in the delivery HE in FE. Centre of Excellence in Teaching Excellence (CETL) applications are being developed in effective partnership in delivering HE in FE, and in facilitating success amongst students with diverse prior educational backgrounds. In addition, we are working with LEAs on progression routes to the Registered Teacher Programme with the aim of 'growing' and retaining our own teachers in the region.

Development plans

We have an aspiration of 25,000 students, and that can only be achieved through a devolved system of higher education spread throughout the region. We are seeking to build an infrastructure to facilitate that, and to expand HE opportunities through distributed Foundation Degrees. The plan involves full merger with the College of Art and Design in Middlesbrough, linked to a new build; the creation of university centres in Darlington and Hartlepool; a university presence on new Digital Business Park (possibly linked to the new Middlesbrough College site); and expansion of both full-time and part-time Foundation Degree provision.

Foundation Degree portfolio

We have a mixture of 'generic' and 'niche' Foundation Degree provision, eight in all, with 21 in development and a further 10 under consideration. None to date has been created through 're-badging' or re-designing existing HNC/D provision.

Generic programmes are designed by either one lead Institution or a consortium and are available to all partners. The colleges, through their sub-regional partnership of the Regional Development Agency, have secured £800K to facilitate Foundation Degree development, and we are working as a team to take that forward.

Although the Foundation Degrees are mainly part-time, many accrue the equivalent of full-time CATS points. Access is aided by a flexible admissions policy and use of AP(E)L. We are also successfully using live work-based learning case studies to enhance delivery.

The take-up in 2003/4 of Foundation Degrees in our region has been greater than expected, so we are disappointed that the region has been allocated only 620 of the 10,000 additional places available. This will impede efforts to reduce regional disparity and, despite the funding in place for further 750 new Foundation Degree places, meeting the demand will be a challenge.

Issues

On tuition fees, the university board believes that HE should be adequately funded through the taxation system and is therefore fundamentally opposed to top-up fees and would only seek to introduce them if the institution's financial viability were to be put at risk. With or without top-up fees, funding of part-time provision under HEFCE part-time fee assumptions, coupled with the threat of removal of funding for part-time postgraduates, is a major challenge.

Other issues include formalising 'inclusive' admissions practices and embedding NVQs in our programmes when we are increasingly admitting people with NVQs as entry qualifications. Lack of funded growth, including progression from Foundation Degrees to honours top-up and honouring our commitment to meet the growth aspirations of partners is a further issue.

Despite these issues, we remain well engaged in the agenda and committed to continued growth through the devolved model, subject to extra funding.

2. Anne Breakell, Director of Academic Office, and Dr Maggie Stevens, Director of FE, Thames Valley University

Foundation Degrees

Many of the initiatives in the White Paper were already in train at TVU. We had bid successfully for Foundation Degrees in Internet Computing, Music and Media Technology and Hospitality, all run in strong partnerships with industry and FE colleges. We are rolling out Foundation Degrees in a wide range of curriculum areas, including the recently validated Foundation Degree in Public Service Management with the full support of four Local Authorities; and in Credit Management with the Institute of Credit Management. Further Foundation Degrees are in development, including Sport and Leisure Management, Complementary Therapies and Classroom Assistance.

HNDs

Our position with regard to HNDs is pragmatic. HNDs in Hospitality are very much valued by the industry. We have aimed our Hospitality Foundation Degree at those in work, for example in the Radisson chain. We are going to wait and see on this issue and take a sensible, pragmatic approach.

Postgraduate programmes

We are looking to make our postgraduate provision more suitable for the world of work, for example through the DMS in Public Service Management and Health Service Management.

Retention

We have made fundamental changes to the ways we deliver in order to increase student retention. The ready availability of employment is a major competitive factor, and students may be lost by being offered jobs while on placement. Our work in this area is focused on being as flexible as possible. We have introduced a full credit accumulation scheme which allows students to speed up or slow their pace of study as they move in and out of employment. In addition, we have introduced an HE summer college to allow students more opportunities to gain credit and are about to introduce a student mentoring scheme.

Links with further education

We already have about £1.8m worth of FE within the university, which will increase considerably with the merger with Reading College of Art and Design. We have found it very valuable because it has strengthened our relationship with employers, and has meant working very closely with the LSC.

It is important to remember that FECs have very different priorities. We have a menu of ways of linking with colleges, including joint delivery of Foundation Degrees, and delivery by HE staff of FE modules to encourage progression. Different colleges have different emphases: some want to deliver HE themselves, while others do not have that aspiration, so we must not assume that all FECs want the same thing.

Widening participation

Like most universities we are working on Aim Higher, Partnerships for Progression, Excellence Challenge (a partnership with schools and colleges), lifelong learning partnerships and Connexions. When we started talking to Connexions we were surprised at their lack of knowledge of vocational routes.

We feel that using employers is going to be one of the most powerful ways of widening participation of young people who come from families with no previous experience of HE. If we can invite employers in to say to young people and their parents that they value HE qualifications, that message will be very powerful.

Implications for provision

Access programmes are beginning to change significantly now that 19 year-olds can participate. Young people almost straight from school are coming into the university, posing challenges for us and them on which programme is most suitable – access, year 0, Foundation Degree etc. In order to run all these programmes we must be able to work with two different funding regimes, qualification structures and quality systems.

In catering, students tend to do a full-time qualification, perhaps up to NVQ, then go into employment. It is important that we keep in touch with them and their employers so that they can resume their learning in a familiar setting when they are ready. In care, we run healthcare programmes by legislation now – a captive audience in that they have to take the NVQ qualifications because they are working in care homes or the NHS. Despite this, enabling them successfully to complete an NVQ programme requires very significant personal support at work.

Involvement in regional and local planning

It is important for the university not only to be involved in the FRESA but also in the other regional initiatives, area reviews and strategic area reviews. These are showing the need for closer working between schools, colleges and universities, and the need to strengthen progression routes. We have found that that message coming from the LSC has helped us very much in strengthening links and establishing new ones.

3. Professor David Melville, Vice Chancellor, University of Kent

The 'multiversity'

The FE/HE divide is an artificial one and the result of an historical accident in many ways. In looking at vocation pathways we must look at the system as a whole.

Kent and Medway are bordered by the sea and the capital, so there is relatively little 'leakage'. There are four HEIs, all complementary, and seven FECs with virtually no overlap. So it is the ideal place for working together. We have developed the concept of the 'multiversity', whereby a number of institutions with complementary provision work together. Partners do what they are good at, with a clear common purpose. We are also open in recognising competition, stabbing each other in the front, not the back!

Medway, unlike the rest of Kent, is a large population area with some of the most deprived wards in the country. We have a regeneration-driven project centred around two HEIs (Greenwich and Kent) and an FEC (mid-Kent College) to create a new university campus where we have separate identities but some common structures (for example, a learning resource centre) and programmes. It is now growing to include Canterbury Christchurch University College and Kent Institute for Art and Design. Whereas in the past a new build required substantial funding from central government, almost all the funding for this project is from regeneration sources, the RDA, Thames Gateway development and the local unitary authority. This is because they see a multiversity presence as important to the regeneration of the area.

Links with schools

The Medway Progression Compact is a partnership between the Medway schools and the various institutions, and through the Medway Points scheme we give UCAS points for additional activities such as Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, Basic Skills certificates, IT certificates. We guarantee to take these into account in admissions and between us collectively provide a guarantee of progression.

Kent poses particular challenges in relating to schools because of the selective system. The 11-plus separates children, one might say, somewhere in the middle of the 2:2 class of degree, so there is a lot of work to do in the high schools (secondary moderns). One approach we are developing is to engage schools bidding for specialist school status, for example in business, where our business school will form an umbrella for them, helping to build in the concept of business right from the start, helping with business links, bringing in HE staff and putting mentoring arrangements in place. The other aspect of the initiative is on admissions, whereby we give a school, when it gets specialist status, two places at the university where they select the students. This is starting to shift the boundaries of the admissions process, because the best people to identify who will most benefit are those who have taught them. We bring the teachers into the university so they know what programmes require.

The Medway unitary authority and Kent County Council have been persuaded to pay students £8 an hour for mentoring responsibilities in schools. This is currently being rolled out across the whole of Kent.

Other 'multiversity' initiatives

In Ashford, where there is going to be a big housing development but little HE provision, we have again negotiated with the local authorities to establish a university presence along with the FE college as part of the regeneration of that area. We are doing something similar in Folkestone. The idea is that we build and engage with employers and their skills needs from the start. It recognises that we, as a pre-1992 university, are not good at many of the things the new universities are good at. Between us, working with our partners, we can create that complementarity, with vocational routes at the centre.

The principle is the same with the University of the Trans-Manche. We have developed a trans-frontier institution between ourselves and four universities in Lille, Calais and Dunkirk/Boulogne. The development of vocational activities is very important in that.

National Occupational Standards in Higher Education

Dr Stephen Swailes, University College Northampton

The project reported here examined ways that National Occupational Standards (NOS) are being used in higher education to identify pedagogical implications and ways of accelerating their take-up. Three major changes to education and training provide a context for this report – the rise of the vocational qualifications movement, the 1992 reforms to higher education and the recent White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*. The White Paper sets out a vision for two-year work-focused courses to fill skills gaps, for collaboration between Sector Skills Councils and for universities to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge in each vocational area, and for traditional academic disciplines to integrate the skills and attributes needed by employers into programmes.

The standards infrastructure for higher education

Standards play an important part in ensuring public confidence in public services and academic standards are supported in the following ways:

- Methodologies for teaching quality assessment such as Subject Review and External Review
- Institutional arrangements for reviewing standards on their programmes
- Benchmark Statements and Programme Specifications
- External examining arrangements between institutions
- National Qualifications Frameworks and Level Descriptors
- Qualifying Route Courses, for example for Teacher Training, Psychology and Law, in which courses are endorsed by professional bodies.

What are National Occupational Standards?

National Occupational Standards (NOS) arose out of concern for standards in professional practice and as part of a UK initiative to raise the skills base of the workforce. They are developed through reviews of the functions of particular work roles including tasks undertaken, skills and knowledge required and the range of situations in which work is undertaken. Their creation is co-ordinated by Sector Skills Councils (and the former National Training Organisations) who come to 'own' the standards and is heavily influenced by employers. They are now widely used across most sectors of the UK economy and are particularly embedded in public services.

A rationale for NOS-based programmes in higher education

There are several reasons for higher education to design and deliver qualifications based on NOS (Peregrine, 2002):

- To aid progress towards widening participation by focusing on vocational areas
- To provide opportunities for progression in vocational subjects
- To match qualifications to students undertaking work-based learning
- To access funding, for example to develop Foundation Degrees linked to NOS
- To play an increasing role in regional regeneration and competitiveness.

Level of usage and scope for NOS-based provision

Higher education enrolments on NVQ programmes total no more than a few hundred students. The number of students enrolled on Foundation Degrees (FDs) in 2001/02 was 3,775 and 12,000 in 2002/03 and some institutions will be collaborating on programmes involving NVQs but not actually assessing them. The actual level of NOS-related provision in higher education institutions is growing through FDs and Apprenticeships. Mapping level 4 NVQs onto higher education subjects suggests that 41 per cent of the 1.7 million full-time and part-time students are pursuing first degree and other undergraduate programmes in subjects where one or more level 4 NVQs, and therefore NOS, exist. The main areas where NOS appear to relate to academic qualifications are agriculture and related subjects, building, computer science, some branches of engineering, social work, business and administration, journalism, publishing, creative arts and design, and some laboratory sciences.

Examples of higher qualifications based upon NOS and NVQs

BA Social Work – Recent developments stipulate that a three-year BA Social Work that includes practice elements assessed against new NOS is mandatory for people intending to become registered social workers. Higher education providers are accredited by the General Social Care Council to run a BA Social Work. Collaborative arrangements between HEIs and employers have to be in place to deliver the practice elements that amount to 50 per cent of the degree. All practice elements are designed around the NOS and the practice component of the BA is assessed by observation, weekly supervision by a practice teacher and assessment of documentation produced naturally in the job, among other ways. Non-practice modules are linked to the subject Benchmark Statement and to the knowledge and values requirements of the NOS.

BSc Nursing – Nursing qualifications require conjoint validation by a university and a professional body such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Health Professions Council. Validation panels test the extent to which courses map against the expectations of professional bodies and QAA benchmark statements such as those for Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Podiatry and Midwifery. The benchmark statements integrate with the standards produced by the professional bodies.

Health Services Management – The NHS Information Authority is about to complete a UK-wide development of NOS for health informatics staff with the intention that, among other things, the NOS should underpin a qualifications structure for staff working in the sector. One of the problems this will overcome is that courses with similar titles, for example MSc in Health Informatics, may be quite different in terms of structure and content – hence they are not quality-assured to meet any common expected standard outcome. The latest work on NOS will link to existing courses and inform the development of new courses that will map academic programmes onto health informatics learning outcomes.

Apprenticeships – A Graduate Apprenticeship linked to a Hospitality Business Management degree includes QCA Key Skills units and four units of a level 4 NVQ and takes two years after completion of a Higher National Diploma. Two key issues emerged from this project –

first, that there are major implications for the setting-up of work placements and workplace assessments and so academic staff need to develop and keep close relationships with employers; second, that the need to combine vocational and academic assessment regimes was problematic and will be more so on large-scale schemes. There were issues about who 'owns' the vocational aspects of the scheme and resource implications of the employer liaison, and assessment requirements must be fully recognised.

One example of an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship for Information Technology Practitioners delivered through a further education college leads into a Foundation Degree in Business Computing delivered in a partner higher education institution. Apprenticeship students work towards a Technical Certificate at Level 3, completion of which allows progress to NVQ Level 3 units or, exceptionally, academic modules at the HEI. Completion of the NVQ units leads to the award of an AMA in Information and Communication Technology. Academic modules then lead to a Foundation Degree in Business Computing and completion of additional NVQ units leads to a Higher (Graduate) Modern Apprenticeship in Information and Communication Technology. Successful students can proceed to an honours degree in Business Computing.

Forensic Science – Forensic science is a new area of higher education provision for which there is no Benchmark Statement. The University of Central Lancashire is the largest provider of forensic science courses in higher education and has used NOS to meet the needs of the profession. Intended learning outcomes on the UCL BSc and Foundation Degree marry broadly with the NOS elements. Half of the forensic science staff are former forensic science practitioners. UCL also provides a BSc in Police and Criminal Investigation for which standards for policing have been incorporated. Anglia Polytechnic University is also a major provider of BSc and Combined Forensic Science degrees in which modules are mapped onto the 10 elements of the NOS. All lecturers on the APU forensic science courses are practising forensic scientists.

Other Provision – Other examples of how NOS are used in higher education are Foundation Degrees in Property and Construction, Health-Related Exercise and Fitness, and Creative Sound Design, a BSc in Veterinary Nursing and Practice Administration, the Diploma in Probation Studies and an Engineering Graduate Apprenticeship and Foundation Degree (Hemsworth, 2003).

Implications for assessment practice

National Occupational Standards provide an assessment framework and they make few demands on the route to which assessment can take place. In terms of NOS used to inform higher qualifications, assessment focuses on the knowledge needed to underpin successful practice rather than that defined by external subject 'experts' and this calls for sources of knowledge production and knowledge use to be closely connected. Assessment also seeks strong ties between theory and practice such that the long-term development of the individual is assisted by questioning of experience and reworking of methods and practices. Evidence for the inclusion of personal values in writing about professional practice is also sought.

Methods of assessment include self-assessment against the standards followed by action planning to use past achievements as evidence and to fill gaps in the student's experience. Systems for Accreditation of Prior Learning may be used. Learning outcomes are negotiated with students and the outcomes recorded in individual learning contracts.

Assessment criteria for the learning outcomes are devised although these will be specified in a standard. Assessment formats include:

- Portfolios of evidence mapped against competence and knowledge requirements
- Diaries recording events and feelings over a period of time
- Problem-based learning where students use organisational projects to generate evidence for competence and knowledge
- Assessment interviews in which evidence for competence is presented.

Assessed materials contain a strong emphasis on reflection on the student's professional practice (or simulated practice) covering both the core values pertinent to a particular vocation and the learning process. These characteristics of assessment suggest that further roll-out of NOS-based qualifications is dependent upon the availability of high-quality work placements and simulation, a supply of occupationally competent teachers, supervisors and assessors, greater use of practice-based research and work-based learning methodologies.

Conclusions and issues arising

A substantial proportion of students in higher education is following programmes based upon or linked to NOS or other form of national standard such as professional body endorsement. Some subject areas have the potential to make extensive use of NOS in the design and delivery of qualifications, for example in business and management, although there are large areas of provision for which specific standards are not available. The use of NOS to inform the design of higher education qualifications is increasing due to the growth of vocational and sector-related programmes. In addition, academic standards are best judged through the outcomes of learning rather than learning/teaching inputs.

National Occupational Standards provide the outcome-based measures by which standards can be assured and defended objectively. The inclusion of formal assessment of NVQ units above a small scale creates significant implications for infrastructure and resourcing in academic departments. However, the benefits of NOS can be reached without necessarily invoking formal NVQ assessment systems and this represents the dominant model for the future.

NOS are a powerful and cost-effective means of becoming the 'common language' that helps to connect the main stakeholders in education and skills provision. Institutional validation events for new programmes could be strengthened in areas where NOS exist to put greater emphasis on sector involvement and explicit reference to NOS. Sector Skills Councils have an important role to play in disseminating information on qualification development in light of emerging NOS and government initiatives on skills development.

Ways are needed to promote NOS in higher education and to show how they can be used in qualification design without implications for additional resources. Programme designers need a mechanism by which they can identify which NOS can be used in their areas and of knowing about NOS that are in development. Programme designers need to know which standards could be linked to an award and so a database of qualifications and the standards they are linked to should be available.

Further study should also explore the methodologies by which NOS can be selected for inclusion in qualifications. Greater understanding of the relationships between Benchmark Statements and NOS would assist institutions and a pilot project to map a sample of Statements against NOS is recommended. The use of practice-based modules in NOS-based programmes raises the question of the consistency with which accreditation of prior experience and learning policies and practices are treated across institutions. It is important to work towards parity of policy and procedure to maximise opportunities for widening participation and equity. An enquiry into practice across a range of institutions would be useful.

As pressure to build NOS into programmes increases there will be a matching demand for staff development in the principles and practices of work-based learning and the pedagogical issues surrounding programme design and assessment issues that accompany it. Academic departments will need to seek ways of updating with professional practice, for example through secondments or via networking, to access up-to-date practice experience and knowledge.

References

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How can further and higher education work with employers to realise the education and training needs of individuals and businesses?

Professor Tom Kirby, Chief Executive, Games Workshop plc

Recognise the value of skills

I do not see skills as very connected with the educative process. There is a desperate lack of skills in society and there is a simple reason for that: we do not pay enough for our skilled and experienced people because we are obsessed with formal education. Take the example of pantography in our business. Pantography – cutting holes in metal to make things – is a lost skill in the UK. Recruiting new pantographers is very difficult because it involves a five-year apprenticeship with the company. The only way we can do it is by paying well. A major obstacle is the misplaced notion among highly skilled employees that in order to succeed they need to gain promotion to management. It is a classic dilemma for employers. Our solution is to pay properly. Our top tool designer earns more than his boss and his boss's boss. His boss's boss's boss is me.

What I don't want

As an employer I do not want anybody with a business degree! Although there is good material in some business degrees, the qualifications generate bad attitudes. Thinking you know something when you have no experience is delusional. Learning can be useful as a precursor but experience has value that cannot be obtained from study. We have the same problem with art college graduates who want to join us as illustrators. They have to start by 'un-learning' a lot.

Reading a book is not enough; you have to do something with it. That is hard to achieve because it requires a shift in behaviour. Nobody can succeed in my organisation if they are not prepared to examine their own behaviours and do something about them.

Business schools teach you to have a 'career'. The notion of a job change every two years is bad advice, for having a career at the expense of the company is ultimately self-destructive. Most good people in good companies have been there a long time. The way to the top in a good organisation is loyalty and devotion, as well as talent and attitude – an unfashionable view but true.

What I do want

We need an ego-free environment, especially at senior levels. This means having people who put the business first; do not have private agendas; welcome newcomers who bring skills; balance a willingness to be constantly self-critical with being proud of their achievements; and similarly balance criticism of the business with pride in its achievements.

How do I get it?

Not through qualifications but through qualities of honesty, courage and humility; and through people who display consistency, clarity, fairness, openness and integrity.

How higher education can help

You can help by challenging the focus on qualifications, facts, negative perceptions of business and condemnation of failure. For example, bankruptcy here is viewed as a form of leprosy. In America, by contrast, bankrupts are seen as triers and bankruptcy as a temporary setback, not a condemnation for life. Remember businesses are run by people, not theories or case studies.

Teach – don't train for work. Second-guessing what employers might want is futile because their needs vary considerably. Second-guessing what young people might want is both futile and patronising. Allow teachers to focus on their subjects and, most importantly, encourage schools to educate the 'whole child' and develop good citizens, rather than focus obsessively on passing exams. Exam league tables are pernicious. The emphasis of the curriculum should be on civic duty, ethics, thinking, patience, values, judgement and self-awareness.

Update on Foundation Degrees

Professor Leslie Wagner, Chair, Foundation Degree Task Force and Chair, HE Academy

Foundation Degree Forward

Foundation Degree Forward was established by the HE White Paper and is run through HEFCE, operating from the University of Staffordshire. Its establishment was driven by the idea that FECs may need help brokering partnerships with universities. Its other roles are as a centre for excellence and the national arm for operating Foundation Degrees.

Foundation Degree Task Force

The Task Force, by contrast, is run by the DfES to advise the Secretary of State on the development of Foundation Degrees, the barriers to development and how they can be overcome. One issue has been that the Foundation Degree is a brand with at least two distinct markets. One is school and college leavers pursuing a full-time route and often progressing to a third year honours degree. The second is the workforce development Foundation Degree, linking with employers to upskill existing employees, mainly on a part-time basis. For the Task Force the workforce development side is the stronger issue, including its relation to the HND, which is not mentioned in the White Paper.

Foundation Degrees and HNDs

EdExcel is seeking to find ways of linking its HNDs to Foundation Degrees and the current government policy talks of the HND within the Foundation Degree. One issue is that of a national award. Although institutions are given considerable freedom in the delivery of HNDs, they are perceived as national awards. Foundation Degrees are not necessarily the same, and this is an issue for large employers, particularly.

Why are degree-awarding powers needed to issue a Foundation Degree?

There is no other HE level 2 qualification, including the HND, for which this is a requirement. A great and possibly unique strength of the HND is that it sits both within the QAA and QCA frameworks and is therefore integrated into academic and vocational hierarchies of qualifications. It is odd that the Foundation Degree, as a vocational qualification, is in the QAA, not the QCA qualifications framework, just when we are seeking to create more coherent progression beyond QCA level 3. If it were in both frameworks, it would be open to QCA to license awarding bodies to award Foundation Degrees. They would then not be the sole prerogative of universities, opening up both vocational and academic routes for the qualifications. I offer this as a personal view for further debate.

Closing remarks

Professor David Melville, Vice Chancellor, University of Kent, and Chair, UVAC

In closing the conference I would like to look back a little and look forward to where UVAC might go. I am taking over the chair at no better time for vocational higher education. We have heard of the range of the government initiatives concerning vocational education and training; of employer concerns regarding skills, productivity and graduate employability; of the challenges for HEIs of working in partnerships; of the challenges of the White Paper and of the distinctions that are, often unhelpfully, created between the concept of vocational education and other kinds of higher education; of the difficulties that variable fees might cause; and of course the work of the Admissions Steering Group chaired by Professor Steven Schwartz.

As a UK organisation, we have to be aware of the range of different regions in which we work: in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as the growing importance of the English regions. There is the increasing complexity of the kinds of organisations UVAC needs to influence – Foundation Degree Forward, the Sector Skills Development Agency, the new HE Academy, as well as the RDAs, the Local Learning and Skills Councils and our own funding councils.

Leslie Wagner has laid a very solid foundation during his tenure as chair, not least by establishing the Education and Accreditation Committee and our policy statement, Confidence in Practice. It is my intention to build on his achievements. I am delighted that Leslie will remain involved in UVAC in the newly established post of past chair.

UVAC's achievements

Looking back on the achievements of UVAC, we have increased membership to include both further and higher education, and have key institutions as corporate members – the Learning and Teaching Support Network, UCAS, the Learning and Skills Council and Sector Skills Councils. We have developed national strategic partnerships with the LSC, Edexcel, City and Guilds, the Association of Colleges, and LCCI, making UVAC a unique organisation which brings together major awarding bodies with a commitment to vocational education and training in HE.

Accreditation schemes for Foundation Degrees and Graduate Apprenticeships are up and running, ensuring that HEIs can develop and deliver learning programmes, confident in the belief that through an SSC and former NTO partnership they are delivering the skills individuals need and employers are demanding. It is a unique system involving Teesside, Coventry and Leeds Metropolitan Universities. Recently it is pleasing to note that the personal development programme accreditation scheme has been approved the GlaxoSmithKline undergraduate work placement scheme for chemists.

Recognition of UVAC policy has increased. Our statement Confidence in Practice and detailed responses to the HE White Paper and Skills Strategy have made an impact. Regular meetings with ministers have included Margaret Hodge and Alan Johnson. Ministers, senior officials and the chairs and CEOs of partner organisations are willing to talk to us at the most senior level.

UVAC is a financially prudent organisation with a significant turnover, professional staff and the resources to make a major impact in the future.

The future

Our core must be to step up the efforts we have already made to ensure that UVAC is nationally recognised as the champion of vocational learning for both further and higher education. To our partners we must be seen as the first-choice organisation through which to engage with and support HEIs in the higher-level vocational education and the whole of the training agenda. To our members we must be seen as the organisation through which to influence government, stakeholders and to work with key partners in the implementation of vocational education and training policy and practice.

Our activities, as our strapline says, are aimed at championing vocational learning for employability and personal fulfilment. We must be central to the development of a nation where vocational learning at all levels and in all disciplines is valued; where there are clearly understood vocational qualification routes from pre-apprenticeship, Modern Apprenticeship, foundation and honours degrees to postgraduate degrees and professional qualifications.

We would not exist as UVAC if there were not great challenges to face. We have had a skills White Paper which is largely silent on higher-level vocational skills. We have National Occupational Standards, potentially a world-class tool. HEIs are strongly encouraged to use them, but they are largely locked out of the national approval and development criteria process. UVAC must keep asking why and effect change.

Graduate Apprenticeships are not yet valued and have been left as a rather quiet sideline. Yet in principle they are an excellent and unique national HE/employment bridging programme. We must get them back into the centre of policy.

We need to overcome the artificial policy, funding and quality assurance divides, embodied by the LSC and HEFCE in funding and QCA and QAA in quality. They are not systems designed to recognise an all-through process.

We have the problem of increasing differentiation of practice at regional and national levels. As a national organisation we need to ensure we hold that ring. And of course we have the problem of parity of esteem. Ironically, at the top end of HE and vocational qualifications are the most prestigious – medicine, actuarial, science, law – all of which are seen as academic, whereas an NVQ5 is probably most appropriate for a surgeon.

Over the next 12 months we will influence the work of Foundation Degree Forward, the DfES and HEFCE on Foundation Degrees. We will provide support to HEIs in the manner in which they need it and ensure that the validation proposals support existing higher education arrangements with their further education partners. We will champion the need for an integrated 14–19 and HE qualifications framework – two frameworks potentially confuse individual learners and employers.

We will promote the need for and delivery of the work-based route of progression for the UK workforce which integrate schools (as pre-apprenticeship), private training providers, further and higher education, employers and employees. We will encourage with practical support the introduction of such a route by promoting the UVAC accreditation scheme for awards and programmes which claim to be work-based, vocational, and skills-orientated. UVAC, with the support of the LSC and UCAS, will be consulting shortly on a system for accrediting Advanced Modern Apprenticeship as an entry route to higher education.

We will support the use of National Occupational Standards as a powerful curriculum tool which enables higher education to meet employer skill needs and enhances the employability of graduates. This has relevance not only in higher education but all the way through to the Tomlinson proposals for an integrated programme of 14-19 that covers a much wider range of young people than at the moment.

We will work with our strategic partners to promote vocational learning for employability and personal fulfilment. We will support and represent our members by brokering relationships with employers, improving the further and higher education interface, developing services with our partners and influencing government. We will continue to argue for sensible and integrated funding of work-based and work-related learning in the interests of a competitive and highly skilled workforce. In that we will work to break down the artificial barriers between further and higher education that inhibit our thinking and funding council thinking about all-through vocational pathways. We will promote those vocational opportunities and develop a progression matrix with government which is accredited, readily accessible and competence-led.

We will raise the profile of UVAC and its members to make sure our voice is heard and that everybody is aware of our work. All this will be underpinned with an active research programme.

It is our intention to work with our partners in the interests of our membership to make a significant contribution towards a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce which is highly productive and able to compete globally.

Appendix

Issues raised and points made in question sessions and discussion groups

Improving vocational learning

- Vocational training will never take off until it is tied to national training packages. It will be a product of SSCs, or by awarding bodies in response to SSCs, to meet the occupational standards of the various sectors.
- In New South Wales vocational learning took off only when an industrial award was developed which allowed some FE teachers with industrial experience to go into high schools, some students to experience industry-standard facilities in FE colleges and work with industry-experienced teachers, and a timetable arrangement that allowed schools in close proximity to colleges to have a group of students working three days a week in school, one day in an FE college pursuing a national vocational qualification and one day with an employee in industry. Toyota and Woolworth's were among the employers involved. The initiative got young people into paid employment and opened genuine pathways before them. At the end some people went on to university, some to employment, some to FE, while some jumped from one pathway to another.
- It is critical that there is an incentive for small businesses to take this work on. The infrastructure to support this must lie behind any reforms. A key factor must be integration, bringing the various elements of the overall strategy together. Tomlinson and the skills strategy cannot solve this alone; there must be a lot of supportive activity to make it occur.

Assessment

- Assessment at all levels must be on the basis of fitness for purpose, so the traditional HE assessment by examination should be reviewed. Qualifications at the same level can be demanding in very different ways. We still tend to defer to middle class assessments that law is harder than bricklaying. Parity of esteem is an irrelevant concept.

Funding

- Part-time provision widens participation but is disproportionately expensive. The transfer of Foundation Degree funding to college partners and the prospect of losing part-time postgraduate income exacerbate the funding problem. Moving funded numbers to full-time would be counter to widening participation. We must continue to lobby for more funded growth and find ways of persuading more employers to pay tuition fees – currently very few do so.
- LSC funding has been used effectively to employ workplace support workers to monitor portfolio development and negotiate where necessary with the employer ways to develop particular competencies.

Partnerships

- Parity of esteem is a fundamental issue, so the way HEIs engage with colleges is very important. For FECs universities seem like opaque institutions, aloof and inconsistent in their practices. We have to create structures which involve them, for example having them attend management meetings. There may be a perception within the university that standards in FE are not as high. Lack of experience in delivering HE may create barriers of language or interpretation. But HE has as much to learn from FE – embedding vocational skills in learning and so forth – as vice versa. Openness, transparency and effective communication within as well as across institutions are important. Funding distribution is a further issue. HE must retain a fair share to support all the work on QA etc. The danger is that funding will not be enough to support the growth aspirations of both HE and their FE partners. HEFCE and LSC need to develop a seamless integrated funding model – currently some provision falls between the two.

A Welsh perspective

- The failure of the Assembly to support Foundation Degrees puts out a negative message to employers.
- It is important that FE and HE planning and funding go hand in hand to facilitate the government's agenda. Currently the FE, HE, training and schools funding models are all different.

Foundation Degrees

- While HNDs are meeting the needs of employers, the government is not going to hinder them. On the other hand, some HNDs have been declining for some time and some institutions want to replace them with Foundation Degrees. There will be a place both for Foundation Degrees which are an off-the-shelf package and others which are bespoke.

National Occupational Standards in HE programmes

- There is limited engagement with employers in the area of HE vocational qualifications, including the design of qualifications based on National Occupational Standards. Greater input is needed from SSCs and the SSDA with regard to the dissemination of qualification development and government initiatives.
- There is limited development of critical thinking in NOS-based qualifications. There are also issues over parity across institutions of access and the accreditation of prior learning.

CETL and LTSN

- Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) supported by the HE Academy will provide synergy with LTSN subject centres, not duplication. For example, a university putting in a bid for a CETL in problem-based learning might combine courses in the medical school and engineering faculty with the aspiration of developing that kind of pedagogy across two or more faculties. That would relate to a number of LTSN subject centres but would not be performing the same function.

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