



# **Apprenticeship: An Historical Re-invention for a Post Industrial World**

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**UNIVERSITY VOCATIONAL AWARDS COUNCIL**

*In association with the Learning and Skills Council*



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## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

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This conference proved to be a timely evaluation of apprenticeships in the United Kingdom, with reference to Germany and Australia. The conference has provided a public platform for a series of carefully researched papers on apprenticeship policy and practice which are published in these proceedings. The papers investigate:

- meeting the skill needs of individuals, employers and the UK economy
- an international perspective on apprenticeship from Germany and Australia
- lessons for policy-makers – a critique of the UK approach to apprenticeship
- philosophical, historical, social, economic and educational perspectives on the concept of apprenticeship
- what is needed to enable apprenticeship to raise skills and knowledge levels in the workplace
- how work-based learning in apprenticeship has been used to engage the disengaged.

The conference attracted a wide range of delegates from higher education institutions, further education colleges and national and regional agencies. For the first time in over 10 years it provided a genuinely critical appraisal of what is becoming an increasingly important workforce development tool in the United Kingdom.

As higher education institutions introduce variable fees, apprenticeships will become increasingly important as a viable alternative for young people to earn and learn without incurring significant debt – as is beginning to be evidenced in Australia.

The recent introduction of junior apprenticeships by government has also been operated in Australia for some time. The evidence suggests that it is proving to be a popular route for young people who wish to enter work and follow vocational routes. Paul Hager's paper provides useful insights into how the UK developments have been taken forward in Australia and the problems associated with this type of learning.

On the other hand, the German system, which is often quoted internationally as outstanding, is undergoing significant change. Thomas Deissinger's paper provides a very informed and incisive analysis of the changes.

From the UK perspective, David Guile's paper on evolving concepts of apprenticeship challenges the conventional approach and points to a failure to understand the individual business cultures in which apprenticeships operate.

Professor Karen Evans's paper, by contrast, highlights the value of apprenticeships as a serious contribution to widening participation in learning and provides a particularly useful comparative analysis. This aspect of apprenticeships is often forgotten and is worthy of further consideration by higher education in achieving greater access and participation.

The question of cost and the place of apprenticeships in the skills strategy for England are skilfully analysed by Michael Stark and Chris Hasluck. It is clear from these contributions that Modern Apprenticeship is recognised by government as a major tool for improving the skill levels of the workforce. However, the costs of delivering apprenticeships are variable across occupational sectors and their respective frameworks for apprenticeship.

These proceedings are an important contribution to informing policy-makers, administrators and deliverers of apprenticeships in ensuring that apprentices receive the best possible learning opportunities, and that employers can confidently support the delivery and expansion of apprenticeships as an alternative to full-time education and a major contribution to developing a skilled workforce.

The University Vocational Awards Council particularly wishes to thank Nicky Bruncker and Madeline King of the Learning and Skills Council for their vision in recognising the importance of this conference and supporting UVAC in this way.

**Professor Simon Roodhouse**  
**Chief Operating Officer**  
**January 2004**

## The Skills Strategy in England and Place of Apprenticeship

Michael Stark, Director, Skills Strategy Delivery, Learning and Skills Council

I want to talk about apprenticeship in the context of the workforce, rather than some mystical thing called the 'work-based route'. I will do this in the context of the relationship between skills, qualifications and apprenticeship because we need to distinguish between them. My overall message is simple: the magic ingredient in all of this is the employer! I will move from a broad introduction to address the specific relationship between the entitlements mainly related to adults and level 2 that are set out in the Skills Strategy, the aspirations of those who have reached that benchmark wish to progress to level 3 and beyond, and the role of apprenticeship in these important areas.

### What is employer engagement in skills?

"Engaging employers" means two different things:

1. raising employer demand for skills, by making an overwhelming business case (Skills Strategy)
2. raising employer demand for skills delivered by flexible, responsive providers (Success For All).

We need to do both. We, the LSC, need to set ourselves a target for raising employer demand for skills, but first we need some measures in one has been largely a fact-free zone. We simply do not know what drives the business improvement on which we are predicating our whole thrust towards skills. We do not yet have an ability to correlate workforce development and business performance by sector, region, or type of employer. Although we collect a lot of data we cannot use it – our Individualised Learner Record (ILR) is cumbersome and slow, our mechanisms for collecting and analysing all the employer survey data have been inadequate. To address this issue we have been through a large process of surveying a huge number of employers, the data from whom will be assembled and used dynamically so that we can measure change as well as take snapshots. This is about to be published and will tell us much more about the levels and effects of employer engagement.

### LSC vision, strategy and priorities

Our vision is that, by 2010, young people and adults in England will have knowledge and productive skills matching the best in the world. This fits neatly with the Skills Strategy vision:

*"To ensure that employers have the right skills to support the success of their businesses, and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled."*

The fact is that most adults do not learn at all, even informally, and the situation gets worse as people get older. So if apprenticeship is to be useful, it must not be limited to a small group of young people.

Within the skills strategy, the LSC has set itself seven major priorities:

1. Level 2 entitlement, learner support (Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and the Adult Learning Grant) and reform of LSC fees/funding policy
2. Towards a national employer training programme, including transformation of the business support network
3. Sector and occupational skills, including apprenticeships
4. Delivering a regional agenda (regional skills partnerships)
5. Qualifications and credit
6. From welfare to workforce development
7. Responsive training providers.

Employers are key to changing this, because most working age adults are employed, so lack time for self-initiated study. There is a high drop-out rate among those learning independently, but not when employers back their training. Furthermore, employers spend substantially on training – although very little in ‘our’ sector. This is a worrying trend that seems to demonstrate that we are not demand-led at the moment.

### **Findings from the sectoral pilots**

The first thing we learned was that the impact of employer involvement in the learning process was huge. Adult employees whose learning is directly backed by their employer achieve up to 70 per cent faster, and have up to 300 per cent higher success rates. This is particularly true of low-qualified adults going for a first qualification (for example, basic skills or level 2). Existing LSC providers are not yet fully seizing the opportunities.

### **How much do employers pay for adult skills and training?**

It is important to understand who pays for what. The LSC spends £2.6 billion on adult learning, of which £2 billion is to colleges and other FE for adults and £0.3 billion is for apprenticeship training, 19–24. On a comparable basis, employers spend some six times more, £15 billion, on training. But employers spend only £44 million in fees to LSC providers, so employers fund only two per cent of LSC providers’ total income. LSC providers are therefore missing out on 99.7 per cent of employers’ training purchases.

## **What should employers and others pay for adult training?**

Employers should pay for skills for adults they employ which are directly linked to their business, but they expect the state to deliver the basics and provide second chances – the level 2 entitlement. The individual adult must also take responsibility and contribute more, directly or indirectly – currently adults pay only £100 million out of the £2 billion total LSC adult expenditure. Apprenticeship must integrate with these flows and not be a separate “Government product”!

## **LSC experiences with employer co-financing**

With Modern Apprenticeships, employers make a significant contribution to wages, but overall there are patchy take-up and success rates. Cash is not the principal driver. With the Employer Training Pilots and Sectoral Pilots we put in much less cash, but we get high success rates which make the schemes attractive to employers.

We then have small pilot programmes in the rail, textiles, road haulage and other sectors to deliver apprenticeship-type frameworks to adults. Meanwhile we are delivering new qualifications such as the ITQ, which has been jointly developed by the awarding body, LSC, QCA and, above all, e-skills SSC as the owner of the National Occupational Standards in that sector. There are 3,000 learners working towards this entirely new kind of qualification, which is credit-based and precisely tailored to an individual’s and/or employer’s needs. This is likely to roll out to much larger numbers than the apprenticeship framework, so what do we learn from that? The core question is what would an adult apprenticeship framework look like, based on the lessons from the Employer Training Pilots?

## **Lessons from Employer Training Pilots**

The lessons emerging are that the Employer Training Pilots are very popular with ‘virgin’ employers; we are missing out on many employers by continually going back to the same ones. Because the pilots have targeted unqualified employees, the ‘deadweight’ costs have been low. We must find ways of reducing the deadweight costs if we are to engage more employers and adults in apprenticeship.

Other good practice emerging includes:

- ‘assess/train/assess’
- employer and employee choice of courses
- reformed qualifications with minimal bureaucracy
- new e-learning products
- choice of high-quality provider
- employer purchasing power.

## Sectoral pilots

LSC sectoral initiatives are already well advanced with colleges in these sectors:

- Automotive, through preferred supplier initiatives
- Construction, resulting in substantial increase in take-up
- Rail, through new delivery routes
- Information Technology, through experiments with new qualifications, now leading to ITQ.

They are being rolled out to other LSC areas, some already covering all areas.

Further pilots were launched in 2002–3 in a range of sectors:

- Agency/temporary staff
- Care
- Childcare
- Cleaning
- Health, first aid
- Hospitality, catering, tourism
- Retail, reception, call centres
- Management/leadership in small firms
- Manufacturing, textiles
- Voluntary sector.

In all, some 35 pilots are now operating in every LLSC. All are moving towards mainstream fundable models.

## What value would an adult apprenticeship framework add?

It is for employers to determine what they need beyond a better VQ structure. Employers should own the assessment as well as the training programmes and deliver on outcomes, completions and destinations. Perhaps employers should pay for the costs beyond the entitlements in the Skills Strategy, while the state pays for targeted individuals.

Can we establish an apprenticeship framework from 16 to 65? Given that we have PSA measures which target 16 to 21-year-olds, should we not focus on them in a single band? There could be two levels of public funding with break at 21, not 19 or 25. The LSC cannot fund all employed adults at current unit costs. We need a consistent, employer-owned framework which drives towards equal outcomes but not necessarily equal inputs.

We need better articulation of level 4 programmes – NVQs, Foundation Degrees, other degrees and professional qualifications. Finally, now that the Skills for Business network is becoming established, Sector Skills Councils needs to work with the LSC to deliver their sector skills agreements.

## **The Changing Face of Apprenticeship and Entry Level Training in Australia**

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Professor Paul Hager, Professor of Education, University of Technology, Sydney

### **Early history of apprenticeship in Australia**

Not surprisingly, the apprenticeship system in Australia was largely based on the British model. However, the states (Australia is currently comprised of eight states and territories) each controlled their own arrangements, so some minor differences emerged. For instance, the existence of wage boards in Victoria encouraged the formation of craft unions, whereas the situation in NSW favoured a focus on industry-wide arrangements. Common features of apprenticeships included a contract of training between the apprentice and employer setting out the obligations of each party for the duration of the apprenticeship. Apprenticeships were restricted to 'declared trades' and were closely tied to industrial relations arrangements that regulated wage rates for the various stages of the training. Despite frequent criticisms of its shortcomings (Hermann et al. 1976), the apprenticeship system in Australia survived with only minor changes for a long time. However, the global impact of major social and technological changes of recent decades has led to unprecedented reform of the Australian apprenticeship system.

### **Recent reforms and developments**

#### **• The 1980s**

In the early 1980s global changes were beginning to reshape the Australian economy. One outcome of these changes was a strong focus on the various aspects of skill formation by governments and policy-makers. A recurring theme of this decade was Australia's relatively poor performance in vocational education and training. This prepared the ground for the major reforms of the 1990s. Firstly, the level of training provided to employees by Australian companies and organisations was identified as being unacceptably low. A major federal government report (Dawkins 1988) found that one third of Australian companies offered no formal training to employees. Those that did invest in training spent between 2 and 2.5 per cent of gross wages and salaries, with the private sector generally spending less than the public sector. These figures were low in comparison to training expenditure by companies and organisations in comparable international economies. The causes of low levels of training expenditure were claimed to be complex, including high labour turnover, poaching of skilled employees by competing organisations, an over-reliance on immigration to provide needed skills, and poor attitudes to training by management (Curtain 1987). Various initiatives were tried to encourage more investment in training by companies and organisations. For six years a federal training guarantee levy was implemented whereby firms with an annual payroll of over \$200,000 were required to spend at least 1.5 per cent of their annual payroll figure on training or pay the deficit as an extra tax levy to support government training schemes. These initiatives to change

attitudes to training investment were relatively successful in that by the late 1990s the level of training expenditure on employees by Australian companies and organisations had risen to almost match that in comparable economies (Smith and Keating 2003, p13).

Secondly, the Australian participation rate in formal vocational education and training (VET) programs was identified as being unacceptably low compared with other OECD countries. This was despite the fact that governments were initiating an increasingly complex array of labour market programs, offered through the VET system, that were designed to save various 'at risk' groups from unemployment. The issue of what were appropriate curricula for the various labour market programs became a contested one for the next decade or so. In 1985, flowing from the Kirby Report (1984) on labour market programs, the Australian Traineeship System was set up. The basic idea of traineeships was to provide entry level training for vocational occupations below technician (certificate or diploma) level that were not covered by apprenticeships. This represented a significant extension of formal VET provision. Like apprenticeships, traineeships were to combine on- and off-the-job training, though the exact balance between the two, and the methods of delivery were to be flexible depending on the nature of the occupation. However, unlike apprenticeships, traineeships were normally only one year in length. An important aim was to cater for newer kinds of work in emerging industries that were not covered by the 'declared trades' straight-jacket of the traditional apprenticeship system. Traineeships were also intended to make training more available to various designated equity groups that were greatly under-represented in traditional apprenticeships. This scheme was inaugurated with ambitious annual targets, but in the early years enrolments were well below expectations. Because many 'at risk' students from the displaced labour market programs were guided into traineeships, this created the early perception that they were yet more ad hoc courses for people of limited ability or employability. This situation hardly encouraged employers to look favourably on trainees. Some took on trainees each year to gain the government subsidy for so doing, but simply parted company with them as soon as the year was over. This behaviour conformed to the letter, but not the spirit, of the traineeship system. As we will see, however, by the end of the 1990s this early negative image of traineeships had largely dissipated.

#### • The 1990s

This was the decade of major and unprecedented VET reform in Australia via the so-called 'national training reform agenda' (NTRA). This was a multi-faceted and complex series of changes implemented right across the decade. There is not the space to deal fully with these changes here. Rather, consistent with our main focus on apprenticeships, I will provide brief comment on those changes that were especially significant for apprenticeships, and then describe the system of New Apprenticeships that is currently operating. (For a detailed account of the main milestones in the decade of training reform, see Smith and Keating 2003, chapter 3.)

Some major 1990s developments in the NTRA that influenced apprenticeships included Competency-Based Training (CBT). Inspired by some European examples, a coalition of government, union and employer groups pushed through the policy that Australia's VET system should become competency-based. The vocational educators, who would be responsible for its implementation at the teaching level, were never consulted. The main assumption seems to have been that, hitherto, VET had been largely provider-driven, and that henceforth it needed to be industry-driven. So the principle was that industry would specify the required competencies in terms of standards and that the VET sector would teach and assess according to these standards. It was, of course, a big assumption that industry knew precisely what it wanted or that there were plausible parties able to speak for the needs of the various areas of industry. Governments in 1990 set up the National Training Board to oversee and endorse the development of competency standards for the various industries and occupations.

### **Creation of an Open Training Market**

Consistent with the view that VET had been largely provider-driven, but needed to be more industry-driven, positive steps were taken in the early 1990s to better recognise the considerable amount of training that then occurred outside of the formal public VET sector. Moreover, the expansion of this private sector was actively encouraged with a view to making the overall system more client-focused. Policy initiatives sought the rapid creation of a diverse and highly competitive Australian training market.

### **National Frameworks**

Various national frameworks were set in place, both to eliminate inconsistencies in the VET sectors between the different states, and to better integrate VET into the national education system as a whole. As well, an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was developed in 1994 to align better the various levels of qualifications offered in the main sectors of the education system (Schools, VET, Higher Education) and to enhance consistency and flexibility in recognising the previous study of people who transfer between the sectors.

### **User Choice**

A major policy lever for encouraging a diverse and highly competitive Australian training market has been the introduction since 1997 of 'user choice' for the funding of the off-the-job training component of apprenticeships and traineeships. While companies and organisations have always had the option of purchasing training from private providers, the novel element in the user choice initiative is that what was previously publicly provided training is now the subject of competition between public and private providers. The company or organisation that needs off-the-job training for its apprentices or trainees selects a provider, after negotiating with various alternatives, and then the cost of the resulting training is paid for at a stipulated rate by the state or territory government.

## Training Packages

“Training Packages are industry endorsed vehicles that connect work and learning, describing the knowledge and skills required at work.” (Australian National Training Authority 2003, pviii). As such Training Packages have, since 1997, started to replace formal VET curricula. They either cover an industry or go across industries. The endorsed components of Training Packages include competency standards (various units of competency), qualification rules (on how the units of competency can be packaged to make various qualifications), and assessment guidelines. As well they may contain non-endorsed components such as learning materials and sample assessment tasks. Training Packages are to be used by training providers, both public and private, to deliver VET programs to learners. Once an industry has its Training Package in place, the idea is that only courses based on the Training Package will be funded. Training Packages have been criticised by educators as being a ‘thin’ (‘threadbare’?) surrogate of curriculum. Others have argued that they open up creative spaces for teachers to innovate by specifying outcomes but not processes. This leaves open the question of what the increasing numbers of poorly qualified trainers working for VET providers will make of the thin guidance of the Training Package. As Smith and Keating (2003, p169) suggest, they will most likely train in the limited skills required in the immediate workplace. (For more on the educational debate about the merits of Training Packages see Smith and Keating 2003, chapter 9.)

With this selective overview of relevant developments completed, we can return to our focus on the apprenticeship system. As discussed earlier, at the beginning of the 1990s the Australian Traineeship System had experienced a rather troubled start. A major problem was the perception that traineeships were but the latest version of labour market programs. But the imperatives for reform of entry level training continued to operate at the policy level. A landmark was the Carmichael Report (Employment and Skills Formation Council 1992) which proposed a national system of training which would include more comprehensive and flexible entry level training. This would be competency-based, rather than being centred on time served. The Carmichael Report recommended a flexible training system featuring both on- and off-the-job training, with a variety of pathways for gaining nationally recognised qualifications. It also proposed changed arrangements for government subsidies of trainees’ wages in order to give employers more incentives to participate in entry level training.

At the same time as the Carmichael Report recommendations were being implemented, the federal government established a National Employment and Training Task Force (NETTFORCE) with a brief to convince industry of the value of traineeships and to facilitate the provision of suitable training both on- and off-the-job. According to Smith and Keating (2003, p90):

*“NETTFORCE established 25 Industry Training Companies which developed or modified traineeships and had them accredited with the state and territory training recognition authorities. The role of the training companies was also to work with employers, and convince and assist them to take on trainees by making the whole process more simple.”*

Strategies such as these proved to be very successful since, from the mid-1990s, there has been a sustained and continuing growth in traineeship numbers. For instance, according to National Centre for Vocational Education Research figures (reported by Smith and Keating 2003, p94), for the financial year 1994–5, national trainee commencements were 29,310. By 2001–2 this figure had climbed steadily to 207,160. In the same period apprenticeship numbers rose from 30,680 to 41,180. Clearly, the reforms to the entry level training system, dating from the early 1990s, were having an impact.

By the late 1990s the entry level training system has been streamlined further. The adoption of user choice and Training Packages has been accompanied by other measures such as increased support for Group Training Companies (see next section for more on these) and the making available of traineeships and apprenticeships on a part-time basis, including for school students (see next section). As well, since 1998 traineeships and apprenticeships have been consolidated under the common generic title of 'New Apprenticeships'. (Though there is resistance in some quarters to applying the term 'apprenticeship' to anything other than its time-honoured use.) Overall, traditional apprenticeships, usually of four years duration, have survived and continue to flourish in Australia, though they have been reshaped to some extent by changes and initiatives of the kind outlined above. As well, they have been joined by a large number of one-year traineeships, with both being 're-badged' as New Apprenticeships.

This, then, is the brief overview of the current situation of the Australian entry level training system. Its strengths and weaknesses were explored in a recent paper by Harris and Deissinger (2003) which compared the Australian system to its German counterpart. Harris and Deissinger compared the two systems on five dimensions:

1. Public respect for vocational education
2. Knowledge and understanding of vocational pathways
3. Funding of entry level VET
4. Prime focus of apprenticeships
5. Quality assurance of on-the-job training

On the first dimension, they argue that Australia as a society shows lower respect for vocational education than does Germany where the dual system continues to enjoy very high public esteem. Second, on knowledge and understanding of vocational pathways, they also see Australia lagging behind. With the growing emphasis on flexibility, the burgeoning of traineeships of various kinds, and the consolidation of traineeships and apprenticeships into New Apprenticeships, Harris and Deissinger argue that the Australian system has become incomprehensible to outsiders. By contrast, the German dual system is generally well understood, with 60 per cent of school leavers entering the 350 or so occupational training schemes available. Of course, the dual system has been criticised sometimes for its lack of flexibility, so the recent Australian focus on flexibility is not entirely a negative. Nevertheless, it is certain that the system has become more

complex and confusing as pathways have multiplied. Governments have tried to alleviate this confusion by setting up New Apprenticeship Centres (NACs) "to provide a one-stop shop for employers and young people in relation to apprenticeships and traineeships" (Smith and Keating 2003, p95).

On the third dimension, funding of entry level training, it is an ongoing theme of Australian VET that industry and employers are loath to invest in training, expecting the state to cover a major part of the costs. The earlier mentions of subsidy incentives for taking on apprentices and trainees show that this remains a significant issue. By contrast, in Germany companies and organisations, particularly the bigger ones, regard training as one of their major responsibilities. So the German government does not have to subsidise training in the way that Australian governments do. The fourth dimension reflects historical differences between the two countries. In Australia, the prime focus of apprenticeships has always been an industrial relations one (indentures, pay, what work apprentices should be allowed to carry out at different stages of the apprenticeship). The German system reflects a somewhat different emphasis, with the historical purpose of apprenticeships being a combination of education and training. The off-the-job training component is much more closely prescribed in Germany than it is in Australia. German apprentices receive a significantly lower wage than their Australian counterparts, but in return gain a more holistic education and training. These differences are reflected in the fifth dimension, quality assurance of on-the-job or in-company training. With the increased flexibility in the Australian system, it is possible in some instances for both the on- and off-the-job training to be delivered entirely in-house. The move to Training Packages has opened the way to less qualified trainers. There have been cases of fully on-the-job traineeships where it was doubtful whether the training organisation receiving the 'user choice' funding was actually delivering any training (Schofield 1999). Certainly, Schofield's research led to a tightening of the system and some on-the-job traineeships had their user choice funding withdrawn. By contrast, strict quality control is a major concern in Germany. There are clear rules and principles with the responsibilities of the various parties specified in detail. As well, Germany's mandatory significant qualifications for both workplace trainers and VET teachers, contrasts with the more casual approach in Australia. Overall, Harris and Deissinger (2003) argue that quality control in Australia is clearly lower than in Germany and, if anything, is perhaps decreasing further.

As the preceding discussion has indicated, the notion of pathways, both between qualifications and between educational sectors, has been an important focus of recent VET policy initiatives in Australia. A major concern of this UVAC-sponsored conference is, of course, links between VET and Higher Education. In Australia, progression from a trade certificate to a diploma and, thence, a degree has been a common pathway in established areas like engineering. Such natural pathways are probably less common for some newer occupational areas, though throughout the last decade, universities have been under intense competitive pressure to attract non-traditional students by new pathways. The Australian Qualifications Framework establishes that the most advanced levels in VET are equivalent

to the early levels in Higher Education. However, VET/Higher Education links are not a matter of major special policy focus currently in Australia. Rather policy attention has been more on the school to work transition and school/VET links. A key feature of this has been the extension of the New Apprenticeships system into the schools sector.

### **The success of VET in schools and school-based new apprenticeships**

It is important in what follows to appreciate the distinction between two different types of programs:

#### **• ‘VET in schools’ programs as against ‘school-based new apprenticeships’ (SBNAs)**

Students enrolled in VET in schools programs are taking accredited vocational courses (i.e. courses delivered by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO)) as part of their high school subject mix. For such students, there is the strong likelihood of some on-the-job learning in a work placement as part of the course (60 per cent of these students engage in a work placement). The key point, however, is that such students are not employees of the companies and organisations where they have their work placement. In contrast, students enrolled in SBNAs not only are taking an accredited vocational course, but they have a suitable permanent part-time job (in Victoria, a casual job), plus a training contract, with the company or organisation. Their work experience is part of the on-the-job learning component of their apprenticeship or traineeship.

#### **• VET in Schools Programs**

The early 1990s saw serious tensions building in the Australian schooling system. Retention rates to completion of senior high school had risen dramatically, yet the curriculum continued to be dominated exclusively by university entrance requirements, even though the proportion of students entering university was still small. (In 2001 only 14.3 per cent of all 20–24-year-olds had taken part in university studies). In these circumstances, efforts were made to broaden the curriculum to better cater for the diversity of the student population. The introduction of VET subjects was a readily available option. However, in the early 1990s these VET subjects aroused negative perceptions. They were seen as the preserve of less able students. They were also viewed as a tangible example of the economic rationalist agenda with which governments were increasingly saddling teachers and schools. As well, they were attacked for replicating class differences, the effects of which the education system was supposed to alleviate. For reasons like these, the early years of VET in schools programs were far from unproblematic. Yet by the end of the 1990s there had been a sea change in attitudes to VET in schools programs. The reasons for this are complex. Smith and Keating (2003, pp107–10) discuss seven contributing factors, including development of structures to ensure the quality of VET in schools programs, the capacity of such programs to develop employability skills, and the increasing participation of school students in part-time work. Another significant factor, I suggest, is that study in the VET sector is still largely provided at the public expense, unlike the Australian Higher Education sector in which students have to pay hefty and increasing fees, usually by taking

out long-term loans. As already discussed, VET as a form of public welfare has a strong tradition in Australia. So far, the VET sector has managed to largely evade the 'user pays' principles that have colonised the Higher Education sector. Perhaps increasing numbers of school students have realised that VET provides a path to rewarding employment without incurring a large burden of ongoing debt.

In any case, by the end of the 1990s, VET in schools programs had become unprecedentedly popular. By 2001 95 per cent of Australian secondary schools were offering VET in schools programs and 41 per cent of senior secondary students were studying in these programs. In some cases, schools themselves have become Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) by demonstrating that they have the staff and resources to deliver and award appropriate vocational qualifications. In other cases, schools enter into partnership with an RTO which then delivers the program in the school and awards the qualifications. A further possibility is for school students to take courses at a TAFE college or other RTO, with their school buying the training on a per capita basis.

Advantages of these programs to schools include:

- Increased choice of subjects means students are more likely to become interested in their studies; hence there will be less problem students
- An increased range of subjects means higher retention rates and commensurate funding
- An attractive range of subjects increases the likelihood of students transferring from other schools to complete senior high school. (In accordance with user choice, Australian schools are in competition with one another for students.)
- VET programs create valuable links between the school and local businesses and community organisations.

From the student perspective, advantages of VET in schools programs include:

- Completion of study that counts twice – as school subjects and as part or all of a VET qualification
- Increased opportunities to find areas in which they excel
- An opportunity to learn about the vocational relevance of 'academic' school subjects such as mathematics
- A chance to select subjects that relate to their practical or leisure interests, such as photography.

## **SBNAs**

As already noted, 'school-based new apprenticeships' (SBNAs) link students even more closely to the workplace than do VET in schools programs in that SBNAs involve a permanent part-time job, including a training contract, with a company or organisation.

Their time at work, often the equivalent of one day a week, is usually outside of school hours. It constitutes part of the on-the-job learning component of their apprenticeship or traineeship. As with all apprenticeships and traineeships, students receive regular training at a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), which in some cases is their school. More usually though, schools are in partnership with RTOs. In some cases, this component may consist of flexible work-based training monitored by an RTO. In all of these cases, the SBNA studies count as part of the students' overall mix of high school subjects. In a typical case, normal senior high school students are studying six subjects, while SBNA students take five school subjects and the apprenticeship/traineeship. Because SBNAs are part-time apprenticeships or traineeships, students do not always complete the training contract while still at school. (Traineeships can be completed during years 11 and 12; traditional length apprenticeships are, of course, partly-completed in that time.) The attraction for students, apart from already having gained part or whole of a recognised vocational qualification, is to leave school with a job assured. For some students, this assured job will provide the economic security to move on to further studies.

SBNAs have been growing rapidly since they started in 1997. There were 5,957 students in SBNAs in 2000 with a further 5,755 commencing in 2001 (Smith and Keating 2003, pp113–4). About half of the SBNAs are in Queensland, a state which offers financial incentives to schools whose students sign up for them. Current SBNAs cover a wide range of the services sector as well as parts of primary industry. They seem to be especially popular in major tourist regions, such as the Gold Coast, where typical employers for SBNAs include travel agencies, theme parks, and charter boat companies, as well as the more usual range of areas such as sales and personal services, business, and hospitality. Also notable is the fact that nearly half of NSBAs are employed by Group Training Companies, whereas these organisations only employ about 14 per cent of the total number of apprentices and trainees (Smith and Keating 2003, p114). Group Training Companies originally arose in parts of Australia as a means to provide apprenticeship opportunities in regions or sectors of industry where such opportunities were rare. For instance, in cases where nearly all of the businesses are small- or medium-sized, the cost of taking full responsibility for an apprentice might be very unattractive for one business. As well, it is typical that small businesses are unable to provide the full range of job variety desirable for completion of a sound apprenticeship. Group Training Companies, which employ apprentices and 'lease' them to suitable businesses for a weekly fee, offer a solution to this situation. The Group Training Company takes care of all of the paper work and pastoral care issues, as well as providing the apprentice/trainee with a planned and varied sequence of on-the-job experience. Currently there are over 200 Group Training Companies in Australia with many having expanded their activities into other areas of training and employment programmes.

In terms of numbers and growth, both VET in schools and SBNAs are judged to be highly successful recent developments that productively connect Australian high schools with the apprenticeship system and the VET sector generally. As Smith and Keating (2003, pp115–7)

point out, there are still some unresolved issues and practical problems. For instance, setting up and monitoring of effective work placements for VET in schools programmes is costly and time-consuming. At present there is no settled agreement as to how the various parties might best share these costs. Likewise, timetabling clashes between schools and workplaces are a common problem for both VET in schools and SBNAs. In some cases parity of esteem between VET subjects delivered in schools and those delivered by the VET sector has been an issue. Overall, New Apprenticeships in their various school-based guises, further illustrate the Harris and Deissinger (2003) point that the Australian system is certainly flexible, but so flexible that almost nobody can fully comprehend it.

### **Quality learning and apprenticeships**

As the above sections have shown, there have been significant developments in Australian apprenticeship arrangements in the last 15 years. In this section, I want to suggest that in all of these changes, very little attention has been paid to what kind of learning underpins a sound apprenticeship experience. In the limited space available, I can only briefly outline my argument. (It is presented in detail in Hager 2003.) Vocational learning, and apprenticeship in particular, can be viewed as having gone through several historical phases. Of necessity, vocational learning was originally an on-the-job phenomenon – as early humans struggled for survival as hunters and gatherers, the younger family and clan members were doubtless inducted into what were literally ‘life skills’ by their elders. It is likely that some were more adept at the mentoring of novices than others, so it was natural for them to assume roles as mentors/tutors. With the rise of agriculture, people could live successfully in one place, hence the growth of villages and towns and the segmentation of the labour force into diverse occupations. Thus the institution of apprenticeship was born. (See Hager & Hyland 2003.) Throughout all of these developments, vocational learning remained an on-the-job phenomenon with mentoring at the heart of it. Certainly, with the rise of apprenticeship, such learning was made more formal in various ways, but it was still essentially something that occurred on-the-job. It was well into the nineteenth century before the first moves occurred to shift vocational learning decisively towards off-the-job delivery. This was ultimately to lead to the rise of formal VET.

Although it is sometimes forgotten today, the purpose of formal VET in its beginnings was to provide workers with morally uplifting knowledge in an off-the-job vocational learning situation. In this there was no conception that workers were learning skills that would directly enable them to do their job better. Rather the aim was for workers to become better persons by acquiring the scientific disciplinary knowledge connected to their occupation. The idea of teaching people to perform their jobs was foreign to what formal VET was supposed to be about (Hager 2003). It was only in the late-nineteenth century that

*“... the moral content of the ‘diffusion of knowledge’ movement leached away but its social and physical implications remained.” (Murray-Smith 1966, p9)*

What remained, in the era when schooling was becoming compulsory, was the idea that skilled workers too were entitled to some formal education, specifically in the technical and scientific aspects of their occupation. This created, for the first time, an issue that was to bedevil apprenticeship and VET generally for the next century. How to best integrate on- and off-the-job learning? Hence, the recurring problem of how to connect theory and practice. Through all of these developments, the key idea remained stable that learning to perform skilfully in an occupation was essentially a matter of on-the-job learning. Apprenticeship properly carried out by conscientious mentors was a paradigm case of such on-the-job learning. If we ask what kind of learning underpins this conception of a sound apprenticeship experience, it is evident that a key feature is that the learning is thought of as a process, one that occurs over many years. Moreover, it is a process that is ongoing after the completion of the apprenticeship. This ongoing learning process is reflected in the further levels of skill acquisition, such as journeyman, and master, that traditionally were available beyond the completion of an apprenticeship. Now, admittedly, there have always been examples of bad practice in apprenticeship training. But that leaves untouched the claim that a well-carried-out apprenticeship is focused on learning as a process.

The interesting thing about traditional notions of apprenticeship, with their emphasis on learning as a process, is that virtually all major developments in theories of learning over the last 15 or so years also centre on learning as a process. Major examples of such theoretical developments include socio-cultural theorists, such as Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wertsch (1998). This approach focuses on processes rather than entities or structures, and stresses the inseparability of the individual from the social. Thus, the role of context is also crucial in the learning process. Within this broad approach there are, of course, some differences, but in all variants learning is conceptualised as a process. Equally influential but different theoretical accounts of learning have been developed from activity theory, which was originally inspired by the work of Vygotsky and Leont'ov, and developed by Engeström (2001) and others. Activity theory produces dynamic accounts of human activity that emphasise its mediation by tools (understood in the broadest sense). Also crucial for this kind of theorising are the differences between internal and external activities and the transformative links between the two. Once again, contextual factors are central. Activity theory is not monolithic in that various theoretical approaches can be developed from its main principles (see, for example, Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki 1999).

While there is a strong convergence between traditional notions of apprenticeship and recent influential theories of learning, in that both emphasise learning as a process, much recent VET policy development is completely out of step with this. This is certainly so in Australia, and, from what I read, also in the UK. Far from viewing vocational learning as a process, learning is apparently thought of as unit-by-unit acquisition of independent atoms of knowledge and skill. Work performance is broken down into a series of such decontextualised atomic elements, which novice workers are thought of as needing to gain one by one. Once a discrete element is acquired, transfer or application to appropriate future circumstances by the learner is assumed to be unproblematic.

Further, it is assumed, apparently, that learners have an innate capacity to combine appropriate learned atoms to produce the required holistic response to real work situations that may be more or less novel. In other words, it is assumed that the main learning task is to acquire the atoms that underpin performance. But what if real work performance is something much richer than anything that a mere list of discrete atoms can capture? The notion of discrete unit-by-unit mastery of skills and understanding omits the crucial need for an overall grasp of the whole. Rather than unit-by-unit acquisition of independent skills, a better image to represent the gaining of high-level proficiency in an occupation might be something like the 'gradual clearing of a fog in a landscape'. This image captures the idea of the increasingly proficient performer gaining a growing appreciation of the relationships between various skills and of their significance for the whole.

Some might claim that the description in the previous paragraph is a caricature. But certainly something close to this constitutes the underlying principles implicit in official Australian documents relating to Competency-Based Training. Likewise Training Packages are consistent with this reading. What other understanding is available to poorly qualified trainers working from the thin guidance contained in a Training Package? Likewise, Australian documents on key competencies (generic, core or basic skills) assume similar principles. In particular, key competencies, such as communication and problem solving, are clearly presented as discrete, de-contextualised atoms that once acquired can be transferred simply to diverse situations. Certainly, literature emanating from employer groups reflects this common assumption.

I see three main difficulties for the narrow understanding of learning that has dominated recent VET policy in Australia. Firstly, the faith placed in a naïve notion of transfer is ill-founded. Even psychologists who specialise in learning transfer research have realised that the transfer concept is too simplistic. Recent work has led to proposals to re-conceptualise transfer and, by implication, learning. Researchers have concluded that despite increasing power of experimental techniques, transfer "seems to vanish when experimenters try to pin it down" (Schoenfeld 1999, p7). As Bransford & Schwartz (1999) point out, transfer is indeed rare if it is restricted to 'replicative' transfer, which involves discrete atoms of learning being reapplied repeatedly to new situations. Bransford & Schwartz propose that we broaden the notion of 'transfer' by including an emphasis on 'preparation for future learning', that is, the ability to learn in new environments. So the point of transfer is not replication of isolated atomic bits of learning. It is about successful ongoing learning. This is part of the 'learning as process' that was a key feature of traditional apprenticeships, but is in danger of being lost in current VET policy in Australia and elsewhere.

The second difficulty is that the above principles encourage a situation where learning as the main training task is downgraded in favour of an over-emphasis on assessment. When learning is seen as merely one-by-one acquisition of independent atoms of knowledge and skill, then the obvious measure of progress is to assess each atom as soon as the learner believes it has been acquired. The elements of competency standards become the master

checklist for simple element-by-element assessment by direct observation of performance. This approach leads to unacceptably large amounts of trainer time being spent on assessment of a myriad of discrete tasks, at the expense of activities that promote learning. In general, I would argue, this approach assesses superficial aspects of an occupation and ignores the holistic character of quality performance. By breaking work performance down into a series of such de-contextualised atomic elements that are each assessed separately, any sense that learning might be a gradual process of appreciating a whole and how its parts relate to one another is lost. It also makes a mockery of the Australian VET system's supposed commitment to lifelong learning. The ongoing learning process that characterised sound traditional apprenticeships is dismissed in recent Australian policy documents as 'time-serving'. Rather the New Apprenticeship system encourages a mindset of acquisition of discrete atoms each checked off as soon as possible, and the sooner the full list is completed the better.

The third difficulty flows out of the second. If vocational learning is not centrally about unit-by-unit acquisition of atoms, but, rather, is an integrated, ongoing process of coming to understand a whole complex of knowledge and skills, then current policy overlooks, and even discourages, this vital dimension of learning. It is only by developing understanding of a whole complex of knowledge and skills, and how the various parts relate to one another, that workers can develop skilled responses to relatively novel or even unique circumstances. This gradually acquired capacity to tailor skilled responses to changing contexts is not something that can be captured in a short-term checklist. It is because this rich, synthetic dimension of learning is absent that research finds that trainees have a

*"... low opinion [of] the concept of 'ticking off' outcomes or competencies from workbooks or training records. Quite simply, these lists of outcomes were seen by the trainees as a 'thin' account of their work experience and learning."* (Hager & Smith 2004, p42)

Another research project found that 70 per cent of work sites studied used the training workbooks that encapsulated the checklist of competencies approach, while 30 per cent admitted to neglecting the workbooks. What was interesting here was that

*"... the 30% who admitted neglecting them often included firms that were clearly providing good training. The reasoning here seems to be that the holism of real work situations is such that long lists of outcomes are seen as but pale representations of the real thing. So, thoughtful training arrangements lead people to go beyond this approach."* (Hager & Smith 2004, p42)

Thus, it seems that people who are good trainers may know that what has been served up to them by policy-makers is a sham, but they get on with good training regardless. The worry is the majority who apparently accept the thin conception of training that underpins Australia's New Apprenticeship system.

## Conclusion

The Australian apprenticeship system has undergone major changes in the last 15 years. In many respects, such as increased flexibility and broadened access by opening up of new pathways, these changes have been successful. This paper has outlined the main changes, but has also warned that through a narrow approach to conceptualising skills, the policy reforms could actually serve to deskill workers and downgrade VET programs. I would argue that this is not an inevitable consequence of adopting competence-based strategies, but that is another story. Despite the reservations that I have expressed about various aspects of the Australian apprenticeship system, some are inclined to give it a very healthy report card indeed. For instance, Smith and Keating (2003, p100) argue that the

*"... Australian apprentice and trainee system is in fact proportionately the second largest in the world, second only in participation rates to the German-speaking countries ..., and its growth over the past ten years is one of the success stories of training reform."*

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## **Evolving Concepts of Apprenticeships**

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### **Core argument**

Apprenticeship is traditionally conceptualised as an 'institution'. Implicit in this conceptualisation is a series of assumptions about companies' product and service strategies, the context of work and concepts of knowledge and skill formation.

The 'knowledge economy' is introducing a different configuration of these assumptions. This development introduces a new conception of apprenticeship – 'polycontextual' – apprenticeship. This has implications for our understanding of apprenticeship.

In this presentation I identify three modes of production, which will be underpinned by five assumptions. I will then determine the purpose of apprenticeship in relation to each mode of production. Finally, I will identify implications of this analysis for research, policymakers, companies, education and training providers, intermediary agencies and social partners. Chief among these implications, perhaps, is the challenge the analysis makes of the sectoral dominance of apprenticeships.

Conceptions of production and criteria for production are derived from participation in the following research projects:

- Working Group 2 'Transfer and Boundary Crossing in Vocational Education' COST Action A11 'Flexibility, Transferability and Mobility as Targets of VET'
- TSER 4th Framework research project 'Work Experience as an Innovative Education and Training Strategy for the 21st Century'
- CEDEFOP research project 'Work Experience in the Knowledge Economy: Issues for Research, Policy and Practice'
- TLRP/ESRC research project 'Techno-mathematical Literacies'.

### **Modes of production**

Let us look at each mode of production in turn – Mass Production, 'Lean' Production/'Mass Customisation' and 'Innovation-driven' Production.

**Table 1: Apprenticeship in Mass Production**

<b>Criteria for Production</b>	
Product and Service Strategy	Standardised commodity
Relation between Company Product/Service and Customer	Separate
Context of Work	Functionally separate, stable and well-bounded
Form of Knowledge	Articulated knowledge
Mode of Learning	Theory and practice separate Connections developed through experience
<b>Purpose of Apprenticeship</b>	<b>Entry into occupation</b>

**Table 2: Apprenticeship in 'Lean' Production/'Mass Customisation'**

<b>Criteria for Production</b>	
Product and Service Strategy	Quality commodity Customised commodity
Relation between Company Product/Service and Customer	Separate Customer involvement
Context of Work	Functionally integrated Networked
Form of Knowledge	'Process' knowledge 'Architectural' knowledge
Mode of Learning	Theory and practice separate Connections developed by companies/work teams
<b>Purpose of Apprenticeship</b>	<b>Entry into firm's occupational culture</b>

**Table 3: Apprenticeship in 'Innovation-driven' Production**

<b>Criteria for Production</b>	
Product and Service Strategy	Co-configuration
Relation between Company Product/Service and Customer	Integrated
Context of Work	Integration of customer product/service and company
Form of Knowledge	'Co-configured' knowledge
Mode of Learning	Boundary crossing to co-configure knowledge
<b>Purpose of Apprenticeship</b>	<b>Poly-occupational</b>

## **Implications of the co-configured apprenticeship**

The research shows that it is important to look at apprenticeship not only from a sectoral perspective but also as part of product and service strategy. When you relate apprenticeship to mode of production you focus on the role of knowledge, how you support learning, and above all what the purpose of apprenticeship is.

For research co-configured apprenticeship provides a new focus, and for policymakers and employers, it poses new questions. For education and training providers and intermediary agencies it presents new challenges. Finally, for social partners it makes new demands.

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## **Work-based Learning and Social Inclusion – International Ideas and Perspectives**

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**Professor Karen Evans, Professor of Education (Lifelong Learning), London Institute of Education**

*“The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience”*

Tony Blair, Introduction to ‘Bridging the Gap’, Social Exclusion Unit, 1999

The importance of securing a quality work-based route for young people in the United Kingdom was the focus of the Working to Learn Report (Karen Evans, Phil Hodgkinson, Ewart Keep, Malcolm Maguire, David Raffe, Helen Rainbird, Peter Senker and Lorna Unwin) published in 1997. In that report the authors argued that the potential of work-based learning to motivate young people and to develop latent talent is ‘woefully undervalued’ (p5).

*“Unless initial foundation education and training of the future workforce is of a sufficient standard and is accessible to all who do enter the labour market, the cost of subsequent training will be greater than necessary and much will be remedial in nature. For young people, unsuitable or low-quality education and training, or their effective exclusion from the education and training system, brings disadvantages in employment prospects and in their ability to become participative citizens.”* (Evans et al 1997, p6)

In this paper we aim to explore some of the tensions that need to be resolved when using forms of work-based learning to counter the social exclusion of young people. The paper draws on a European partnership project, carried out in Belgium, England, Finland, Germany, Greece and Portugal (Niemeyer and Evans, in press 2004). In this, we explored how the ‘social exclusion problem’ is constructed in different societies and ways in which young people, particularly the academically less successful, are prepared for employment in systems and cultures different from our own. Four analytic frameworks are identified and discussed. While the paper focuses on tensions at the Foundation Modern Apprenticeship level, the wider findings for Widening Participation, the route to Foundation Degrees through Modern Apprenticeships and the social and vocational aspects of learning for employment transitions at all levels.

From 2002, a major increase in the scale of the work-based route was planned in England. The intention set out by government in the 2001 Report ‘Education into Employability’ was to offer 16 to 18-year-olds a choice between full-time education or work-based training. Entering work without training, or the so-called ‘NEET’ category (Not in Education, Training or Employment, otherwise termed Status Zero) would not be options. Since then the various forms of youth training/national traineeships have been replaced by/rebranded as Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA), leading to a level 2 qualification. Many existing Modern Apprenticeships were restyled as Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, aiming at a level 3 qualification. Gateway provision is available for those not ready to enter the FMA, which attracts many of the least academically successful young people.

Those at risk of social exclusion (the many young people who have left any form of education and training by 17, those who have insecure jobs where no training is provided, those who have dropped out of the official records) are all intended to be encompassed by these initiatives.

Ewart Keep, one of the original Working to Learn authors, assessed in 2002 the prospects for success in this round of initiatives, by setting out two possible scenarios that could develop (Keep, 2002). In Scenario A (*everything coming up roses*) Gateway schemes are successful in preparing the most disadvantaged for FMAs, the majority of young people on FMAs complete successfully and a good proportion progress to AMAs and Foundation Degrees. Employers accept the broader, foundation nature of the FMA and the expanded off-job training. They are satisfied with the new funding deal and the LSC's coordination of the scheme, and the required number of places are achieved. By contrast, in Keep's possible Scenario B (*a road going nowhere*), outside a few strong sectors (such as engineering) the work-based route is increasingly seen by employers as the means to remotivate (or alternatively a dumping ground) for those disaffected with the education system. Employers are unenthusiastic about what they perceive to be the task of remedying deficiencies of the educational system (fuelled by the 'guarantee') and have little confidence in the Gateway schemes to 'deliver' young people suitable for the FMAs. Asking what is needed to ensure that Scenario A develops rather than Scenario B question tends to lead us round the loop of all of the structural and cultural impediments to the success of UK work-based learning that any review of the history of schemes and initiatives of the last 30 years reveals over and over again.

It is not our intention to rehearse these again in this presentation, but to take a sideways, or lateral look at the problem. We ask what other countries in the western part of Europe do to tackle the risk factors for social exclusion among young people who experience problems in entering work, and the extent to which various versions of work-based learning play a part in this.

Table 2 sets out four analytically defined model structures, as identified in the European 'surveys and analysis' project soon to be published as 'Reconnection-Countering Social Exclusion through Situated Learning', edited by Karen Evans and Beatrix Niemeyer<sup>1</sup>. The general precautions with regard to international comparisons have to be borne in mind (Maurice, 1991). The aim of the analysis is "mutual learning", where one tries to understand the "inner" logics and dynamics of different cultural systems in order to improve a specific system, instead of just trying to transfer the "solutions" developed for another cultural setting (Heidegger, 1995).<sup>2</sup> The countries involved – Belgium, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Portugal – represented different systems and cultural values from Northern and Southern Europe.

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1 In press with Kluwer, 2004

2 This approach has also proved to be rather successful for the more encompassing investigations of strategies of post-16 education in Europe (Lasonen, 1996).

**Table 2: Re-enter in European VET structures (analytical)**

Strong non-formal sector	Market-driven	“Dual” (enterprise-school)	Strong school-based
<b>VET-structures</b>			
<b>Strengths</b>			
tradition of – informal learning – self-employment – family support	– close to market needs – flexible – learning situated in “real world” of work	– “secure”, structured pathways – alternating learning	– close relation practice-theory possible – “integrative” – social, ethical education
<b>Weaknesses</b>			
– relatively little formal VET – lack of formal supporting structures	– insecure pathways – little citizenship education	– inflexible pathways – access thresholds – partly separated from labour market needs	– little enterprise-based training – school-to-work transition – drop out
<b>Orientations: education/“schooling”</b>			
– expanding initiatives – stronger institutional commitment – strengthening unconventional initiatives	– stronger structures – expanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social work</li> <li>• youth work</li> </ul>	– open structures – less “schemes” – against “revolving door effect” – “after-care”	– networking with enterprises – more self-reliance of young people – strengthen situated learning
Raising the status of VET in general		Supporting “moving on”	

### Strong non-formal sector of training

Learning in the non-formal sector is closest to what has been originally called “situated learning in communities of practice” by Lave and Wenger (1991). Where there is still a strong tradition of informal learning this offers good opportunities for young people who have difficulties in formal settings of teaching and training. It is often small enterprises where these young people can start at the periphery of the whole work process and become more and more engaged. A strong culture of self-employment, especially in the countryside, will also often provide much family support, that is “parenting” in the sense of surroundings which are safe, but also normative and disciplining, possibly sometimes with too little tolerance for unconventional behaviour which is typical for the target group.

Indeed, in some southern European regions youth unemployment figures are relatively low. Therefore it appears to be reasonable to support this structure where it is still working well although one has to reckon with a strong tendency towards weakening of these traditional settings. Most of the relevant jobs are to be found in traditional sectors of employment. On the one hand, the competencies necessary for performing these jobs, for instance in the crafts or in the retail trade sector, in an effective and efficient manner are nowadays often heavily underestimated. This is true even more so if someone becomes self-employed, running a micro-business successfully (Fischer, 1995). On the other hand, because of this low esteem these jobs are normally very low paid. This could be, however, counteracted by suitable economic policies assisting small businesses or labour market policies supporting people in low paid jobs, for example in the tourism industry, although this solution is very much debated on in the discourse about social policy.

Nevertheless, it may be expected that many young people will find the opportunities described less and less attractive. Therefore there are problems of supporting young people with low educational achievements in structures of a strong non-formal sector if the connection to the modern sectors of the economy is, in the respective region, weak. In this case the amount of formal VET provision is relatively limited, which means that there is a lack of formal supporting structures for these young people.

The options for improving opportunities of re-integration in this case are rather obvious, and centre on the VET institutions developing a stronger commitment to supporting these young people. An important means of achieving this should include the special requirements of teaching and learning for this target group, in specialist education and training for vocational teachers and trainers, including continuing in-service training. Raising the status of VET in general, as compared to Higher Education, should be a very important aim although it appears to be difficult to achieve because it is connected to the cultural meaning of education in general. In addition, these possibilities depend of course very much on the development of the regional labour market. Therefore unconventional initiatives suggest themselves. As several examples of good practice from different countries, described by the respective partners, have shown these aim at providing some social stability during the difficult passage from childhood to adulthood. The aim is to keep young people moving on and 'not indulging in inactivity or unlawful activities.'

### **Market-driven structure**

In this structure (seen by international partners as typifying the English case) vocational training often taking place while young people are already holding a more or less "normal" job, where employers are asked to and sometimes indeed do carry through special training activities (Dearing, 1996). In this way the learning is highly situated in the surroundings of a conventional work-site. This supports motivation through taking on the role of an adult (Eraut, 1998). But those with low prior attainments might have difficulties in moving from the periphery closer to the centre, and may become trapped into low-skilled and low-paid jobs.

Because this structure is very flexible with regard to labour market needs, the opportunities to be trained in an occupation where jobs can be found are relatively good, at least under favourable conditions in the labour market. Very often the young people are offered opportunities of taking courses in, for instance, a further education college so that elements of alternating learning are introduced. For those with low prior attainments, bridging 'schemes' can be easily inserted into such a structure just because it is so flexible.

Problems arise as the counterpart of the relative strengths of this structure. The flexibility also means that the pathways to be taken are insecure and the possibility of dropping out again remains a constant risk. This again might often undermine the motivation and engagement of these young people at risk. On the other hand, this can mean that people can come back after some time, even several times, so that this structure is really open. Young people may adapt their learning and working to the lifestyle which suits them best at a particular age, an opportunity which has been shown to be important for the target group. Obviously the danger arises that people might drop out for good. A serious problem is that in the market-driven structure the spread of incomes is large and has proved, during the last two decades, to have widened even further. This means that many become trapped in low-paid jobs, some of which require only minimal competences and provide little job satisfaction.

In addition, the inclusion of social workers and youth workers is not obligatory in such a structure although of course in the real "mixed" cases there are always some of them working in the field. Because there is no clearly structured alternance between workplace learning and vocational schools (or further education colleges, respectively) education for citizenship is comparatively underdeveloped (see Kerr, 1999).

These weaknesses point to some ways in which provision can be strengthened in such a structure. The 'initiatives' should be firmer established within the overall VET structure which itself may be considerably strengthened and thereby raised in its status. For the young people at risk a "tightly knit" safety net (OECD, 2000) should be created which provides regular support by social workers and youth workers. But the "locally managed tracking mechanisms that allow early leavers at risk to be quickly identified and provided with assistance" (OECD, loc. cit., Working group III, p3) may sometimes prove to be counterproductive because it could increase the resistance of these young people, resulting in low motivation and no engagement at all, in the worst case.

These aspects have been shown as a result of the project, to be of utmost importance for effective and successful initiatives. What one can learn from more open structures is that they sometimes allow for time and space, during the difficult phase of becoming adult, for taking one's own decisions. On the other hand, sensitive tracking might prevent serious alienation from societal networks. Indeed, a more closely woven safety net may provide also education for citizenship and could even take on some aspects of vocational "schooling" which may provide more security for the at risk youngsters, as has been described as the "parenting" feature of good vocational schools in other systems.

### **Dual VET structure with strong influence of employers and trade unions**

In this structure where the structured teaching/learning alternates between workplace and vocational school, supported situated learning best describes the apprentices' experience (Guile, Young, 1999). If the learning at vocational school is suitably connected with the workplace learning, (which is not always the case) opportunities for reflective forms of problem solving are strengthened (Heidegger, Adolph, Laske, 1997).

The structure of the dual system has proven to be rather inclusive at least at times when there are more apprenticeship places available than young people seeking a place. This is because the hierarchy of occupations which in fact does exist means that there are a lot of occupations where the cognitive requirements are not all that demanding (Reuling, 1998). Under favourable labour market conditions, opportunities for young people with low prior attainments are not so bad. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the fraction of young people considered not to be adequately prepared for VET and the labour market depends rather strongly on the question if there is a shortage or a surplus of apprenticeship places open for the young people. This again depends on general economic conditions but also on the labour market and especially the VET policies which are pursued. The apprenticeship represents a clearly structured pathway which provides security once one was able to enter an apprenticeship contract. Although there is a "second threshold" for getting a job after completion of an apprenticeship it has turned out that under favourable labour market conditions the opportunities for young people – of all abilities – to enter the labour market of adults are fairly good.

Nevertheless the threshold for access to an apprenticeship is the most serious weakness of this structure with regard to low achieving school leavers. It is this threshold which has, for instance in Germany, resulted in establishing a large number of 'Re-Enter' initiatives. In addition, the well-structured pathways are at the same time rather inflexible, and the structure of the apprenticeship (sub-)system is often not close enough to labour market needs. For there is a real difference between the apprenticeship market, geared to opportunities offered by the employers, and the labour market for adults. This means that for the low achieving young people the second threshold, the passage to an adequate job in the adults' labour market, presents another large problem.

These weaknesses represent great challenges for improving the structure of measures for integration of the young into VET and employment, even if these themselves are rather well established and employ important features of "action-oriented learning" including components of situated learning (Engeström, 1999). In addition, the collaboration between the customary "dual system" and the Re-Enter initiatives tends to be weak, just because the former is clearly regulated and does not easily allow for deviating pathways (Zielke, Popp, 1997). Even if the Re-Enter initiative is successful in getting young people to "moving on" it often turns out to be often difficult for them to enter a "normal" apprenticeship.

The *structures* should be more open for pathways that deviate from what is considered to be “normal”. This is, to some degree, allowed for in less regulated structures. That is, access should be provided in a much more flexible manner, encompassing “outreach services” as described for some examples of good practice by the Belgian partners. This would lower the access threshold especially for the young people who are the most at risk of dropping out completely, that is young people who have already been lost by the tracking mechanism usual for the VET structure outlined here.

### **Strong school-based structure**

A close relation of practice in the vocational school workshops and theory in the classroom is supported by this structure. This can be, and sometimes is, further developed in the sense of “action-oriented learning” that may be organised in a combined workshop-classroom setting.

Therefore here “integrative” models can prove to be successful where the low achieving students are included in the whole learning group even if they may not participate fully in the most demanding tasks. This is certainly an excellent way of combating exclusion and preventing stigmatisation of the target group. Because in school-based structures a hierarchy of occupations to which the respective VET is related does, of course, exist, opportunities can be established for students with low prior attainments. In particular, the access thresholds are low as long as the young people, depending on their living circumstances, remain within the scope of the tracking mechanism employed.

In addition, social and ethical education can be fostered if adjusted to the sometimes problematic situation of these young people. Too much disciplining has to be avoided because they might drop out.

On the other hand, the ‘second threshold’ for entering the adults’ labour market after leaving the school-based VET may constitute a severe problem especially for the at risk people. Because enterprise-based training plays only a minor part in this structure the employers may be cautious as far as the employability of these youngsters is concerned. The ability to deal successfully with the day-to-day challenges a “real” work-site has not been proved (Lasonen, 1999).

Because the strong school-based structure is usually, at the same time, rather strictly regulated it appears to be difficult to adjust, the VET measures to the changing conditions in the labour market. The whole process of school-to-work transition appears to be often problematic for the target group. This seems to be one reason why drop-out becomes a problem under unfavourable conditions of the labour market, leading to the introduction of special initiatives to bring people back into the system.

The obvious means for reducing these problems appears to be a stronger networking with enterprises which indeed has been introduced in some countries where the strong school-based structure is prevalent. This is equally important for initiatives aiming to counter social exclusion by reducing drop-out. The latter are designed to be more open as compared to the conventional structure. In addition, these programmes lay more stress on the self-reliance of the young people deemed to be 'at risk'. This should enable them to cope effectively with the sometimes harsh conditions to be found in enterprises. Considering what has been said earlier, the networking should also include the whole range of local initiatives dealing with young people's interests, like sports clubs, cultural centres etc. In this way 'learning communities centred on practice' can be built around collaboration between practitioners in the new initiatives, customary VET, youth work and social work (see also Lasonen and Kämäräinen, 1998).

While action-oriented learning suggests itself in the school-based structure "situated learning" in the sense employed in this project is more difficult to achieve. Re-Enter initiatives proper may give incentives to strengthen situated learning especially for low achieving young people, maybe for other components of the school-based structure, too. This would also in this case support the young people in "moving on", during their learning and after they have left the respective schemes for re-integration.

### **Implications for the English FMA operating in the market-driven structure**

The analysis of the market-driven setting as seen through the lens of international comparison suggests some strengths and weaknesses as well as features that the English FMA needs to work towards. These are partly addressed in the framework initially elaborated in Working to Learn Report, where we argued that work-based learning *does* potentially play a part in countering the social and economic exclusion of a growing minority of young people. The potential of work-based learning is multi-faceted:

- pedagogical: under certain conditions it can be the most effective way of integrating practical and theoretical learning
- curricular: work-based learning allows the curriculum to keep up with changing workplace practices, and it provides a bridge between the cultures of the school and the 'world of work'
- motivational: it may motivate young people to participate and learn, particularly those who are bored or alienated by full-time education
- social and economic integration: it provides adult roles for young people, particularly for those who are most at risk of dropping out of the system altogether; it may also smooth the transition into the labour market
- diversity: contributes to the diversity and flexibility of opportunities required in a modern educational system.

The model reproduced below aimed to capture the potential of work-based learning while taking account of what we know about how young people learn, what the risk factors are for them, and what has been successful or unsuccessful in earlier attempts to improve the quality of youth training/Modern Apprenticeships.

<b>Breadth</b>	<b>Variety</b>	<b>Personalised provision</b>
Job-specific competence	Two or more placements	Individualised programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to meet learner needs</li> <li>• to build around what an employer can provide</li> </ul>
Skills knowledge and understanding covering the occupational sector	Possible to change occupation without penalty to trainee, employer or provider	Mentor support for trainee to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• give guidance and support</li> <li>• act as advocate when necessary</li> <li>• arrange additional support such as careers guidance</li> </ul>
	Work sampling when appropriate, for those who need it	Flexible use of individual development planning
General education that is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• directly related to employment</li> <li>• non-employment-related</li> </ul>	Balance of on-, near- and off-the-job experience for all	Choice of part-time or full-time provision
The whole entitlement would be provided at entry, intermediate, foundation and advanced levels, with built-in progression when and for whom it is appropriate.		

Source: Evans et al 1997. *Working to Learn*, CIPD

But, as Keep argued, there are considerable tensions between the pursuit of this inclusive mission and the engagement/full support of employers under the present arrangements. Our argument is that any such provision has to involve employers on the basis of what they can reasonably provide, and publicly fund what they cannot reasonably be expected to provide. What can reasonably be expected depends on the nature of the employer. For small employers, for example, it is unreasonable to demand large-scale involvement in a relatively complex apprenticeship programme based on the principles outlined. Structures must be in place to allow employers to determine their own level of involvement, with mechanisms for that to be supplemented by other providers. The Working to Learn report argued that the right to choose this level of involvement must be balanced by an acceptance of nationally and locally agreed programme standards, so that the interests of young people, employers in general and the state as a whole are safeguarded.

In turn this requires the replacement of employer control over training with partnership structures in which employers have a key role and a strong voice, as do others, such as education representatives and the trades unions.

Working to Learn also argued that much more attention needs to be paid to learning processes:

*“Because a high-quality, work-based route should transcend the boundaries of the traditional classroom and shop floor/office, we would advocate the development of new pedagogical approaches...”* (Evans et al 1997, p20)

The need to take pedagogy much more seriously has been underlined by the European comparisons we have been able to carry out in this field. In Germany, in particular, both vocational pedagogy and social pedagogy are well-developed fields of theory and practice. This is taken very seriously, and has the unintended consequences of generating tensions between those expert in vocational pedagogy and those trained in social pedagogy when it comes to the needs of those young people who need help towards the entry level required for the full German apprenticeship (that equates with AMA). Consider this quote from Beatrix Niemeyer, reflecting on the problems of providing ways into ‘normal’ apprenticeship for those who are at risk of exclusion:

*“Between the three different professions concerned... (teachers, trainers, social workers). ...expertise is not systematically shared, mutual learning does not happen on the level of the educational staff, therefore holistic support for the young persons is difficult to arrange. On a theoretical level this extends to the question about the relationship of social pedagogics to vocational pedagogics. To what extent can their findings and methodological knowledge be transferred from one to the other or used by both? From a general perspective social pedagogy is considered to be expert for its methodology while vocational education rather adopts the theoretical approach, including the development of the related learning theories. While the ‘normal’ vocational education and training more or less systematically excludes the idea of additional social support apart from personality development by the growth of a vocational identity.”* (Niemeyer 2004 in press)

Yet Niemeyer acknowledges that a specific didactic, linking the broad experiences of practice to a pedagogical theory which integrates social and vocational learning, still has to be formulated. Given the importance attached to methodology, theory and expert knowledge in German training, these pedagogical challenges will be taken seriously. Part of the challenge in the UK is, as Frank Coffield (2001) has pointed out, that there is little articulation of any discernable pedagogy of work or work-based learning at any level of the system.

Based on the experience of good practice in the participating countries and grounded on social theories of learning we have proposed (Evans and Niemeyer 2004) an expanded concept of situated learning in LCPs, Learning Communities centred on Practice, for this special field of education. This aims to integrate engagement and motivation as

preconditions for learning and provides a holistic approach towards the learners' personality, dispositions and skills development. It is broad enough to embrace the various approaches of European VET practices. It is based on the importance of work experience and practical action for the enhancement of processes of learning and understanding, which are common to theories of vocational education and training, but shifts the focus from the individual to the social components of learning. Inspired by cognitive-anthropologic theories it is argued that learning is not an individual act but learning processes are emerging and being constructed from a social context in which they are situated. Learning therefore is not a question of knowledge transfer but rather a question of allowing young persons to participate in social situations and accept them as members with the potential of growing competence. From situated theories of learning we take the outstanding importance of the learning community, the LCP as the social framework for learning.

### **Lessons that can be learnt from a comparative/international review**

We have argued that there are tensions that need to be resolved when using forms of work-based learning to counter the social exclusion of young people. Responses to the risk of social exclusion for young people are differently framed in different societies and we can learn from the ways in which young people, particularly the academically less successful, are prepared for employment in systems and cultures different from our own. We conclude, for the market-driven English case, that steps need to be taken to:

- address failures of market-based model with an approach based on regulated partnerships and entitlements. These should avoid placing unreasonable demands on employers and ensure consistency of access and quality standards
- develop stronger and more holistic approaches to our understanding of social and vocational pedagogy
- recognise that teachers and trainers in this specialist field need specialist education and training and adequate conditions of employment to practice
- engender higher expectations of what can be achieved by young people deemed to be 'at risk of social exclusion', under the right conditions and with appropriate support.

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## Taking an Expansive Approach to Apprenticeship for the Contemporary Workplace: a Framework for Improvement

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### Background

Modern Apprenticeship (MA) was launched ten years ago by the Conservative government to raise skill levels and provide a framework for career progression. Originally it was set at level 3 to provide differentiation with the then Youth Training Scheme at level 2, which had a mixed reputation. It was a flagship programme which, with the development of Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (FMA) at level 2 and a new focus on entry level, aimed to provide a ladder progression through to higher education.

### Overview

MA is in operation in over 80 sectors, with wide sectoral variation. It has been open to 16 to 24-year-olds, with current moves to relax the age cap. There is a target for 28 per cent of 16 to 22-year-olds to enter MA in 2004; the current figure is around 25 per cent.

The rationale for Modern Apprenticeship is twofold – economic, to raise productivity through workforce development at the intermediate skill level; and social, as a vehicle for lower educational achievers. There are inherent tensions in these two objectives. The message to young people is captured in this quotation used in a local LSC brochure on Modern Apprenticeship for young people, where an engineering apprentice says: “To work and learn so close to an aircraft as I do is a once in a lifetime opportunity; if, like me, you struggle with the theory side of learning but excel in the practical then Modern Apprenticeships would be ideal for you.”

### Characteristics of Modern Apprenticeship

People often associate apprenticeship with school leavers, but approximately 50 per cent of starts are aged 19-plus, with fewer than 20 per cent aged 16. There are marked sectoral differences in the age profiles. Traditional apprenticeship sectors such as engineering and automotive tend to have a younger age profile than service sectors. Nearly half of all entrants are female but traditional gender stereotyping persists, with construction, for example, nearly all male and childcare nearly all female. A small number of traditional and non-traditional sectors – including retail, construction and administration – account for majority of take-up.

Regarding attainment, 24 per cent of Foundation Modern Apprentices and 33 per cent of Advanced Modern Apprentices achieved the full framework (LSC figures for 2002–3). Approximately two-thirds of entrants to Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) do not have level 2 qualifications, and this may partly account for the low AMA completion rate.

Attainment is better in traditional sectors such as engineering and lower in 'newer' sectors such as customer service and social care.

Progression from Advanced Modern Apprenticeship and level 4 is problematic. Whereas 90 per cent of young people with A levels enter higher education by the age of 21, under half of those with vocational qualifications do so. Attainment varies greatly from one sector to another:

*"[An apprentice's] chance of receiving a good training, a decent preparation for a career, is largely determined by which sector they enter."* (ALI annual report, 2002: 13)

## Recent research

Why does the MA look so different from one sector and from one organisation to another? To investigate this, we developed in-depth MA case studies in contrasting companies and a range of sectors. Using these case studies we developed a framework for analysing provision and explaining differences, a tool for employers and others to use to analyse their approach and improve the quality of apprenticeships.

The approach allows us to position employers on an expansive-restrictive continuum. It is important to understand that the MA cannot be 'expansive' or 'restrictive' on its own; its character is a result of broader organisational characteristics.

We investigated practice in three companies in the steel and metals sector, whose apprentices were following frameworks in engineering, steel processing, accountancy and business administration. They were companies of different sizes, each with a different business focus.

## Expansive apprenticeship

Company A adopted an expansive approach which was characterised by:

- participation in several settings, including off-the-job learning, giving breadth and depth to the programme
- training and supervision to complete the workplace 'curriculum' – so that apprentices were valued as employees and learners
- access and support towards attaining vocational qualifications with educational and sectoral currency as well as competence-based qualifications
- apprenticeship located within a progressive career structure – borne of a culture of employee and organisational development.

## Restrictive apprenticeship

Company B, by contrast, took a restrictive approach, where:

- apprentices were confined to one internal setting (restricting breadth)

- there was fast transition to productive worker status (restricting depth)
- qualifications were not valued
- work was organised to suit short-term business goals – so no longer term vision
- there was a ceiling on progression.

### **Facilitating progression**

Our research indicated that progression is facilitated by:

- access to underpinning knowledge and the workplace curriculum (the mapping of knowledge, skills and tasks to be learned)
- opportunities for participation (providing breadth and depth), teaching and learning
- qualifications which are fit for purpose, recognised by HEIs and professional bodies, and linked to professional qualification pathways
- designating employees to be responsible for apprentices' progress
- clear post-apprenticeship pathways and career development.

### **Contrasting apprenticeship experiences (Sally & Tom)**

The contrasting experiences to two apprentices help to bring home what we found. Sally and Tom followed Accountancy and Business Administration apprenticeships respectively. They had similar educational backgrounds on entry to AMA. Sally completed her apprenticeship and was working towards professional accountancy qualifications (CIMA) through planned work placements in financial and commercial sections and projects. Tom, by contrast, gained some general work experience but did not achieve NVQ3. While he felt he was useful to the company and had achieved pay rises, he had no sense of career, learning or qualification path.

### **Utilising the expansive-restrictive framework**

Employers can use the framework to gauge how the MA fits with broader organisational and workforce development strategies, and to determine how the organisation will support the apprentice's attainment and progression, and contribution towards organisational goals.

Its wider applications include use by training providers and local LSCs to identify ways to support organisations who need help to see the wider business benefits of the MA. It could be used by SSCs to think through the role of frameworks and sectoral needs. The expansive approach could also encourage progression to higher education by many young people with aptitude, but who currently miss out on this opportunity.

Fuller, A. & Unwin, L. (2003). Learning as Apprentices in the Contemporary Workplace: creating and managing expansive and restrictive participation, *Journal of Education and Work*, 16(4) pp407–26.

## Apprenticeship Cultures – a comparative view

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### Introduction

There is no doubt among scholars engaged in the field of comparative research that vocational training systems are determined by a specific 'philosophy' or 'intrinsic logic' which gives them the character of 'black boxes' as they have to be understood 'in relation to other societal institutions' including the labour market, the economy, the system of industrial relations and of course the system of government (Raffe, 1998, p391). With this premise in mind, looking at vocational training in a merely institutional manner by using the state function as the crucial *tertium comparationis* (for example Greinert, 1988) reduces the potential of gaining insight into what may be called the 'training culture' of a given country. The title of this paper refers to 'apprenticeship cultures' and therefore to a specific learning arrangement in the area of vocational training which, despite its medieval origins and 'old-fashioned' terminology, seems to remain a pivotal topic of national and international training policies. This is especially true for Anglophone countries such as the UK or Australia where apprenticeships have been revitalised or reframed in recent years due to dissatisfaction with both school-based skill formation as well as traditional on-the-job training (Ryan, 2001; Canning, 2001; Deissinger, 2003; Harris & Deissinger, 2003; Deissinger, 2004a).

Despite a number of 'modern' intentions backing or promoting apprenticeships, societies cannot ignore the 'historical character' of their respective vocational training systems. This implies that there is a cultural foundation for the general significance given both to apprenticeship as an institutional solution towards the problem of skill formation as well as to the interaction or even interdependence between the apprenticeship system and the systems of general and higher education respectively. In Germany, it is an apparent phenomenon that the understanding of a separate vocational pathway as 'unique' and valuable in itself is a trait which sets the country apart from most other European societies (with the exception of Austria and Switzerland). This unique positioning, however, has traditionally provoked criticism with respect to the organisation of vocational training and general education 'according to separate criteria and systems of assessment' including 'limited possibilities for progression between them' (Young, 2003, p228). On the other hand, it may be argued that academic and (non-academic) vocational pathways, in the German case, are well rooted within distinct but interdependent subsystems and that their mutual interaction obviously contributes to stabilising the 'vocational track' in a stronger way than in other countries. Despite serious problems related to the training market (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2003) there are no signs that the German apprenticeship system representing this strong belief in the importance of vocational qualifications has entered a stage of degradation.

If one looks at the respective apprenticeship cultures in the UK and Germany, both represent an 'updated past' as they follow the principles of vocational training emerging from the time of the Industrial Revolution (Deissinger, 1994). In the UK, then, vocational training in the majority of cases meant acquiring qualifications through on-the-job training complemented by the voluntary attendance of evening classes in continuation schools. Industrial training never became successfully institutionalised within the national educational system – with clear implications for the present policy and practice of co-operation between the different 'learning sites' (Deissinger, 2004b). The division of education and training typical of the Victorian Age paralysed the development of educational opportunities for the working classes and helped to create a social pattern of industrial training being that of 'boy labourers' rather than of 'boy learners' (Tawney, 1909). Whereas in Germany the state emerged as the leading force in promoting vocational training, in the UK, due to the successes of industrialisation achieved without significant contributions from the educational system, there was a strong belief that 'preparation for production was best given on the job rather than in formal education' (Child et al., 1983, p73). The general aversion to state intervention and the reluctance on the government's side to become involved with matters linked to skill formation in particular also stifled efforts to institutionalise the day continuation school on a compulsory basis. In Germany, due to a decidedly corporatist approach to vocational training and to the successful pedagogical justification of the necessity to offer compulsory part-time education to apprentices and young workers, industrial training became based on the traditional notion of *Beruf or vocation* (Deissinger, 1998). This probably explains the major difference between Germany and the UK (Deissinger, 1999), since it touches the cultural as well as the pedagogical dimension of vocational training.

It is therefore justified to use the term 'apprenticeship culture' to describe both pedagogical efforts and institutional arrangements in the area of vocational training. Against the background of complexity of the issue the analytical framework used in this article refers to three dimensions of what constitutes an apprenticeship culture (Deissinger, 1995):

- The first dimension refers to the *institutional pattern of vocational training*, including the various responsibilities of public and private providers, the legal framework, the 'learning sites' involved and the financial issue. This institutional or organisational dimension also brings into focus whether and to what extent a given country makes use of apprenticeships at all and how the apprenticeship system works.
- The second dimension refers to learning processes within this framework as well as to the *intentions underlying the process of skill formation*. This, of course, includes the nature and quality of training or learning regulations and the issue of their mandatory or non-mandatory character.
- The third dimension refers to the *relationship or interaction between the vocational training system and correlated systems*, in particular the system of (pre-vocational) school education and the system of higher education, including the issue of parity of esteem between different pathways into skilled employment.

The following reflections refer to the first and second dimension without systematically distinguishing between them since they are interlinked and intertwined with each other. Hereby a special focus is devoted to the obviously different meaning and understanding of the 'vocational principle' and the notion of 'competence' in Germany and the UK. Other facets, such as the vocational full-time schools in Germany or the system of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in England and Wales, will not be discussed in this paper.

## **Patterns of Vocational Training: Initial Training in the UK and Germany:**

### **• The 'Vocational Principle' as the Cornerstone of Apprenticeships in the German Dual System**

In the perception of external observers, Germany is a country where 'firms are distinguished by a very high proportion of the workforce having intermediate level qualifications' (Steedman, 1998, p81; Marsden & Ryan, 1995). The reason for this is that vocational training mostly occurs in the Dual System (Greinert, 1994; Zabeck, 1985; Raddatz, 1983) which functions as the major non-academic route<sup>3</sup> for German school leavers by giving them formal access to the labour market as skilled workers, craftsmen or clerks (Bynner & Roberts, 1991). The system recruits some 60 per cent of 16 to 19-year-olds and contributes to limiting the number of unskilled employees to a constantly low proportion in the German labour market (Büchtemann, Schupp & Soloff, 1993, pp510 f.; Greinert, 1994, p116). Unlike in the UK or France, where they form a marginal sector within the vocational training systems (Gospel, 1995), dual apprenticeships exist in nearly all branches of the German economy including the professions and parts of the civil service.

The function of the Dual System unequivocally refers to initial training of school leavers in a given range of 'declared trades' or 'recognised training occupations' (Deissinger, 2001a). Although the dualism of 'learning sites' and legal responsibilities certainly is the striking feature of this 'German system' of vocational training (Greinert, 1994), its working principles also comprise at least three more aspects:

- Initial training in the Dual System is a well-understood and socially accepted pathway into employment as it follows a traditional pattern deeply enshrined in the ancient mode of apprenticeship (Deissinger, 1994). This means that training is workplace-led and predominantly practical by stressing the importance of work experience during the training period. It also means that the system works in accordance with skill requirements defined 'around the workplace' (Harney, 1985; Deissinger, 1998).
- Despite its traditional basis and long history, the Dual System is determined by the involvement of the state with regard to the nature and quality of occupational standards as well as to legal conditions underlying apprenticeship training (Raggatt, 1988; Deissinger, 1996; Schmidt, 2003, p307). The German 'training culture' (Brown & Evans, 1994) is based on the notion that an apprenticeship should be based on an underpinning pedagogical understanding which sets it apart from 'normal work'.

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3 Due to the "three-tier" school system (Ertl, 2000), access into higher education is lower in Germany than in most other European countries. Currently, 1.94 million young people are enrolled as students in the German higher education system (with 70 per cent studying at a university) as against some 1.62 million in the Dual System of initial vocational training.

- Since the state's function is to secure quality standards with respect to in-company training in a predominantly formal manner other social groups have a major say in the Dual System. This means that public, private and semi-private institutions work together by using long-established modes of cooperation within the system and that employers and unions normally take the initiative with respect to training regulations and their revision or modernisation (Benner, 1984; Deissinger, 2001a; Streeck et al., 1987).

The specific 'vocational' or 'occupational' character of training is reflected through the structural features of the Dual System. This orientation in fact can be traced back to the legal restitution of the 'master apprenticeship' and the development of the 'vocational character' of the further training schools around 1900 (Blankertz, 1969, pp119 ff.; Deissinger, 1994; Greinert, 1994, pp22 ff.). This historical re-invention of the 'principle of self-administration' turned out as the starting point of a consolidation and universalisation process which at the beginning of the 20th century also incorporated industrial and commercial training, thereby creating a general institutional principle for the division of labour and the assignment of competences (Schütte, 1992; Harney, 1987, p180).

Against this background, the German meaning and understanding of the *vocational principle as realised in the dual apprenticeship system* refers to a specific quality of didactical as well as institutional arrangements which define the 'application requirements' for skilled labour (Kutscha, 1992, p537) through a system of occupations bridging the spheres of training and work (Deissinger, 1998; Beck, Brater & Daheim, 1980):

- Occupations are seen as 'more or less complex combinations of special achievements' which relate to formal qualifications typical of a given trade. Therefore they have been created in order to correspond with the functional requirements of the division of labour (Zabeck, 1991, p559). Each occupation has to be integrally structured and relatively job-independent. Both the branch and the individual value of the qualification obtained at the end of the training process represent 'special qualities' both in relation to other occupations and to qualifications in higher education (Beck, Brater & Daheim, 1980, pp20 ff).
- Training occupations function as the starting point as well as the target of the training process and are based on what may be called an 'organisational picture' (Brater, 1981, p32) which is standardised by state statutes and thus significantly removed from the specific character of individual workplaces. The quantity and quality of skills and knowledge to be imparted in the training process are supervised and validated through intermediate and final examinations as well as certified in a way acceptable to the labour market. Apprenticeships hence are closely associated with the notion of homogeneous training courses based on standardised training ordinances (Deissinger, 2001a).

The mandatory contents of a *training ordinance* are specified in the *Vocational Training Act (VTA)* of 1969 [Deissinger, 1996]<sup>4</sup>. According to section 25 VTA it must contain (1) the name of the skilled occupation, (2) the duration of the training period, (3) the skills to be provided by the company in the course of training, (4) a specification of the syllabus 'to be followed for the purpose of imparting the relevant abilities and knowledge', and finally (5) the examination standards. The so-called 'principle of exclusiveness' (section 28 VTA) makes sure that training ordinances represent the only way which leads young people into skilled employment:

*'(1) Training for a recognised trainee occupation shall be given only in accordance with the relevant training regulations. (2) Initial training in occupations other than recognised trainee occupations shall not be provided for young persons under 18 years of age unless it is intended to prepare them for a subsequent course of instruction'.*

This principle clearly underlines the 'process character' of the German apprenticeship system and its strong focus on the 'input' or 'contents' aspect. The majority of training schemes (currently 350) are so-called 'mono occupations' which do not allow for any kind of specialisation, let alone a differentiation of training time or training contents. It is assumed that a broad basis of elementary vocational qualifications supports a maximum of flexibility and mobility between different workplaces and firms. This concept also becomes evident in the training schemes in the metal and electrical sectors which were issued in the late eighties: specialisation only takes place after an initial training period of normally one year which is common to a whole range of occupations related with each other [Stratmann & Schlösser, 1990, pp266–9]. The current policy of modernisation, however, goes further and tries to dynamically integrate new developments in the world of work – in particular IT competences – into the existing system of vocational training [Müller, Häusler & Sonnek, 1997]. The year 2003 saw the emergence of seven new training occupations and 21 schemes underwent revision procedures<sup>5</sup>.

As already mentioned above, one of the crucial traits of the German apprenticeship system is certainly its *dual character*. Whereas in other European countries, such as the UK, on-the-job training – even under the new Modern Apprenticeship scheme (Ryan, 2001) – is complemented by off-the-job training on a more or less voluntary basis, in Germany it is mandatory. While there has been an ongoing discussion about the 'process character' of vocational training in the UK – including the scope for 'expansive participation' of companies

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4 The Vocational Training Act may be viewed as the final stage of a post-war public debate on the degree to which the Dual System as a whole should be submitted to state influence. As a compromise, the Act did not install a new training system including the vocational school, but mainly "consolidated much previous practice under one Act" (Raggatt, 1988, p175). The Vocational Training Act is essentially a specified labour law since its central object is the indenture between the apprentice and the training company.

5 Among the new occupations are the "car mechatronic" and the "investment clerk". Both new technologies and the growing demand for specialisation may be seen as the triggering factors for the creation of such occupations (see [www.bibb.de](http://www.bibb.de)).

in workplace-related training (Senker et al., 2000; Fuller & Unwin, 2003), in Germany the State Education Acts provide an essential element of the legal framework for dual apprenticeships by making sure that school leavers are kept within the educational system. For each training occupation the state education ministries, in line with training regulations under the federal law, work out syllabuses for the vocational and general subjects within a given occupation taught at the part-time vocational schools (Greinert, 1994).

Besides its didactical principles, and its legal and institutional characteristics the German system relies on a functioning training market. The latter 'has the character of a suppliers' market' (Greinert 1994, p80). Once a training contract has been signed this means the *principal financial responsibility of companies for the training process* including, besides training allowances, all direct and indirect costs such as training personnel, machinery, training administration and social insurance contributions. The fact that the 'system is financed principally by employers' (NCVER, 2001, p38) reflects the principle of self-government re-affirmed by law in the late 19th century. Therefore, companies provide training opportunities on a voluntary basis. Training in the craft sector has a particularly strong tradition (Deissinger, 2001b) as some 530,000 young people out of the present total of 1.6 million trained in the Dual System (2002) are apprenticed in a craft company under the supervision of a master craftsman (although with a decreasing tendency)<sup>6</sup>.

Against this background the German apprenticeship system may be viewed as a *system of training* rather than a system of employment in which the wages of apprentices reflect this emphasis, with German apprentices typically paid wages that are far lower than adult rates and apprentice rates in Australia or in the UK (NCVER, 2001, p39; Payne, 1999, p480). Training allowances are the result of collective bargaining but keep attached to the purpose of giving young people a basic start into their working lives without putting too much burden on employers. As the apprenticeship system is seen to be neither part of the school or education system nor a normal sphere of work the 'system reference' is clearly training and recruitment for skilled work. The consequences of such a clear separation of pathways or subsystems of course implies that lots of expectations rest on the Dual System and frictions on the training market can hardly be compensated without additional activities on the side of the state. Among these, activities to promote either external training options or give incentives to employers are paramount (Berger & Walden, 2002). Moreover, the introduction of a training levy seems to become more and more likely as the two ruling parties in the federal government have in principal agreed on its introduction. This new move has to be seen against the background that at the end of September 2003 only 6,500 school leavers out of the still searching 35,000 could be provided with a training opportunity<sup>7</sup>.

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6 In terms of the financial burden, companies shoulder the lion's share of training cost: in 2000, companies invested nearly €28 billion into the Dual System. The average training outlay per apprentice is currently rated at €16,435 pa. (Beicht & Walden, 2002). Due to that, the cost argument can be found among the most important reasons which companies report for not entering training. A recent panel survey published by the German Labour Office Research Unit sees the financial aspect of training at nearly 38 per cent, 28.6 per cent of companies say that training is too burdensome and complicated for them, while 12.5 per cent complain about applicants' educational background or social skills.

7 See Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Pressemitteilung 205/2003, 6 November 2003 [Pressedienst@bmbf.bund.de].

German employers, however, have always refused such a legal enforcement of training supply, fearing that this could eventually lead to even fewer training places. Nevertheless, the problems on the training market clearly underline that the Dual System is subject to external risks.

• **Competence-based Training as the Cornerstone of Vocational Training Reform in the UK**

Vocational training in the UK has often been described as a market model (Greinert, 1988, pp146 f.). This means that training takes place in a decentralised, heterogeneous system, characterised by the particular importance of individual firms in the process of skill formation. In contrast to the German system and also following a specific cultural pattern, the system has so far successfully avoided external regulation, especially from the state. Although the government's training acts of 1964 and 1973 highlighted both official recognition of the need for vocational training reform and of the significance of the functional contribution of post-compulsory education and training and the delivery of intermediate skills to youth employment (Raffe, 1987), the UK's 'training culture' is still dominated by a 'system understanding' far removed from combining legal, organisational and didactical guidelines with firm-based qualifying work, as it clearly prefers on-the-job training. Against this background, young people in the UK often experience their training as 'workers' (Bynner & Roberts, 1991, pp238 ff).

Skill formation comes from private and public institutions, ie. it occurs in Colleges of Further Education, through (modern) apprenticeships or via simple, unregulated traineeships offered to young people by individual firms as well as, finally, 'work experience' through state-subsidised youth training programmes, now part of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme (Ryan, 2001). Most of the schemes and programmes in the area of in-company training, however, have traditionally lacked didactical norms and there is no more than an optional basis for alternating training arrangements since in the UK part-time 'vocational school' (or college) attendance is not compulsory. The same applied in particular to traditional ('time-serving') apprenticeships where the craftsman or skilled worker status was automatically conferred at the end of the apprenticeship without any supervision of the learning process or obligatory examinations (Deissinger, 1992, pp12 ff; Aldcroft, 1992, pp55 ff; Payne, 1999, p480).

Against this background, the 1980s marked the beginning of a period of activity and change in the vocational training system, especially in England and Wales (Steedman, 1998). Among the various projects – such as the implementation of state-funded youth training programmes and the expansion of the Further Education sector – the even stronger involvement of companies within a state-supported and partly state-organised system can be seen as one of the cornerstones of that policy. At the same time, vocational training reform aimed at transforming the old 'provider culture', based on 'shared practices' of established institutions such as colleges, trade unions and awarding bodies, into a 'learning culture' based on the individual achievement of competences (Young, 2003, p229)<sup>8</sup>.

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8 Young points out that this is the basic assumption underlying the concept of "national qualification frameworks" linked to "that of a learning society which is contrasted with societies of the past in which learning, at least recognised and accredited learning, was largely restricted to initial education and training" (ibid., p224).

In 1986, the system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)<sup>9</sup> was 'launched with much fanfare' (ibid., p223) to combine the notion of 'legal freedom' and 'company training autonomy' with the idea that training should be linked to more reliable forms of certification of relevant competences (Williams & Raggatt, 1998; Hodgson & Spours, 1997; Wolf, 1995; Aitken, Lilley & Wardman-Browne, 1991; Jessup, 1991). Consequently, NVQs have been looked at as instruments within a coherent 'system' of vocational qualifications to promote the competitiveness of British industry and also as one of the pathways within the National Qualifications Framework. Although it was created mainly for people in work or in-company training, its first aim has been to limit the exploding variety of certificates and denominations of qualifications issued by an 'army' of different examining bodies and to improve the transparency and marketability of vocational qualifications in general. At the same time the system was launched to raise the status and acceptance of vocational training, an intention which is implied in the term 'national'.

The most striking feature of the certification framework made up of NVQs is the definition of outcomes and not that of specified courses (Steadman, 1995). The principle of modularisation gives employers and employees the opportunity to define training needs flexibly and individually and opt for the achievement of competences on various levels. Supporters of the system (Jessup, 1991) point to its function to promote job-ready skills and its general flexibility potential. On the other hand, critics express concern that the system is too bureaucratic, the knowledge factor within the modules is rather under-represented and that take-up among employers is far from satisfactory (Hodgson & Spours, 1997, p15). Apart from the fact that the NVQ system continues to provoke criticism in the scholarly world because of its industry-led nature and its pedagogical deficiencies (e.g. Raggatt & Williams, 1999; Hyland, 1995; Smithers, 1999), it is obvious that – in particular from a didactical point of view – the principles constituting the NVQ system and the inherent *meaning of competence* differ sharply from the German 'vocational principle' (Deissinger, 2002):

- Qualifications and underlying competences can be divided into units (modules) or even elements which the German training schemes do not allow for. Even 'stage training' in the Dual System (Pätzold, 1983) is based on the assumption that the qualification at each level should be uniform and marketable by representing an occupational standard, not just a bundle of specific competences.
- In the NVQ system the focus lies on learning results that are 'independent of the site, the form of provision and the type of pedagogy and curriculum' (Young, 2003, p225). This 'outcome-based approach' to vocational training concentrates on the individual achievement of modularised training objectives<sup>10</sup>. In consequence, quality control during the training process is virtually absent and there is no formal examination procedure beyond assessment in the workplace.

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9 For differences between England and Wales and Scotland see: Raffe, 1997; Pilz & Deissinger, 2001; Pilz, 2001.

10 Reuling quotes the OECD describing qualifications in the "outcome-based approach" as "major driver, incentive and motivator of learning and the role of individuals is stressed rather than that of teachers, government or other stakeholders" (Reuling, 2002, p15).

Therefore, the competence aspect and the modular aspect constitute crucial components of the British 'training culture'. Quite remarkably, this also applies to Modern Apprenticeships (MA), introduced in 1995, which now can be described as a concept integrating two neo-liberal ideas in the field of vocational training policy emerging in the 1980s, namely *the notion of competence-based training and the principle of public co-funding of in-company training* (Unwin & Wellington, 1995; Ryan, 2001). MA apprentices now must hold a training contract, but nearly 90 per cent also have an employment contract, which means they earn a wage rather than receive an apprenticeship allowance (Ryan, 2001, p138). Training courses follow recommendations worked out by the Sector Skills Councils but their binding character appears weak. Moreover, apprenticeships under the MA scheme are much more heterogeneous with respect to gender, branches and occupations. In contrast to Germany, there is no law which would define qualifications of trainers, minimum contents of training courses or examination procedures. Modern Apprentices in the UK are expected to go for an NVQ during or at the end of their training time, but the 'success' or 'completion' rates are reported to be far from what the government had in mind when it launched the scheme some 10 years ago.

Although there is now generally a higher degree of formalisation (and certainly more bureaucracy) within the UK's qualification and certification frameworks than two or three decades ago, the didactical understanding which determines the processes of skill formation in the area of company-based initial training differs hugely from the German model. This seems especially true with regard to apprenticeships, as Paul Ryan points out that 'behind all the changes, British apprenticeship continues to differ fundamentally from its counterparts elsewhere in Europe'. He claims that the 'differences have even increased, as continental countries elaborate the public regulation of apprenticeship, while the UK favours deregulation' (Ryan, 2001, p133). The contrasting 'character' of the German system with its specific focus on the 'vocational principle' is adequately reflected in a statement which reads as follows (ibid., p136 f):

*'A striking difference from Germany is the absence of minimum training periods, such as a three-year programme for bakers. Similarly, apprentices need not take part-time technical education, unless they are MA participants functioning under an NTO framework that requires it – and even then no general education is required. Indeed, 'off-the-job' training in a company training centre or with an external commercial provider is often enough to meet NTO requirements, despite concerns about its quality and relevance (Kodz et al., 2000).*

*The absence of process regulation reflects Britain's 'competence-based' approach to skill certification. What matters in principle for NVQ certification is demonstrated competence in the performance of work tasks, and that alone. Educational attainments should indeed form part of that assessment if they are needed for competence, but are otherwise to be discarded as superfluous (Jessup, 1991; Wolf, 1995). (...).*

*Nevertheless, the contrast to Germany is sharp. There is no equivalent of Germany's minimum training periods, mandatory part-time courses at the Berufsschule, and compulsory general education. More generally, while in continental Europe apprenticeship is integrated into the national education system, straddling the worlds of education and training, British apprenticeship is located firmly on the training side.'*

In a similar way, Peter Raggatt some years ago pointed out the differences between the UK and the German system of vocational training with respect to the issue of external regulation of a training system in general and apprenticeships in particular. In his view the law which governs the Dual System – by setting up roles and responsibilities for the various 'participants' – provides 'continuity with the past', but at the same time works 'as a primary source of quality control' (Raggatt, 1988, p176).

## Conclusion

Compared to other countries, there is no doubt that 'the continuance of tradition' in Germany has always been highly valued (Phillips, 1995, p61). This is especially true with respect to the Dual System of apprenticeship training since it owes much of its reputation to the fact that it has remained one of the most frequently (though not necessarily successfully) copied training systems in the world (Arnold, 1985; Kloss, 1995). Looking at its working principles and the obvious importance of institutions and organisational patterns laid out in law it may still be labelled 'the most comprehensive and detailed regulatory system for apprenticeship training in the Western world' (Raggatt, 1988, p175). There is still a strong belief that the apprenticeship system is faring much better than both the school system and the tertiary sector<sup>11</sup>. In a recent press declaration the ministers of education of Austria, Switzerland and three German federal states<sup>12</sup> deplore the fact that international studies on education too often neglect the significance of vocational pathways for the 'ordinary school leaver'. In their plea to the OECD to 'accept and investigate the status of vocational education' they hold that the Dual System with its apprenticeship focus still offers well-accepted routes into skilled employment. This clearly underlines the social significance of the apprenticeship system in the national debate and the strength of the underlying principles which make it a 'cultural institution'.

Both the role of the state, the importance of 'shared practices' including chambers, employers and trade unions, the mandatory character of part-time course attendance and, above all, the 'vocational principle' make the German system an 'institution-based

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11 The German education system in general, however, has recently become under fire by international studies on student performance (OECD 2000; 2003). Similarly, the national "Education Report" (Bildungsbericht) published in October 2003 (Avenarius et al. 2003) claims "serious" deficiencies in the country's school system by pointing to too many drop-outs, too few achievers of higher education entrance qualifications and too little support for students coming from poorer families.

12 See Gemeinsame Pressemitteilung der Schweizerischen Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren, der Länder Österreich, Baden-Württemberg, Hessen und Bayern zur OECD-Studie "Bildung auf einen Blick" (Pressemitteilung des bayerischen Kultusministeriums, No. 288, 17 September 2003).

approach' (Young, 2003; Reuling, 2002). The contrast even to Modern Apprenticeships in the UK, in particular in England, is striking when it comes both to the social positioning of apprenticeships within the country's education system and also with respect to 'process regulation'. The UK apprenticeship system still sticks to market principles, although apprenticeships nowadays appear to be more formalised than 20 or 30 years ago. However, there can be no doubt that the overall social and economic importance given to the 'outcome-based approach' via competence-based training clearly distinguish it from the German system (Young, 2003, p234). In a recent paper, Lorna Unwin deplores the 'lack of demand for skills by UK employers' pointing out that there are too many of them who 'exist in the low-skill, low-product specification end of the economy and so have little need for skills above basic operative level' (Unwin, 2003, p9). This kind of 'vacuum' in the intermediate skills area eventually seems to be associated with at least two recent trends in the UK's vocational training system: The first one may be seen in the growing importance of full-time vocational education (Payne, 1999, p486 ff.) as against company-based training (which continues to marginalise the NVQ system) – while the second one is the 'dismal history' of youth training and competence-based qualifications, 'neither of which have advanced or even been particularly interested in meaningful vocational education' (Unwin, 2003, p8; Wolf, 2003).

It seems that this meritocratic 'move of vocational education and training into the college classroom' (Payne, 1999, p497) could in the long run jeopardise all political efforts to bring the UK closer to the status of an 'apprenticeship society'. However, another suspense-packed question, which also has to be addressed to the German system, certainly is the issue of the principal 'survivability' of apprenticeships in a modern 'learning society'.

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## The Net Costs to Employers of Modern Apprenticeships

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### Introduction

The 2003 Skills Strategy describes Modern Apprenticeship (MA) as “central to the drive to improve workplace skills.” It sets a target for 2004 that 28 per cent of young people will start an MA by age 22. It also considers the possibility of extending MA to people 25 or above. Significantly, while overall numbers of MAs have increased since 1999, the number of Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (AMA) starts has almost halved. The increase arises from the larger numbers starting a Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (FMA), which rose to overtake AMAs by 2003.

This study provides a detailed assessment of the gross and net costs to employers of providing training to NVQ Levels 2 and 3 and through Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (AMA) in selected occupations, frameworks and industries. The study, the latest in a series of Net Cost studies, provides information on:

- the contribution of government funding to the cost of training MAs
- the effect that funding had on the volumes of people being trained
- the structure of training being offered.

The purpose of the study was to indicate the types of cost (and benefit) employers encounter in delivering Modern Apprenticeships and the variation in such costs. The data presented are indicative, based on a small number of detailed case studies in five industries; engineering, construction, retailing, business administration, and hospitality.

- Drop-out was recorded as a problem across several industries, especially in retailing and hospitality.
- Employers reported that they valued Modern Apprenticeships because they provided a structure to their training activities and recognised the merits of training their own staff for the future development of their businesses. That said, the quality and structure of training provided in relation to the engineering and construction AMAs was incomparable to the less formal, learning by doing oriented training provided in the other MAs studied in the research.

### Aim of the study

Since 1994, the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick has conducted a series of studies to estimate the costs borne by employers in training young people to a recognised NVQ standard. The first two reports in the series were concerned with training to NVQ levels 3 and 2 (or their equivalents) respectively. Modern Apprenticeships had yet to come into being at the time of the first study and were in their formative stages

by the time of the second. As such, these studies were concerned with all possible routes taken by employers to enable their staff to acquire an NVQ. This, the third study, is concerned only with employer provided training under the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme whether this leads to an NVQ level 2 (Foundation Modern Apprenticeship, FMA) or NVQ level 3 (Advanced Modern Apprenticeship, AMA).

The study provides a detailed assessment of the gross and net costs to employers of providing training to NVQ Levels 2 and 3 through FMAs and AMAs in selected occupations, frameworks and industries.

The study looked at:

- the contribution of government funding through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to the cost of training Modern Apprenticeships
- the effect that funding has on the volumes of young people being trained
- the structure of training being offered.

### **Choice of frameworks**

Overall, a detailed breakdown of costs is provided for MA frameworks in:

- engineering
- construction
- retailing
- business administration
- hospitality.

The data presented are indicative, based on a small number of detailed case studies in each industry. The purpose of the study is to indicate the types of cost (and benefit) employers encounter in delivering MAs and the variation in such costs. The industries were selected because: (a) each has a history of significant engagement in training, and (b) each was covered in the previous net costs studies.

Using a cost-benefit framework, the net costs to the employer of engaging in MA training was estimated.

### **Gross costs of training**

Table A gives a summary of the gross costs that accrued to the employer in providing either FMAs or AMAs. With respect to AMAs, engineering and construction incurred the highest costs, primarily due to the longer duration of apprenticeship training in these industries. It should also be noted that training under these two frameworks tended to be much more structured than other AMAs, with substantial periods of time when apprentices would be engaged in off-the-job training.

**Table A – Summary of gross costs (per apprentice)**

Industry	Advanced Modern Apprenticeship		Foundation Modern Apprenticeship	
	Duration (years)	Gross costs (£)	Duration (years)	Gross costs (£)
Engineering	3.5	46,150		
Construction	3	30,992		
Retail	2	24,240	1	8,172
Business Administration	2	23,712	1* 2**	8,542 17,688
Hospitality	2	22,976	1.5	16,155

Source: IER Net Costs studies

Notes: \*assumes a one-year apprenticeship in business administration

\*\* assumes a two-year apprenticeship in business administration.

With respect to the FMA, employers in business administration, where the duration of training was around two years, and in hospitality incurred the highest costs. Again the higher costs were incurred because of the duration of training.

## Net Costs to employers

Table B provides a summary of the financial costs and benefits of MA training as revealed by the case studies. It is apparent that there were differences in net costs both between industries and between AMAs and FMAs. In engineering and construction the gross costs of apprenticeship training are relatively high and only partially set off by MA funding. In contrast, in retail and business administration one interpretation of the data presented in Table B is that employers break even with respect to the costs and benefits.

**Table B – Summary of training costs (per apprentice, £s)**

Industry	AMA		FMA	
	Excluding MA funding	Including MA funding	Excluding MA funding	Including MA funding
Engineering	16,265	14,715	-	-
Construction	10,253	3,185	-	-
Retail	-	-	(318)	(231)
Business Administration	2,729	2,729	3,562	(285)
Hospitality			2,560	2,560

Source: IER Net Costs studies. Figures in parentheses are net benefits

## Differences between apprenticeships

We can divide the MAs into two distinct groups along sectoral lines. The 'high commitment' sectors are engineering and construction, the 'low commitment' retail, hospitality, and, to some extent, business administration. Table C sets out the contrasting characteristics of each group.

**Table C**

High commitment	Low commitment
Aim is to attain AMA	FMA is the aim
Structured internal training	Informal internal plus external training
High level of off-the-job training	Dominance of on-the-job training
3-year training period	12-year training period
Trainees mainly 16–21	Trainees of all ages
Skilled jobs	Semi-skilled jobs
Low initial productive contribution	High productive contribution throughout
High gross and net cost	Low gross and net cost (often negative)
Low trainee drop-out	High trainee drop-out
Low employee turnover	High employee turnover (but reduced)
Evidence of skill acquisition	Certification of existing competences

## Do high costs deter employer engagement in MAs?

Many employers already engage in MAs at substantial cost but recognise the benefits from their investment. Other employers bear little of the cost of an MA. Cost may be a barrier to employer engagement only at the margin. However, cost is an issue in respect of older trainees.

The barriers to employer engagement with MAs are rather to do with lack of awareness of the programme, concerns about relevance of specific NVQ frameworks, lack of interest in work-related training among young people and the quality of applicants for MA training.

## Conclusions

The Net Cost study highlights the value placed on MAs in areas of traditional apprenticeship training. It indicates that employers in non-traditional areas of apprenticeship may bear little of the cost of MAs, and suggests that cost is not the main barrier to take-up. The results also raise concerns about additionality of MA training, in terms of skill acquisition and accreditation, and worryingly, about the ability of the MA programme to develop as envisaged in the 2003 Skill Strategy.

Hogarth, T, Hasluck, C. *Net Costs Of Modern Apprenticeship Training To Employers (DfES, Research Report 418) 2003.*

## Creating a Coherent Vocational Pathway to Enhance Employability and Personal Fulfilment

Professor Simon Roodhouse, Chief Operating Officer, UVAC

### Introduction

This paper will examine approaches to a coherent vocational pathway by considering progression from Modern Apprenticeship to Foundation Degrees and Graduate Apprenticeship, the implications for the national qualifications structure, the need for a common curriculum language and then question the lack of a national credit accumulation and transfer system.

### Background

A trilogy of New Labour green and white papers in 2003, for 14–19: Opportunity and Excellence, the Skills Strategy and the Future of Higher Education<sup>13</sup>, have determined the contemporary policy climate for UK vocational education and training in private training/voluntary organisations, employers, schools, further and higher education, noticeably, 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 Fryer<sup>14</sup> and Blunkett<sup>15</sup> in the late 1990s is continued by Clarke, Johnson, and Lewis<sup>16</sup> today. As Swailes and Roodhouse have pointed out<sup>17</sup>, these concerns are neither party political nor new. In 1986, nearly 18 years ago, the issues are best described by an extract from the relevant 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 their action today.

13 Copies of these papers are available on the DfES website [www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/key.shtml](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/key.shtml).

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

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

16 Current, 2004, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Lifelong Learning.

17 2003, Structural Barriers to the take up of higher level NVQs, Journal of Vocational Education and Training, vol. 55 no. 1, 2003, pp85–110.

*“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.”*  
[Swailles and Roodhouse 2003]

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)<sup>18</sup> and the Skills for Business network, all of which are expected to resolve the UK skill and productivity gap. SSCs are replacing the earlier National Training Organisations (NTOs) and National Training Organisations National Council (NTONC) which in turn were born out of industry training organisations/industry-led bodies and even earlier industry training boards established in 1964<sup>19</sup>.

Up to 2002 Conservative and New Labour government education and training policy was measured through the National Learning Targets. The 1995 annual report on Progress towards National Targets provides a typical illustration of this approach, including the collapsing of traditionally academic with occupationally specific qualifications into the National Learning Targets:

- Foundation target 3: by 2000, 50 per cent of young people to reach NVQ level 3 or equivalent. (In fact the report claims that 41 per cent of young people, up to and including aged 21 have achieved either two GCE A Levels, an NVQ/SVQ level 3 or vocational equivalent.)
- Lifetime target 3: by 2000, 50 per cent of the workforce qualified to at least NVQ level 3 or equivalent. (It is claimed again that 40 per cent of the workforce qualified to at least two GCE A Levels and NVQ/SVQ level 3, its vocational equivalent or a higher qualification.)

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18 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.

19 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](http://www.cesi.org.uk/_newsite2002/publications).

The consequent revisions of the targets included:

- a lifetime target of 60 per cent of the workforce to be qualified to NVQ level 3, and advanced GNVQ or to GCE A Level standard
- a lifetime learning target of 30 per cent of the workforce to have the vocational, professional, management or academic qualification at NVQ level 4 or above.

In the case of Modern Apprenticeships (MA) there was no target but instead an NVQ objective. In reality, no national statistics were collected on MA completion rates until the establishment of the LSC. Instead figures quoted related to the achievement of an NVQ through a Foundation MA or Advanced MA. Although there have been recent improvements in completion rates for the NVQ component of a framework was on average between 35 per cent to 40 per cent. Targets for MAs have always therefore focused on 'starts' in comparison to the national learning targets. Consequently progression is complicated further by individuals not completing the learning programme.

Many of these targets were taken up and re-presented by the National Skills Task Force as new objectives:

- By 2010, to reduce the proportion of adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy from just over 20 per cent to 10 per cent
- By 2010, to increase the proportion of 25-year-olds with a level 3 qualification from 41 per cent to 70 per cent
- By 2010, to increase the proportion of the adult workforce with level 2 qualification from 68 per cent to 80 per cent<sup>20</sup>.

These have subsequently influenced the 2003 Skills Strategy, whose proposed outputs specifically focus on adult literacy and level 2 at the expense of the level 4 NVQ aim, which has been re-invented to emerge as Foundation Degrees.

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 to 30 by the end of the decade<sup>21</sup>." These targets have informed the DfES strategy objectives.

***"Objective 2 [extracts]***

***Meeting individual talents and aspirations at 14–19***

*The Department targets are to:*

- *Increase by three percentage points the numbers of 19-year-olds achieving a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 2, compared to 2002, by 2004*

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20 National Skills Taskforce Final Report, Chapter 5, The Way Forward: priorities, p62, 2000.

21 The Future of Higher Education White Paper, Expanding Higher Education to meet our Needs.

- *Increase the proportion of 19-year-olds achieving a level 3 qualification from 51 per cent in 2000 to 55 per cent in 2004*
- *Ensure that there is an apprenticeship place for everyone who wants one and meets the required standard (modern apprenticeship).*

### **Objective 3** [extracts]

#### **For those in higher education**

The Department targets are:

- *Increase participation towards 50 per cent of those aged 18–30 by the end of the decade, while maintaining standards*
- *Bear down on rates of non-completion*
- *Strengthen research and teaching excellence.”*  
(DfES Departmental Strategy)

Progression re-surfaces 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)<sup>22</sup>/Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and DfES initiatives such as Partnership for Progression and Aim Higher. It is disappointing that the current review of admission to higher education chaired by Professor Schwartz, Vice Chancellor, 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 and the fact that this is 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.

The 14 to 19 Green Paper places increasing emphasis for young people on clearly defined and recognised vocational routes in and through schools, Modern Apprenticeships, and further education to remove “the notion of leaving education at 16”<sup>23</sup> and encourages

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22 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 takes over responsibility for further education funding, the funding of workforce development, Modern Apprenticeships, national traineeships and training targets.

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

entry into vocational higher education, particularly Foundation Degrees<sup>24</sup>. It suggests that the gateway to higher education should be changed from GCE A level to a UK version of the International Baccalaureate, the Advanced Diploma<sup>25</sup>.

Foundation Degrees, conceived by the National Skills Task Force, form the centrepiece of the government policy response to the intermediate labour market skills gap in the UK described in *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper.

The intention of the Skills Strategy is “to ensure that employers have the right skills to support their businesses, and individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled.” It sets out proposals to link and co-ordinate the work of the Learning and Skills Council, the Sector Skills Development Agency, Sector Skills Councils, the Small Business Service, Business Link and Regional Development Agencies<sup>26</sup>. (With the exception of the Business Link, these are all agencies created by successive New Labour administrations which has had the cumulative effect of weakening the ‘joined up’ policy approach, hence the need for co-ordination in the Skills Strategy.)

In addition, the Skills Strategy confirms the importance of further education in improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce particularly at levels 2 and 3. It also reinforces the importance of Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Degrees, and the role of Sector Skills Councils in determining the match between skills demand in the workplace and the supply of learning from further and higher education.

It should also be noted that the Learning and Skills Council has been given primary responsibility for workforce development<sup>27</sup>. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), on the other hand, have a primary responsibility to develop the regional economy to create and sustain jobs, businesses, quality and standard of living with the exception of higher education, and includes initiatives such as Modern Apprenticeships.

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24 The most recent publication can be found on [www.dfes.gov.uk/foundationdegreereport](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/foundationdegreereport) and the key documents are Foundation degree Prospectus, Hefce, July 00/27, October 2000 and Foundation Degrees Consultation Paper, DFEE, ISBN1 84185 216 3, February 2000.

25 The Tomlinson Review is addressing these issues and will report later in 2004 on the QCA website, [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk).

26 Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott announced the new programme for the regions in December 1997, launching the Regions White Paper – Building Partnerships for Prosperity. The RDAs were established under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. RDAs agenda include regional regeneration, taking forward regional competitiveness, taking the lead on regional inward investment and, working with regional partners, ensuring the development of a regional skills action plan to ensure that skills training matches the needs of the labour market.

27 The workforce development strategy sets out how the LSC will deliver its targets to raise skill levels and demand for learning, and engage employers in improving skills for employability and competitiveness. The strategic objectives for workforce development are: to raise informed demand for employment-related skills among individuals and employers; to support improvements to the responsiveness and flexibility of the supply side; and to contribute to the development of an underpinning framework of better skills and labour market intelligence, responsive vocational qualifications and improved links to the wider educational agenda. The Strategy itemises actions under each objective and also outlines how progress will be measured and can be found at [www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/CorporateandStrategic/Strategic/default.htm](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/CorporateandStrategic/Strategic/default.htm).

What becomes glaringly obvious from the 1980s onwards is the failure of successive governments to connect meeting employer need with the coherent provision of quality learning at all levels including further and higher education. This in part may be due to the artificial public policy split between training and education provision. This has been compounded by continuous structural change even though the social and economic imperatives have remained largely consistent throughout.

### **What is workforce development?**

In higher education, workforce development<sup>28</sup> is often described as work-based learning and is increasingly being recognised as a field of study. Defining workforce development as work-based learning enables higher education in particular to incorporate the learning people do for, in and through work.<sup>29</sup> Carol Costley, points out:

*“Some universities have been involved in work-based learning for a long time, for example, through placements and sandwich courses. Some universities have structured courses where continuing professional development with the knowledge gained through experience is accepted implicitly. Others use the processes of accrediting prior and experiential learning (APEL) to formally recognise such knowledge.*

*Learning contracts are becoming familiar instruments. These activities are variously described as work-based, work-related, placement activities, elective modules, independent study, APEL, reach out, CPD, work-based learning among others. It is worth noting that work-based learning in higher education is nearly always part of an existing university programme with its own disciplinary frameworks and approaches to higher education. Learning outcomes and criteria for assessment are therefore within the subject knowledge born of research and scholarly activities that already are embedded in the universities.”* (Costley, C. (March 2001) *Different methodologies in work based learning, Making it Happen*, Conference Papers, ISBN 1-84308-060-5)

What is difficult to conceptualise is the lack of engagement by further and higher education in workforce development that is meeting the needs of learning people do for, in and through work. Perhaps, Val Butcher, the Learning and Teaching Support Network

28 “Workforce development consists of activities which increase the capacity of individuals to participate effectively in the workforce, thereby improving their productivity and employability. Workforce development has a role to play in raising productivity; increasing social inclusion; and preparing the economy for the future.” Source: In Demand: Adult skills for the 21st century, Cabinet Office, 2001.

29 UACE, Workbased Learning Network, 1999.

30 Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team Role of the team (ESECT) will concentrate on the curriculum as the main route to improving employability and will seek to promote an integrated approach that can be made effective for everyone involved. The team will:

- collate information about how HEIs can enhance student employability
- identify ways of effectively using this knowledge in learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum practices
- disseminate information to institutions, Learning and Teaching Support Network subject centres, employers, students, professional associations and other bodies
- help interested parties work with higher education teachers to improve student employability across the curriculum.

(LTSN) Generic Centre leading on employability along with ESECT<sup>30</sup> in higher education, has identified the problem:

*"We somehow seem to be incapable of learning from experience. Succeeding generations of employers are still marooned in tedious development project steering committees whose proceedings take place in academic jargon. Frustrated academics are still struggling to secure placements and projects with the very companies who are lambasting the quality of their graduates work readiness."*

(Butcher, V. *Workable higher education/business consortia – the higher education perspective*. In Roodhouse, S and Hemsworth, D (Eds) (2002) *Widening Participation in the Workplace: the New Agenda for Further and Higher Education*, UVAC Annual Conference proceedings 2002 ISBN 0-907311-06-7)

There is no doubt that both further and higher education have been highly successful in developing and delivering entry to work programmes, qualifying people for work at all levels. However, continuous professional development, re-training, part-time provision, learning diagnostics, assessment and certification – all work based – remain marginal. Why is this the case when the national economic and social demands are as strident as ever?

In this context, it is noticeable that initiatives such as Modern<sup>31</sup> and Graduate Apprenticeships<sup>32</sup> have failed to become integral components of further and higher education provision. Similarly, although considerable effort has been made to develop work-based learning, particularly by institutions such as Middlesex University, Anglia Polytechnic University and other members of the University Vocational Awards Council, it has been achieved through the individual, and organisational desire to respond to local and regional needs, despite the paucity of coincident policy directive from agencies with responsibility for business, skills, education and learning.

Public funding schemes persist in being unsympathetic to this activity, however it is defined, and mechanisms to connect business needs with further and higher education provision are disorganised and confusing.

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31 Modern Apprenticeships can be traced back to 1994 and their roots are founded in Department of Employment youth credits, youth training and youth opportunities schemes. The apprenticeships were conceived initially as a means of addressing youth unemployment.

32 A Graduate Apprenticeship can be defined as an integrated learning framework developed by an SSC/former NTO on the basis of sector skills needs, incorporating an honours or postgraduate degree, Key Skills, an NVQ, NVQ units or the use of National Occupational Standards and delivered by an HEI or HEI/FEC partnership. A Graduate Apprenticeship offers:

- a nationally-recognised development route incorporating an honours degree or postgraduate degree, NVQ/NOS and key skills
- an integrated, modular plan for the development of vocational and employability skills
- practical training leading to the achievement of an NVQ or approved training based on National Occupational Standards
- coaching in key skills such as Communication, Application of Number and IT.

As such Graduate Apprenticeship can be used by an employer as a motivational programme to attract the best graduates and make them effective more quickly. A detailed account of Graduate Apprenticeships can be found in *The Review and Development of Graduate Apprenticeship*, A national higher education and employment bridging programme, University Vocational Awards Council, October 2003, ISBN 0907 311 083.

## Why should further and higher education do more?

There are challenging choices for individual further and higher education institutions and those that work within them as to whether it is worthwhile in social, educational, financial and economic terms to respond to this changing, largely English policy environment.

For some, research is the inevitable focus for individuals and organisations, whilst others will increasingly concern themselves with entry to work learning programmes and workforce development at local, regional, and national levels.

Combining knowledge and skills to achieve vocational excellence has been a fundamental part of university life for centuries. It is essentially the everyday business of higher education today, training teachers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, social workers, health and media professionals. Professor Roger Waterhouse powerfully argues that we are bound up in structure and have forgotten the value of universities:

*"The oppositions between theoretical and practical study, between academic and vocational education, are not born of some necessary structures in the ways in which people learn.*

*Still less are they born of some typology of human beings (those who think, and those who do). They are the residuum of institutional structures, which are not only out of date but inhibit our collective learning process.*

*The ultimate value proposition for universities is not that they can teach, nor even that they can sell research, but that they can assess. They accredit learning."*  
(Waterhouse R. (2002) *Widening Participation and the Distributed University*, In Roodhouse, S. and Hemsworth, D. (Eds) (2002) *Widening Participation in the Workplace: the New Agenda for Further and Higher Education*, UVAC Annual Conference proceedings 2002, pp6–11, ISBN 0-907311-06-7).

There are significant drivers which inevitably influence the ambition and consequent activities of the individual further and higher education institution in arriving at a position where there is a corporate commitment to the skills and workforce agenda.

These can be briefly summarised as:

- 50 per cent target, government imperative (*The Future of Higher Education* White Paper, 2003, DfES, HEFCE)
- Social inclusion and economic disadvantage (Mainstream government policy)
- Skills development, for the workforce, a government imperative. (National Skills Task Force, the Skills Strategy White Paper and Sector Skills Councils, LSC)
- Response to local, sector and regional economic need (Individual mission of the FEC/HEI, Learning and Skills Council, and HEFCE Strategy)
- Foundation Degree recruitment (FEC/HEI)

- Around 1.3m people in work with level 3 type qualifications. (LSC,SSDA, FEC/HEIs)
- Work-based learning as a credible progression route into higher education.(HEFCE, Access and Widening Participation, Partnerships for Progression, and Aim Higher, LSC)
- Government target for 28 per cent of young people to enter MA by 2004 (Skills Strategy, DfES)
- Vocational routes from the age of 14 years (14–19 Green Paper, DfES)
- The introduction of fees (government policy).

Public funding for higher education in England, for example, is increasingly reflecting these drivers as described in the HEFCE strategy 2003<sup>33</sup>:

*“Universities and colleges need to gauge their contribution to meeting regional and national needs in relation to the whole higher education sector – the central message of the plan was that individual universities and colleges have to recognise that they cannot all meet the full range of customer and stakeholder needs to the necessary standards of excellence.”*

In particular, it suggests that there has to be a significant change in the nature of provision:

*“One of the greatest changes identified in the plan is to the traditional concept of higher education. Lifelong learning – the continued acquisition of knowledge and skills from cradle to grave – is turning education from a single life episode to a long running series. This will require new types of courses and methods of delivery in order to provide education and top-up skills and knowledge where and when they are needed.”*

The *Future of Higher Education* White Paper, apart from addressing the question of variable fees, confirms this by unequivocally setting out a strongly differentiated higher education sector with increasing emphasis on vocational education and training, in particular the Foundation Degree, for those not in a position to benefit from the proposed resources for research. This is reinforced by the following extract from the Expanding Higher Education to meet our Needs chapter:

- *“Increased participation in higher education towards 50% of those aged 18–30 by the end of the decade remains in place long.*
- *Links between further and higher education will be strengthened to give students clear progression pathways.*
- *Financial incentives are to be made available for students entering foundation degrees.*
- *Expansion is to be generated through two-year work-focused foundation degrees.*
- *Support for the development of work-based degrees is to be provided by streamlining the funding regimes to make collaboration easier.*

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33 The full strategy can be found on the HEFCE website [www.ADMIN-HEFCE@JISCMAIL.AC.UK](http://www.ADMIN-HEFCE@JISCMAIL.AC.UK).

- *More support will be made available for students taking part-time degrees and the development of flexible '2+' arrangements, credit transfer and E learning.*"  
(White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, 2003)

In addition, the white paper attempts to place increased emphasis on relationships with business. This is aptly described in the chapter, *Higher education and business – exchanging and developing knowledge and skills*, and the following extract provides an insight into the direction the Department is encouraging higher education institutions to take:

- *"Strong partnerships between HEIs Institutions in each region and the RDA and other agencies charged with promoting economic development.*
- *The setting up of a network of 20 knowledge exchanges to promote knowledge and technology transfer including skills development within local communities of practice.*
- *Driving forward foundation degrees to make them the main work-focused higher education qualification, which will include HNC and HND within the foundation degree framework.*
- *Stronger alliances facilitated by Sector Skills Councils, between business and the relevant departments in higher education institutions to develop and market courses and involve employers and the delivery of learning.*
- *The improvement of vocational skills for Graduates, particularly the integration of skills and attributes which employers need, such as communication enterprise and working with others. (Key skills)."*

(White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, 2003)

The continual lack of cohesion in national policy, now almost 20 years on, has been the major block to delivering a coherent strategy for workforce development, delivering explicit progression at all levels at a cost, time and place to suit the workplace learner over a lifetime.

### **What is required to surmount the obstructions to successful workforce development including apprenticeships?**

There are significant hurdles to jump, in order to enable further and higher education to respond to this changing environment. It is essential for success that institutions and national agencies recognise that structures, procedures and regulations need to be adjusted to facilitate a genuine response at the local level to workforce development, progression, and widening access. Immediate key issues need to be addressed and practical action taken to remove obstructions, including:

- flexible and diverse entry routes to level 4 (QCA) or level C (QAA)
- recognition of the existing work-based qualifications and frameworks such as NVQ and Modern Apprenticeships
- accumulating and crediting experience and learning, locally, regionally and nationally

- understanding of needs of employers and constraints on employees
- flexible response to needs and the learning of transferable skills
- use of national occupational standards as a curriculum tool
- work experience opportunities
- coherent partnership funding for work-based/related learning in FE/HE
- standardised data collection.

A strengthening of sector body, employer and further and higher education collaboration to deliver effective, cohesive and transitional learner-centred routes to higher-level qualifications is an inevitable consequence of this approach. None of these policy goals can be achieved without compatibility and mutual recognition between the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) frameworks including audit regimes not least to recognise prior learning and experience. This could potentially lead for the first time to the further and higher education national credit framework. Central to success, as mentioned earlier, is the greater use and recognition of a common curriculum language, national occupational standards<sup>34</sup> and QCA key skills<sup>35</sup> for vocational and work-based routes into higher education.

### **Exceptional barriers to further and higher education meeting the needs of the workforce**

Apart from the strategic policy issues referred to earlier in this paper which form the backbone of the barriers to meeting the needs of the workforce, there are in addition a number of difficulties which will also require attention. For example, there is evidence to suggest that individual learners and employers do not understand the higher education product offering and benefits. This should not be surprising as the focus of attention for higher education has to a large extent been on the school and school leaver.

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34 NOS define competence in performance terms – they are concerned with the successful outcome of work activity. Furthermore, NOS are actually developed by employers themselves through Sector Skills Councils. They describe ‘quality performance’ and provide a menu of competencies for people working at every level within an industry. An immediate source of information is the [www.uvac.ac.uk](http://www.uvac.ac.uk) website where a toolkit is available. The other site is [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk) and in addition a useful paper, Hargraves, G. (2000) *The Review of Vocational Qualifications, 1985 to 1986: An Analysis of its Role in the Development of Competence-Based Vocational Qualifications in England and Wales*, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48, 3, 285–308.

35 Key skills are the skills that are commonly needed for success in a range of activities in education and training, work and life in general. The key skills established by QCA are:

- application of number
- communication
- improving own learning in performance
- information technology
- problem solving
- working with others.

At level five there is a single key skills unit in personal skills development. More information can be found on the [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk) website.

This, coupled with perceived worries over the quality of the NVQ and Modern Apprenticeship routes, has led to a lack of confidence by higher education in these work-based awards which is explained by Swailes and Roodhouse:

*“Consistent with Matlay (2000) we found that some of the ‘bad press’ about NVQs has done lasting damage. Renewed marketing initiatives need to target a more positive image with new messages. Further use of old messages about real world competence and employer-led initiatives will not be effective. The living and working context has changed considerably since NVQs were introduced and the climate now is for high quality qualifications, lifelong learning and access to higher education. Higher NVQs have a role to play so long as branding and design issues are resolved.”*

(Journal for Vocational Education and Training, 2003, vol. 55 no. 1.)

There is also a low level of understanding and information on the spectrum of level 3 qualifications available to higher education admission tutors. This is a serious issue, and one that has been recognised as needing attention if government strategic objectives are to be met. Resulting from this poor understanding is a lack of smooth transitional progression from workplace to further and higher education. Time requirements, location and high cost of part-time courses traditionally militate against those in work who wish to engage in learning. No clearly defined national credit system<sup>36</sup> has been adopted jointly by the QCA, QAA and DfES which supports transferability and underlines the failure by the further and higher education sector to respond to the changing patterns of work, and personal life of employees. The under-utilisation of APEL<sup>37</sup> is symptomatic of the lack of interest in the individuality of employees in the workforce, and in particular the range and depth of learning and expertise they have acquired. A partial UCAS points system makes it increasingly difficult for an individual following a vocational route on a part-time basis to gain entry to higher education. The scarcity of staff development compounds the existing levels of ignorance in higher education and may indicate a lack of interest by individual higher education institutions in workforce development. The costs of learning and time commitment by the employer and the individual are substantial and often severally underestimated. This is a formidable agenda and can only be delivered with a nationally inclusive policy that brings together education and training public sector suppliers with businesses and employees at all levels including government administration. The Skills Alliance may just provide the basis for this.<sup>38</sup>

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36 *Credit and HE Qualifications: The Credit guidelines for HE qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland* developed by the credit bodies CQFW, NICATS, NUCCAT and SEEC provide a comprehensive account of the recommended guidelines for credit including definitions and principles and guidance on credit values for qualifications in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (QAA 2001). These have yet to be adopted.

37 See the paper, *The assessment of prior experiential learning in Europe: radical changes to the idea of the University*, Pat Davis, University of Sheffield, presented at the annual DfES research Conference, 2003.

38 This is referred to in the Skills Strategy White Paper.

## Overcoming the obstacles

The barriers could be overcome by institutions, regional and national agencies undertaking the following action in the longer term:

- An integrated qualification system
- Training and accreditation of Admission tutors and services
- Accreditation of Advanced Modern Apprenticeship and NVQ routes as entry to HE
- Integrated provision from FE and private training providers to HE with a common credit and APEL system
- Accelerated learning routes linked to at least a regional APEL system
- UCAS to include a wider range of vocational qualifications at level 3 in respect of the tariff system
- Financial incentives to employers and employees
- Flexible forms of delivery
- Overhaul of part-time provision
- Clear part-time, work-based progression route to Graduate Apprenticeships.

The ultimate mechanism for overcoming the barriers to developing the workforce must be an integrated national qualification system linked to a coherent funding system. It will be impossible to generate a national credit accumulation transfer scheme as well as encourage the greater use of accreditation of prior learning and experience unless there is a coherent national qualification framework that has currency throughout the United Kingdom (which requires detailed negotiations with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). This approach would also enable progression routes to be developed in an explicit manner from further to higher education and more significantly enable all those involved to be aware of the spectrum of approved qualifications.

Professor David Melville, the University Vocational Awards Council Chair<sup>39</sup>, recently questioned the ad hoc approach to higher-level vocational education and training<sup>40</sup>, in particular the lack of a single qualifications body. His point is well made, as the current arrangements leave much to be desired. In England, we have two quality assurance arrangements and systems which continue to fail to interact in the interests of the

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39 The University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) is committed to the enthusiastic promotion, advocacy and support of appropriate policies for the development of vocational higher education. In our three years of existence with our membership of 48 Universities, 21 Higher Education and Further Education colleges and corporate members, we have argued that:  
*"Vocational HE is essential both to the development of the UK knowledge economy and to the government's policies for social inclusion. It is the vehicle for new approaches to the preparation for HE, innovative curricular, pedagogic change and flexible structures and processes. Through, for example, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships, Foundation Degrees, work-related learning, work-based learning and accreditation of vocational qualifications, hundreds of thousands of people are being given the opportunity to upgrade their skills and qualifications to the benefit of themselves, their employers and society as a whole."*

40 Education Guardian 09.12.2003.

learner. However, there are glimmers of hope on the horizon with the review of vocational qualifications currently being undertaken by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Learning and Skills Council and the Sector Skills Development Agency. The review is expected to consider possible models for a national qualification framework which would make sense of all qualifications at all levels in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. This is a tall order but if achieved would provide a unique opportunity to develop national progression routes, credit and accumulation systems as well as greater flexibility to recognise a wider spectrum of learning.

What would a national qualification framework look like? Would it follow the New Zealand or Australian models?<sup>41</sup> Currently in the UK, with the exception of Scotland, we have a five-level construct, with an additional entry level. This is, to a large extent, based on the original NVQ system which was designed to incorporate all vocational qualifications, originated in 1986, and encourage greater conformity by the explicit use of national occupational standards including key skills. This approach was designed to ensure that vocational qualifications met the needs of employers and remained up to date in terms of skill and knowledge requirements in the different industrial sectors across the UK economy. It has subsequently been diluted by the incorporation of national school examinations such as GCSEs and A Levels. This has led to a qualification framework which has moved away from its original vocational ethos into a national structure which surprisingly ignores higher education (see Table 1). This is left to the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education. Currently there is only one qualification which spans both the QCA national qualification framework and the QAA system.

The implications of a combined national education and training qualification system are considerable, not least who undertakes the quality assurance audits for which levels of the framework. In fact, this can be easily overcome, as the regulatory responsibilities for different aspects of a combined national qualification framework could remain with the current designated bodies, in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. What is important here is to understand that the United Kingdom can have a national qualification framework. We have been preoccupied with the regulatory and quality assurance activities that are satiated with a framework at the expense of the framework itself.

What a combined framework may allow is a reappraisal of the NVQ system, including the national occupational standards (NOS) of competence, in the context of higher education as a contribution to employability and workforce development. An emerging example of this is the incorporation of national occupational standards in Foundation Degrees which the national skills task force fully supported:

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41 A useful description of these qualification systems and others can be found in *Promises and Problems for Commonwealth Qualification Frameworks, a Report of a Commonwealth Seminar held in Wellington, New Zealand, February 2003*, edited by Gari Donn and Tony Davies. Commonwealth Secretariat, June 2003.

*“Recommendation 7: the new foundation degree should be designed as a flexible vocational programme, **linked to national occupational standards**, for part-time or full-time study including significant work experience, and offer progression by further study to an honours degree for those who desire it.”*

(Final Report of the National Skills Task Force, Skills for all: proposals for a national skills agenda p39, 2000)

In fact, national occupational standards have the potential to be the transitional curriculum development tool for all qualifications in the national framework. This would provide coherence and responsiveness to employer needs, while enabling higher education institutions to respond to local, regional and national learner needs within a defined at national framework. The current model, from QCA is described in Table 1.

**Table 1: National Qualifications Framework (NQF) 2003**

Level of qualification	General	Vocationally related	Occupational
5	Higher level qualifications		Level 5 NVQ
4			Level 4 NVQ
3 Advanced	A levels and AVCE	Vocational A level (advanced GNVQ)	Level 3 NVQ
2 Intermediate	GCSE grade A*–C	Intermediate GNVQ	Level 2 NVQ
1 Foundation	GCSE grade D–G	Foundation GNVQ	Level 1 NVQ
Entry level	Certificate of achievement		

(Source: QCA 2003)

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, as mentioned earlier, established a framework in 2001 for the sector, described in Table 2, which uses levels 1–5 and numerals as defining mechanisms. It would be expected that there is a correlation between the QCA levels 4 and 5 and the QAA levels 1 to 5 in order to facilitate progression and recognition of occupational competence, but this is far from the case. Furthermore there is no recognition by QAA of national occupational standards and this is even more perplexing when higher education has been engaged in work-based learning, for example through sandwich courses and work placements as well as continuous professional development. It seems to suggest that the authority has little interest in workforce development at the higher levels in support of the sector.

National occupational standards provide a dynamic curriculum tool to answer the criticisms that higher education provision does not respond to employer need. The UK has probably the most sophisticated system of competences in the world, the result of £100 million of investment by government over the past 15 years. NOS are relevant and potentially useful

to the large majority of employees and employers, whatever their role or sector. As such, the standards should represent an extremely useful and important tool that could help higher education further enhance the responsiveness of learning programmes to employer requirements. Furthermore, supporting higher education in the use of national occupational standards would strengthen the relationship between institutions and Sector Skills Councils. This, in turn, could encourage the use of sector labour market intelligence when planning provision. Unfortunately, although examples of good practice are apparent, awareness and use of national occupational standards in higher education is low.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 2: Quality Assurance Agency Framework, 2001**

Level	Qualifications
5 Doctoral: 'D' level	Doctorates
4 Masters: 'M' level	Masters degree, Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas
3 Honours: 'H' level	Bachelors degrees with Honours, Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas
2 Intermediate: 'I' level	Foundation degrees, ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas
1 Certificate: 'C' level	Certificates of Higher Education

*(Source: QCA 2003)*

When attempting to deliver employable graduates and meet the learning needs of the workforce, this lack of co-ordination at national levels between the frameworks is unhelpful and for the learner acts as a real barrier to progression. To add to this cluttered qualification landscape the National Skills Task Force (second report, 1999) for the first time introduced the two-year vocationally-related qualification (Foundation Degree) and deliberately excluded the Higher National Diploma (HND). This is described in Table 3.

The intention of introducing a new two-year vocationally-related qualification was to address the intermediate skills gap in the UK labour force. As a result the Foundation Degree has now been established as a flagship qualification for higher education and incorporates national occupational standards where appropriate as well as key skills.

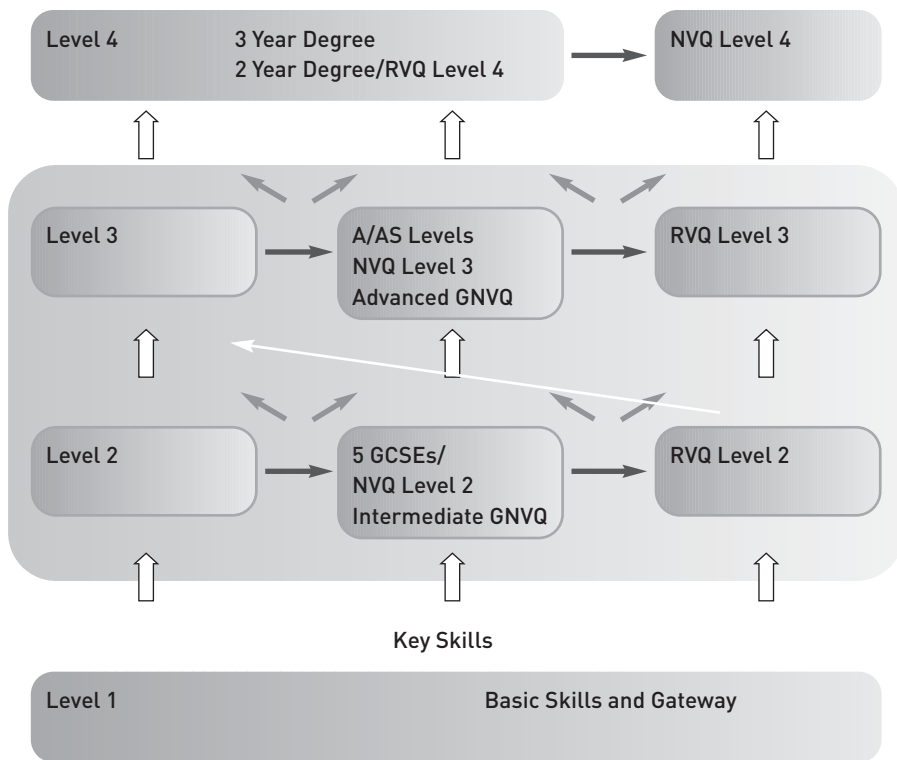
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42 The DfES and LSC-funded NOS and NVQ Employer Champions Group reported in 2002 that National Occupational Standards:

- *"Are a world-class listing of job-led competency standards*
- *Outline the skills people need to do their jobs well*
- *Provide a framework for vocational learning*
- *Help ensure that learning programmes meet employer needs*
- *Enhance the vocational content of curricula, and*
- *Are a key tool in the development of employer-relevant qualifications and learning programmes."*

The HND continues to meet the skills and knowledge required in well-established sectors such as construction. In other words, we have increased the number of qualifications in the marketplace and potentially generated yet more confusion amongst employers.

**Table 3: Progression Framework for Vocational Education and Training**



*(Source: Second Report of the National Skills Task Force: Delivering Skills for All, 1999)*

This emerging national education and vocational qualification landscape has yet to be fully realised. A possible outcome of the vocational qualifications review is a transformational model described in Table 4.

**Table 4: A revised and integrated National Qualification Framework**

Qualification	General	Vocational	Vocationally related	Occupational
<b>7</b> D (doctorate) level		Doctorates	Level 5 NVQ	
<b>6</b> M (masters) level			Master degree, Postgraduate certificates & postgraduate diplomas, graduate apprenticeships Key skills	Level 5 NVQ
<b>5</b> H (honours) level			Bachelors degrees with Honours, graduate certificates & graduate diplomas Key skills	Level 5 NVQ
<b>4</b> I (Intermediate) level			Foundation degrees, ordinary (Bachelors) degrees, diplomas of Higher Education and other higher diplomas Key skills	Level 4 NVQ
<b>4</b> C (certificate) level			Certificates of Higher Education Key skills	
<b>3</b> advanced level	A and AS levels, key skills	Vocational A level advanced modern apprenticeships (advanced GNVQ)		Level 3 NVQ
<b>2</b> intermediate level	GCSE Grade A*-C	Modern apprenticeships, including key skills	Foundation GNVQ	Level 2 NVQ
<b>1</b> foundation level	GCSE Grade D-G	Key skills		Level 1 NVQ
Entry level		Certificate of educational achievement		

(Source: Simon Roodhouse, 2004)

It also requires a consistent approach to raising awareness and the value perceptions of NVQs, NOS and Modern Apprenticeship among higher education institutions; the development of an accreditation system for Modern Apprenticeship frameworks as an entry award for higher education particularly Foundation Degrees; and accreditation of a part-time credit/work-based route linking Modern Apprenticeship, Foundation Degrees and Graduate Apprenticeships into continuous professional development.

If we were to achieve this goal, then the results would be immensely beneficial. We could envisage a position whereby there is a seamless transition from further to higher education for the learner without loss of status; the recognition and integration of private training into a national system; a national credit accumulation and transfer system; and significantly enhanced use of accreditation of prior learning and experience built on national occupational standards which meet employer needs.

Specifically the following national policy action would be required for successful workforce development:

- Explicit and closer working between the National Quality Assurance Agencies in the interests of the learner to avoid bureaucracy, duplication and repetition
- Use existing systems by raising awareness, usefulness and value of NVQs, NOS and Modern Apprenticeship (and equivalents in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) among Higher Education Institutions
- The development of a national higher education system for the recognition of experiential learning in the workplace
- Accreditation of a credit/work-based route linking Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Degrees and Graduate Apprenticeships
- Improved funding arrangements for part-time learning and a new dynamic partnership with employers
- A national broker and champion of workforce development for employers, employees, further and higher education in partnership with LSC.

This must be a prize worth having, as the future of the UK economy and society will increasingly rely on the quality of the workforce, in particular its ability to reinvent itself through the acquisition and generation of skills and knowledge in response to significant global challenges.

As Professor David Melville concluded in his recent Guardian article:

*“GCSEs, A levels and honours degrees offer near seamless progression routes for those who want them. Is it too much to ask the same of vocational and work-based education?”<sup>43</sup>*

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43 Education Guardian, 9 December 2003.

## Points made in question sessions and discussion groups

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- On the 'supply-side' issue, we must be cautious about the claim that employers, even SMEs, do not want what HEIs can offer to support workforce development. If HEIs go out and meet them half-way, negotiating a flexible package that meets their needs, employers do respond. Employer demand is undeniably there if institutions adapt delivery to meet their needs.
- Employers are a very disparate group of organisations, so engaging them is a complex task. Beware of regarding large companies as the representative voice of employers. HEIs need a better understanding of employers than has traditionally been the case.
- Regional forums which bring together the 'supply' and 'demand' sides are promising in the longer term, but they will take time to be effective.
- Addressing our complex funding mechanisms has to be part of the solution to engaging employers.
- Better regulation and co-ordination will help to ensure consistent delivery standards in apprenticeship. People in different parts of the country should be entitled to the same high quality and standard of apprenticeship training. We must also recognise that the capacity of employers to support apprenticeships varies greatly, and work with employers to support them by bringing in other providers where necessary to deliver the entitlement.
- The main reason why employers do not participate in apprenticeship is that most are never asked or made aware of what their obligations are regarding apprenticeship. Where employers are linked with training providers or apprenticeship agents, employers tend to view the relationship as they providing a service, rather than vice versa.
- Flexibility and tailoring to the perceived needs of learners and employers has to be balanced against the potential for confusion and abuse of the system.
- Problems with the apprenticeship 'offer', particularly lack of currency of NVQs among employers, is a serious drawback and contrasts sharply with the high standing of apprenticeships in Germany.
- If more and more jobs are going to be of a hybrid nature and cut across sector skills, we need to consider how NVQs and apprenticeships can deliver cross-sector customisation. Although this will cause immense problems for accreditation and standardisation, it is an issue that will have to be addressed.

- The 14 to 19 agenda, with increased vocational learning from Key Stage 4, is very relevant to the apprenticeship debate. If we can engage more employers at this stage it will give young people a better experience of work and better inform their learning choices.
- Ways must be found of linking the part-time jobs of students to their learning. Graduate Apprenticeship provides a model for achieving this.
- The costs of employing an apprentice who may be largely unproductive for one to two years may be deterring some employers, but cost is only one of a range of factors impacting on employer involvement.
- Modern Apprenticeship is still very highly regarded by employers in the traditional apprenticeship industries such as engineering, where there are clear progression pathways to chartered status. The challenge is rather at the post-apprenticeship levels, NVQ 4 and 5.



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