2018

AN EXPLORATION OF COLLABORATIVE EXPERTISE AND PRACTICE IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Summary of and critical commentary on the seminar presentations by Norman Crowther with contributions from Christoper Winch, Mark Addis and Irene Bucelli

DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE EXPERTISE IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

ORGANISERS: PROFESSOR CHRISTOPHER WINCH (KING'S COLLEGE LONDON), PROFESSOR MARK ADDIS (BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY) AND DR. NORMAN CROWTHER (ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS)

SEMINAR 1: 30 JANUARY 2015 AT ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS OFFICE

1.00-3.00 **A Qualified Workforce**– Speaker: Dr. Mary Bousted, General Secretary Association of Teachers and Lecturers; Speaker: Martin Doel, CEO Association of Colleges; Respondent: Professor Christopher Winch, King's College London; Chair: Alan Thomson, Editor *InTuition*

SEMINAR 2: 13 MARCH 2015 AT BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

1.00-3.00 **Dual Professionalism: What does it mean in practice?**– Speaker: Professor David Guile, Institute of Education; Speaker: Lee Weatherly*, CEO Midlands Group Training Services; Respondent: Lee Davies, CEO Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys; Chair: Sue Dutton, Sue Dutton Consultancy

SEMINAR 3: 15 MAY 2015 AT ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS OFFICE

1.00-3.00 **Comparative Vocational Education and Training**– Speaker: Professor Andy Green, Institute of Education; Speaker: Professor Ann-Marie Bathmaker (Birmingham University); Respondent: Dr. Dina Kuhlee, University of Oldenburg, Germany; Speaker: Simon Field (OECD) Chair: Professor Paul Gibbs, Middlesex University

SEMINAR 4: 12 JUNE 2015 AT BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

1.00-3.00 **Policy Contexts of Professionalism**– Speaker: Dr. Norman Crowther, Association of Teachers and Lecturers; Speaker: Joel Petrie, Liverpool Community College; Speaker: James Noble Rogers, Universities Council for the Education of Teachers; Respondent: Dr. Alis Oancea*, Oxford University; Chair: Professor Ann Hodgson, Institute of Education

SEMINAR 5: 18 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS OFFICE

1.00-3.00 **Initial and Continuing Teacher Vocational Education and Training**– Speaker: Lord Jim Knight, Director TES Global; Speaker: Dr Janet Broad, Institute of Education; Respondent: Professor Mark Addis, Birmingham City University; Chair: Professor Lorna Unwin, Institute of Education

SEMINAR 6: 13 NOVEMBER 2015 AT BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

1.00-3.00 **Union Learning Fund Case Studies: Public Money, Employer Engagement and Current Practice**– Speakers: ULF Case study Julia Stevens, Halesowen College and Rebecca Poorhady, project worker at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers; Speaker: Dr Ann Limb OBE, Chair of South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership; Speaker: Tom Wilson, Director of Unionlearn; Speaker: Graham Schumacher (MBE), formerly Head of Learning and Training, Rolls Royce; Respondent: Professor Ewart Keep, Oxford University; Chair: Professor Alison Fuller, Institute of Education

SEMINAR 7: 29 JANUARY 2016 AT ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS OFFICE

1.00-3.00 **Communicating and Implementing Industrial Democracy and Social Partnership**– Speaker: Mark Langhammer, Association of Teachers and Lecturers; Speaker: Paul Nowak, Assistant General Secretary of the TUC; Speaker: Paul Wakeling, Principal, Havering Sixth Form College; Chair and Respondent: David Corke Head of Policy, Association of Colleges

Thanks to all those who gave their time and expertise so generously in their presentations whether verbal, Powerpoint or in written form. We hope the critical transcription ensures a wider audience and coherent view while doing justice to the work of the presenters.
*On the day Lee Weatherly and Alis Oancea were unavailable.

1. What does professionalism and continuing vocational education mean today?

The vexed issue of professionalism in the post 16 sector has had a long and turbulent history. We have a profession in a virtual crisis: shifting models in the past ten years from a deregulated profession to a regulated one and back to a deregulated model. In this recent history how the failure of Institute for Learning, disestablished as a professional and regulatory body, has impacted on the sector? How does the new deregulated sector respond to issues around expertise, quality and initial teacher training? Has deregulation enabled the sector to be more flexible and responsive or do we risk a race to the bottom with employers cutting corners due to funding cuts or short-termism? What do we mean by professionalism and who should own it and drive it forward?

Policy context: a brief history of the regulation and deregulation of FE professionals

In 2004 the then Labour government Standards Unit's 'Equipping our teachers for the future' reforms were just beginning to be developed and implemented. Following the 'Success for All' reform agenda (DfES 2002), these reforms gave articulation to government policy for the sector. They envisaged different levels of qualification: from a Passport to Teaching Award, equipping those at the start of their career and/or teaching on a limited contact of a few hours a week with introductory skills and knowledge to teach their subject, to a Full License to Practice leading to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status. They focused on professional standards which, as far as possible, would be common across 14-19 teaching and build on the standards being developed by the Higher Education Academy for the university sector. They also introduced new quality assurance mechanisms including verification by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) and a four-year cycle of inspection by OFSTED.

In 2007 the professional standards were revised and new teaching qualifications were required by regulation. Introduced at the same time was a requirement to register with a professional body, the Institute for Learning (IfL), and to acquire professional status. The new qualifications framework and requirements introduced in 2007 did, according to OFSTED and others, improve the quality and content of training, and helped to professionalise the sector. There were reservations: for example, in relation to over-prescription of the Diploma in Teaching in the Learning and Skills Sector programmes; but also in regard to the role of associate teachers; or in the light of shortcomings in securing the active engagement of all employers in the training and development of the workforce. Nevertheless, the moves towards professionalisation that began with the 2002 qualification requirements and the 2007 reforms represented real progress and constituted tentative steps towards parity of esteem for teachers in the Lifelong learning sector with those working in schools.

Since 2011, however, progress towards a professionalised sector has taken a rather different direction. Instead of a regulated and mandatory form of professional activity, this new direction envisaged a voluntaristic and commercialised route. The catalysts for this were Lord Lingfield's interim and final reports, which swept away the 2002 and 2007 reforms. They proposed the removal of the requirement that all teachers in the sector should either hold, or be working towards, a recognised teaching qualification. They also proposed removing the requirement that teachers undertake a minimum amount of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) credits each year, and that they be members of the professional body, at that time the IfL. Undoubtedly, some of these policies were in need of reform. The various Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), the Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS) and the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) qualifications were over-prescribed (DIUS, 2007) in the sense that their application and requirements were in tension. For example, few had the incentive to complete the Certificate and so institutions tended to support completion of the Diploma. And while the Certificate was aimed at technicians and demonstrators it had no clear status in the workplace. The identification of 'associate teachers' actually threatened to undermine the status of teachers; the 30-hour CPD requirement was crude and also at odds with teachers' professional autonomy.

Lingfield and other proponents presented their proposals as being liberating for the sector: as an example, in fact, of professionalism itself. This position, however, is controversial. Giving freedom and increased

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autonomy to individual employers is not necessarily empowering for teachers. A profession is an occupation organised around shared commitments to which individuals owe allegiance and subscribe to in some way (either by identification or, at best, formal subscription). A profession is a collective of individual practitioners, not a collective of institutions or employers. The medical profession is not comprised of the collective of hospitals, GP surgeries etc. It is collective of the people who work in them. The learning and skills sector is no different. Moreover, apologists for Lingfield argued that the removal of the 2007 reforms would be liberating for teachers themselves. In some ways this is true. The removal did give teachers more scope to manage their own CPD, which, it can be agreed, is a hallmark of professionalism, provided of course that they are given the time and the resources needed to undertake CPD. However, there is little evidence of change around CPD and professional development, so the view that deregulation would create such a space appears to be lacking support. Even the Society for Education and Training (SET), which is the employer-led continuation of the IfL, has only 17,000 members (out of a total workforce of 300,000) and most of those have come from the private sector. In any case, individual autonomy is only one characteristic of professionalism. Accountability is another and is equally important criterion: for instance, as we shall discuss shortly, an autonomous professional body that regulates and supports the profession and is accountable to its members is a hallmark of a profession.

Importantly, the assumptions underlying these changes could also be found in other educational sectors. School teachers have also been de-professionalised with the removal of the qualification requirement for teachers in academies and so-called free schools. Ironically, but regrettably, in some ways parity between sectors has been secured by undermining the esteem of both sectors. Nevertheless, the retention of Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills (QTLS), as a regulated benchmark of professional formation in the FE sector and holding legal parity with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in maintained schools, can be considered a relevant marker of progress. At the same time, it is noteworthy that QTLS is mainly taken by those working in schools, not those in the FE sector: this development reflects, perhaps, the looseness of deregulated professional landscapes.

Contrary to the most pessimistic predictions formulated when the 2007 regulations were removed, aspects of professionalism have survived. For example, the number of people seeking teaching qualifications has not fallen as drastically as it was thought they would. The number of in-service

How aspects of professionalism have been retained

programmes has in some places fallen steeply, but that might in part be because many of the unqualified staff that had been in the system prior to 2002 have now been trained. Moreover, while some Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers have ceased provision, recruitment to some programmes, particularly pre-service programmes, has remained buoyant. There may of course be a recession factor in this, but it also reflects both the continued desire of many colleges to employ qualified staff as well as the fact that individual teachers recognise that they need to be properly trained. Notably, when consulted, employers also wanted to keep the qualification requirements. A professional attitude may have a more secure base than some feared. Secondly, despite Lingfield's assertion that it should be for employers to determine what qualifications their staff should have, we do still have a *de facto* recognised teaching qualification: the Level 5 diploma developed by the Learning Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) in its later days in consultation with employers, training providers, unions and others. The diploma's status as the *de facto* teaching qualification is reflected in the fact that it brings with it eligibility for student loans and, in the case of pre-service specialist Diploma in Education and Training in Maths, English and SEN, it can attract bursary support from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to encourage new entrants into the profession.

The LLUK standards were overly-complicated, especially because of the associated units of assessment, and so while they represented a regulated environment they were also felt to be overly restrictive. On the other hand, the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) standards are clear, easy to understand and appear to embrace professionalism (ETF 2014). For example, these claim that:

> *Teachers and trainers are reflective and enquiring practitioners who think critically about their own educational assumptions, values and practice in the context of a changing contemporary world. They draw on relevant research as part of evidence-based practice. … Teachers and trainers are dual professionals; they are subject and/or vocational specialists and experts in teaching and learning. They are committed to maintaining and developing their expertise in both aspects of their role to ensure the best outcome for their learners* (ETF 2014 p.1).

However, it remains questionable the extent to which professionalism is supported and fostered. On the one hand, standards are subject to the active support of employers; however, whether they are sufficiently

monitored to have any impact is an open question. These standards are arguably not visible in the working lives of practitioners. For professional standards to have real visibility and impact on practice would constitute one of the hallmarks of a profession.

As already suggested above, another hallmark of a profession is the existence of an autonomous professional body. The decision that IfL should become self-funding, that is, funded via membership subscriptions, led to the UCU boycott, the commissioning of the Lingfield report and the resulting removal of not only the IfL membership requirement, but also the removal of the qualification requirement. One could understand why people, especially comparatively modestly remunerated people, might resent being required to be a member of anything. However, it would be unheard of for a profession like doctors not to be subject to a self-governing autonomous professional body. If a profession does not regulate itself, other agencies, such as government or the employers, will do so instead.

On the other hand, trade unions did voice their disfavour at the strategic direction of IfL and its lack of impact on practitioner working lives. It was also true that setting a fee of £78 in the first instance was simply a self-funding exercise for a government quango and did not, at the time, represent a good investment for the ordinary member who was required by law to be a member of IfL. Nevertheless, there were differences between the trade unions: the larger FE union UCU boycotted IfL and ATL did not, due to the overall benefits of having a professional body and the legalistic requirement for practitioners to be members. Despite this, the concept of an independent professional body for teaching has not been entirely lost. On the schools side of things, the College of Teaching has received broad support from across the spectrum, including from ATL; although how many teachers will be willing to join with fees that are likely to be far higher than those charged by either the General Teaching Council (GTC) or IfL remains to be seen. Moreover, the ETF, which took over some, but not all, of the functions of IfL and LSIS, has established a new membership body, the Society for Education and Training (SET), open to people working in colleges, the armed services, the voluntary sector and other areas. Currently, there are around 14,000 members with a large amount coming from independent training providers: this is a distinctly new phenomenon and confirms the ATL's emphasis in supporting what they call 'vocational educators', those who teach, support, educate, mentor learners in workplaces, in their current Unionlearn 'Transformers' initiative. However, the ETF is of course an employer-led body that

depends in large part on core government grant, and even the Society will not be governed entirely by its membership. Nevertheless, its existence does reflect the continued desire in many quarters for a professional body of some kind and the Society's mission includes a specific reference to 'promoting professionalism'.

To conclude these points on recent historical and cultural events, we can point to how the current state of the sector sees elements that may one day serve as bedrock for the 'professionalisation agenda': the recognition of the Diploma in Education and Training as the *de facto* teaching qualification; the embedding of generally accepted professional standards to underpin teacher education; the incentivisation of training through the availability of loans and bursaries; and the establishment of the Society for Education and Training with an avowed commitment to professionalism. Nonetheless, it must be clear that we do not have a professionalised workforce at the moment. This would require mandatory qualifications and self-regulation. Instead, we have what might develop into something genuinely professional: whether this needs the stimulus of a new approach to VET or to professionalism are moot points.

At the same time, while appraising the policy context and recent history of the sector is informative, we may need to approach the issue more theoretically, if we are to work through the challenges of understanding and progressing FE professionalism in the English FE sector. For a conceptualisation of the FE sector we need to have a better set of terms that could enable stakeholders and others to have a shared understanding of the sector and, following that, move to some sort of agreement of what is to be done. This could lead to what Fligstein and McAdam (2012) call a 'settlement'. They suggest that in institutional fields, when actors hold opposing interests, the power dynamics must be managed so that field activities can continue. For Fligstein and McAdam, a strategic action field defines an arena or 'policy field' based on intersubjective agreement, in which each party takes into account the other in order to guide his or her actions (ibid. p.216). Research in this vein seeks to uncover the "shared understandings that are critical to field level interactions" with an emphasis on collaborative meaning and an attempt to secure cooperation (ibid. p.398). In a way, this booklet attempts this first move towards a conceptualisation of the sector.

A theoretical approach is needed to work through the challenges of understanding and progressing FE professionalism in the English FE sector

In this direction, chapter 3 and 4 of this booklet supply a perspective on the broader political and industrial context, for example through the work of

Fligstein and McAdam (2012) and Busemeyer (2015). This may help with the strategic direction of the sector and with locating the challenges to developing an 'expansive' professionalism specifically.

The expertise of the FE professional

The notion of expertise in relation to professionalism in the FE sector needs unpacking. One way to do this is by looking at Abbott's (1988) work on professions, which focuses on the dynamics through which occupations define their jurisdiction, their right to control the provision of certain services or activities and the kinds of knowledge and techniques that are needed. This work suggests that professional occupations possess a particular body of abstract knowledge and sets of techniques that constitute markers of expertise which are socially recognised. One may suggest that developing professionalism requires a form of denoted expertise: this is essential to achieve credibility with other professionals and the public. This goes hand in hand with developing a jurisdiction over one's expertise and over the knowledge and techniques that characterise it.

The FE professional has a particular take on expertise, understood as 'dual professionalism'. Dual Professionalism for a teacher is the concept of a profession that has expertise both in the occupation that is to be taught and in the practice of teaching. However, it is not clear that this is currently a coherent concept: for example, some believe that in the current policy context what is needed is a "triple professionalism", reflecting teachers' ability to work with their FE colleagues in different institutions, industry contacts and sectors as well as the two kinds of expertise already mentioned (Hodgson and Spours 2013, Hodgson and Spours 2015). Before tackling this much-debated concept, then, we first develop an exploration of vocational expertise and of the idea of vocational pedagogy in particular. This will allow us to explore how some of the key concepts are currently articulated in the English FE sector. In the next section, we will then focus on the vexed issue of dual professionalism.

Vocational Expertise

A key issue is what vocational experts need to know about teaching in order to reveal their expertise in the occupation that they are teaching. This raises the question of whether there is too much talk about 'teaching'

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in VET. This seemed to be the view expressed by the Commission on Adult and Vocational Teaching and Learning report (CAVTL 2013) suggesting that excellent vocational teaching and learning is really 'about work'. An argument could be put that those who 'do' should show students how 'it' is done and therefore they are best placed to reveal the real ways of work, the specific skills that are needed and the disposition to approach them. After all, a teacher in a classroom or workshop and, particularly one who has been in that environment for some time, would not necessarily be familiar with current thinking and practices. It is a point that can be further nuanced by arguing that those in the world of work could contribute some finer points, albeit not all, to the education and training of VET students and learners and add to the value of learning in the sector.

However, while the CAVTL injunction *'It's about work…'* is a nice headline concept, it does not tell the whole story. VET can be 'about work' in its purpose or aim, but not actually 'about doing work'; it can be 'about work' in its curriculum design; it can be 'about work' in developing employment opportunities; it can be 'about' work in delivering training in the workplace; it can be 'about' work in terms of assessment in the workplace. But it's not simply 'about' work: this is a simplification that in fact reveals some serious shortcomings in CAVTL's vision. It is to the analysis of these that we now turn.

The CAVTL report first and most distinctive suggestion is the need for a "clear line of sight to work" (CAVTL 2013 p.9). A key tenet of this view is the idea that experience of the job in its context is central and "the real work context should inform the practice of vocational teaching and learning for learners, teachers and trainers" (ibid. p.7). There is an idea that doing work can be 'learning' or 'training' as long as 'the somebody' who also does that work is present. There is no question about the traditional model for such an approach: it is called an apprenticeship. An apprenticeship is a formally organised or culturally specific way of developing needed skills in the next generation of relevant workers, or those who become workers.

But, what we really need to focus on here, however, is the fact that what is proposed is that the learner learns something from having a vocationally proficient person showing, telling or demonstrating something. This is understandable and even important, but pedagogically it makes little sense. The insistence that a 'vocational' expert be necessary for the learner experience takes the notion of 'a clear line of sight to work' and integrates it into the workplace. But it does so as a parallel to the apprenticeship

<div style="color:blue">The problematic pedagogical assumptions underlying the idea of a "line of sight to work"</div>

model. Learners are being asked to 'view' the workplace in practice and be 'guided' by the vocational expert.

While this could look understandable and even relevant it does beg a number of questions. For example, 'who' is the vocational expert? How do we know who could fulfil that role? Why would they fulfil that role? Do they want to be a teacher or a trainer? Are they, in fact, a trainer? Secondly, what is the course of education or training that the learner is on? If it is training and is provided by the employer then the matter is one of developing the skills within the workforce. However, if, and this was CAVTL's remit, to understand vocational teaching and learning (the 'adult' in the title was there for political reasons and appears to have no real focus in the paper which deals with 16-18 year old further education for the most part) as practised by further education colleges, then the role of that 'vocational educator' has not been defined or properly elaborated.

It would appear, then, that the vocational educator is supplying knowledge, dispositions, and aptitudes that are related to the workplace in ways that the FE lecturer cannot do. This would be the aspect of a 'line of sight to work' that this role adds to the simple context of participating in such a workplace via a workplacement or work experience. And, to be more, precise, the 'knowledge' that such a person would add would have to be tacit knowledge that is found in the 'know how' of practice. Otherwise, it would be something that the FE practitioner could articulate in terms of the theory and understanding that learners are tested on in the classroom (formal learning). It would appear that the CAVTL recommendation is to explore further the informal or non-formal modes of learning that such an educational context would provide.

To conclude this point, the notion of a 'line of sight to work' conceals a fundamental debate around 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' and their articulation in terms of roles, curriculum, and proficiency (who has that expertise and how do we know?) that, until explored, will hinder collaborative practices between colleges and employers and FE practitioners and employers, as well as 'vocational educators'.

On the other hand, a more pedagogic approach would design the particular sequences of learning that the learner would experience in terms of a scheme of work and, more precisely, the lesson aims. Hence, one of the fundamental debates here, is how one conceives the relation between the abilities and dispositions one needs in the workplace and those that one needs for studying and learning. How far learning and training can be

brought together is a key debate, which risks being glossed over by taking the CAVTL understanding of pedagogy as complete or final. What we need to understand is 'what' the vocational expert is adding, why and when, rather than simply saying we need those in industry to teach or train (the terms becoming increasingly problematic).

In the English context, without a richer sense of what an apprenticeship means, and without the development of a 'new' tradition of how expertise is developed, we cannot then simply say that there needs to be 'a line of sight to work'. CAVTL has taken one necessary element of an educational and training programme and tried to turn it into a sufficient principle. There are serious debates about how far one can 'immerse' oneself in a community of practice and develop requisite expertise. However, whatever view one takes of the *immersive* versus *pedagogic* model of the curriculum or training programme, they both have coherent and well-rounded forms. In other words, they are not empirically derived from consideration of what industry wants from VET or how one can frame the learning environment of a learner.[1]

What we have stressed so far, then, is that in order to fully understand the expertise of the FE professional, we should resist simplifications such as those offered by the CAVTL. Instead, we should avoid a reductive view of the educational sphere of expertise. We should understand where others are needed to develop appropriate skills and competence, without conceding the need for educationalists to develop curricula design or pedagogy. We should not concede 'lifelong learning' or, even, 'training', unless, that is, they are to be uncoupled from education. All high-quality apprenticeships, for example, have 'educational' elements either in design, teaching or in institutions. Further, in its incorporation by governments, related to qualifications and assessment and funding, the idea of 'apprenticeship' is subject to a new settlement around what it is, who it is for, and who owns it.[2]

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[1] This prescription by CAVTL while intuitively welcomed by those who wish to see either a direct relation of VET to employment or wish to see the 'real' relation of industry to future workers, not only has the theoretical problems mentioned above, but is causing some real concerns about the logistics and practicality of each learner having such a relationship to the site of work. This goes to the heart of the problem: how does once conceive the 'sight' of the site of work?

[2] Fligstein and McAdam (2012) would see this contestation in the policy field of further education to have some impact on neighbouring policy fields such as higher education and industry. The apprenticeship levy is a clear example of how policy in one area VET has repercussions for other policy fields which were (and still are) to a large extent uncoupled. There is a wider issue here around the relation of our neo-liberal market model of VET, the state, and other agents.

In short, the world of work has become more about 'learning' than the reverse. Colleges cannot become workplaces without losing their fundamental educational purpose. Educational elements are essential to fulfil the purpose of any learning. These include: clarity about the kinds of pedaogy required and where curriculum design; the sequencing of lessons/training; and the nature and form of assessment. It is undoubtedly necessary to understand 'how' learning takes place in the workplace and we need to import concepts from work-based learning into educational terms in order to develop a set of policies and practices around 'vocational pedagogy'. However, it cannot be simply assumed that what is done in the workplace is the map to follow. This would entail a restricted vocationalism in which the state of the art is left to our current workplace practices and the condition of our labour market. The educational sphere has much more to offer than that.

Such a focus on work-based learning in initial teacher training has been omitted. This, perhaps, has prevented presenting a better case to government, while also bearing on the relations with employers. The education sphere needs to engage, research and understand what is happening in workplaces: how they change, and where expertise emerges if it is to provide proper preparatory education and training, adequate curricula and teaching. Nevertheless, it is also the case that awarding bodies have a model that fails to link theory to practice. The current black box approach is to provide specifications of skills, knowledge and understanding without experiential dimensions in the world of work itself. If awarding bodies were tasked to develop a better experiential dimension for assessment, this would provide better, and more relevant, assessment strategies, examinations, demonstrations or portfolios.

At the same time, this debate cannot ignore the wider argument that a qualified workforce is part of the core mission for further education. A respected teaching profession can only arise in further education, and the post-16 sector broadly, with regulation of teacher qualifications. This does not mean assuming that qualification-led professional development is necessarily adequate in itself. It is a legitimate question to ask whether all teachers need to be qualified to the same level in terms of their pedagogy. On the face of it, it does seem unlikely that a narrow set of national qualifications and regulations can be applied meaningfully and equitably to all who teach and train in a sector as diverse as FE. Professionalism must be more than simple and pure regulation. However, while flexibility around qualifications is important, there remain important and irreducible elements to teaching. This suggests that there may be a greater

Qualifications, professionalism and regulation in the FE sector

interdependence between the qualifications-professionalism-regulation trinity than perhaps employers surmise. In short, qualifications ought to provide the wherewithal to allow teachers to progress to further learning and, if desired, higher qualifications. This would give a degree of universality which would appear to be necessary if one wanted a 'profession'. Moreover, such investment would enhance not simply the status of practitioners and their practice but the sector itself.

To sum up, in the FE sector we find that vocational expertise and teacher qualifications have not been articulated at the level of vocational pedagogy in a systematic and comprehensive way. This is the case even though there have been multiple interventions by the state and other agencies to promote professionalism: for example, as we have seen in the previous section, in regard to qualifications, infrastructure, professional body and CPD (Lucas 2004, Hodgson 2015). As a result, the following key challenges emerge:

- The marketization of the sector model may be an impediment to state intervention. Through what Crowther and Lucas (2016) call the logic of incorporation, areas of market interest were overdeveloped while areas such as teaching and learning, professionalism and the curriculum were neglected.
- Not having an articulated pedagogy could contribute to the public perception of the lack of parity between FE practitioners and school and university teachers.
- The lack of public recognition, which in turn undermines legitimacy of VET expertise, also demotes the aspiration of the sector vis a vis those other educational sectors.

The idea of 'dual professionalism'

The relation between the qualifications, professional development and mandatory or self-regulating protocols of a VET practitioner is hidden behind the concept that has come to headline professionalism in the sector: dual professionalism. This concept, developed most visibly by IfL, has continued to be a term of use. It refers to the ways in which vocational teachers need to combine the professionalism associated with a particular occupational field and the professionalism related to becoming an expert teacher or tutor (Robson 1998). It allows the dichotomy of teacher and vocational expert to co-exist in the practitioner's practices. It distinguishes the VET practitioner from a teacher who is an academic expert, to whom the concept does not apply. However, it does not ultimately articulate the

VET expertise in a meaningful way. It simply names it as an element for vocational teachers.

The concept of dual professionalism raises a number of questions. How do we know who is a 'dual professional'? Is there specific training needed to provide skills that industry wants in a learning environment? Does that change in the workplace or can that also be a learning environment in the fullest sense of that word? If so, does it require a specific pedagogy? Is a teacher needed? If so, what sort of teacher? Dual professionalism as set out in the *Further Education Teachers' Qualifications (England) Regulations 2007* was itself meant to leap the chasm of the teacher practitioner. However, it did not spell out what 'industry expert' meant, nor even attempt to develop what such professional pedagogic practice would be: there was no core expertise developed that would announce what it is that a dual professional would do differently in practice from a lecturer teaching A levels, for example. This is why the teacher unions' submissions to CAVTL raised the concerns of vocational lecturers around Initial Teacher Training and CPD.

We can, however, focus on how the concept of dual professionalism is understood in the current policy context and evaluate its implications and related challenges. An example of work in progress around such points is the Teach Too Project. One of the aims of the programme is to evidence what dual professionalism looks like. It makes no substantive assumptions about the components of dual professionalism (other than a practitioner is a teacher and a vocational expert of some description). Instead, it supports the idea that the relations between employers and colleges, industry experts and college practitioners will develop through the

The Teach Too programme and dual professionalism

What is the Teach Too programme?

Commissioned and funded by the Education and Training Foundation, the Teach Too project was delivered by the Institute of Education (UCL) and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP). Building on the recommendation of the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning Report, Teach Too intended to explore models of collaborative partnership between employers and providers at practitioner level, in the co-design, delivery and assessment of VET programmes. With the aim of developing recommendations for a national framework, the project evaluated 17 Demonstration Models, and over 40 Development Projects over two phases.

Now in its third phase Teach Too models include:
- industry professionals teaching in provider or workplace environments, and/or contributing to curriculum development, whilst continuing to work;
- promoting the practice of teachers and trainers updating their industry experience;
- helping to build the 'two-way street'– genuinely collaborative arrangements between employers and providers.

See http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Teach-Too-Phase-1-Report.pdf for the Phase 1 report of the project.

programme's projects into a potential framework for an explicit identification of dual professionalism. This in turn bears on relations and practices.

Guile, using Teach Too Programme as an example and a vehicle for dual professionalism, attempts to define the concept and what this means for a model of practice and development. For example, he claims that:

… what dual professionalism shows is that collaborative expertise is a situated accomplishment developed through the organization of, and the participation in, work … (Seminar 2 ATL/PESGB 13.03.2015)

This basic definition can be unpacked and developed as a significant statement of intent. It is at the heart of the Teach Too strategy of building on existing practice, rather than establishing a new national framework, but it also relies on an immersive understanding of VET expertise. The concept introduced remains one 'in formation': that is, it was, and would be, an outcome of a way of working. Its potential development was envisaged via the criteria of *arrangements*, *activities*, *outcomes and impacts* (ETF 2016) in defining effective Teach Too practice. Very simply *'arrangements'* consisted in how colleges related to employers in bringing together industry expertise and FE practitioner expertise. In short, this highlighted the need for collaborative expertise. The types of *'activities'* learners engage in are those not only located in a vocational teaching and learning context, but those supported by active involvement from employers' staff. This was understood as developing a clear line of sight to work and learners' active engagement. Finally, *'outcomes and impacts'* refer to what happens and what is produced by such working relations and collaborative learning. The idea is that by building on existing practice, Teach Too projects not only identifies these principles, but through them facilitates and enable 'dual professionalism' to emerge, albeit within the parameters of the project aims, which are, more precisely, to develop links to industry experts.

The further development and formalization of dual professionalism via the eventual establishment of a national framework for Teach Too aspires to:

- Offer England (and arguably the rest of the UK) a way to demonstrate the merits of our approach to VET which reflects the character of our labour market and economy (i.e. no longer presenting ourselves as deficient compared with other European countries).

A concept "in formation" that builds on existing practices and relies on an immersive, collaborative understanding of VET expertise

- Provide new and broader career pathways and strategies for up-skilling of the existing and future workforce.
- Demonstrate to colleges, providers, employers, learners, regions etc. the benefits that partnership and collaboration can offer everyone.
- Show that collaborative expertise is a situated accomplishment developed through the organization of and the participation in work.

To sum up, the Teach Too programme takes an immersive approach to dual professionalism that aspires to result in a national framework capable of developing the concept in the wider context of current workforce concerns.

However, this agenda relies on finding agreement that dual professionalism is a concept that will be characterised by practice rather than by definition. It would also require that the fluidity of practices could be articulated in a form of expertise that the public could understand, that government policy could support and that employers would pay due rewards for. One of the issues, then, is that the Teach Too programme adopts an approach to dual professionalism that concentrates on dual professional activity, taking as a point of departure the way in which colleges, providers and employers work with one another. Through the programmes's projects, colleges, providers and employers work together in a variety of ways. The question is whether these are new or pre-existing relations. Are they developed simply because of the project and the funding? With the project being agnostic about dual professionalism, it is hard to see what it will discover other than practices that may (or may not) fit with the idea of 'teacher' and 'vocational expert' being related. For example, how far do the arrangements impact on college/provider roles? How far do they impact on contractual employment relations? How far do they change current practices beyond the project? Is their impact sustainable or strategic?

As a result of the programme's approach, the current arrangements for visiting experts in colleges are *ad hoc* and not systematic. In a deregulated context this measure is now dependent on gaining access to experts, on how they can be used in an educational context, as well as on the needs and capacity of the employer. In some colleges the model of a single contract of pay and conditions for all staff would bear on 'what' a dual professionalism is and 'who' dual professionals are. In turn this necessarily impacts current or future practices, with severe limitations on the notion

of a dual professional, particularly as it relates to public intelligibility around the role. In addition, both the sector's development of a workforce saturated in casualisation and the proliferation of short-term measures represent serious obstacles to a project looking at concrete examples of professional practice. At the same time, the human resources model of compliant employee professionalism always looms large in current collaborative arrangements. Here workforce development, CPD and the capacity of the workforce itself are delimited by short term and mandatory training needs, which are not necessarily related to the development of expertise in the field. Finally, because the programme works without an underpinning concept, it would be hard to know if the model(s) it eventually finds or proposes are sustainable or even consistent. Arguably, suggesting that practice itself determines the concept of dual professionalism is leaving too much to circumstance, since if practice varies then so does dual professionalism.

Next to these programme-specific challenges, there are a number of broader issues with the emergence, the maintenance and the refinement of dual professionalism that are not fully reflected upon in Teach Too. The most distinctive - and unique to the skills sector (including HE) - is that skills, practical expertise, or work-based practice are tacit and developed, applied and shared in particular contexts. Such skills and abilities are changeable and continually developing to not only match the needs and cultures of practice, but also to meet explicitly the demands of new technologies, research developments and new products. The fundamental issue here is that such practices are under-theorised in the UK context. At best, they are conceived as local, contextualised practices, with no suggestion that they can be either codified or brought into a broader conceptual framework. The Teach Too project aims to develop those practices into a set of local frames of reference. On the other hand, such practices could be seen as potentially being mapped by a frame that is already constructed and informed by other vocational systems. For example, Winch (2015) has developed a transparency tool that does precisely that. Such a tool offers an expansive framework for VET curricula but is not prescriptive. Rather the intention is to provoke discussion of choices and consequences at key stages of curriculum design, and by implication to prompt justification of such choices. A key challenge remainsto create the conditions for those who develop policy and skills to discuss the differences in these approaches and the potential benefits of each. Without such discussions and debates we are blindly facing consequences of *ad hoc* policy formation and implementation.

Broader issues that remain unanswered: codifying contextualised practices into a broader conceptual framework

There are further concerns as well with how the sector can relate to the aim of teaching occupational skills and competences. That is, how can vocational lecturers relate to the occupational practices and realities found in the workplace? The change to apprenticeships has, on the one hand, moved the assessment of those competences to the workplace environment. On the other hand, apprenticeship frameworks are too plastic to ensure that what is being assessed in one occupational area is at the same level as another. How the new Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education can square this circle is a moot point.

Furthermore, any new institution or qualification does not change the relationship of the vocational lecturer in the college to workplace skills and dispositions. Until this relationship is better forged, either through a systematic industrial updating of the professional development model or by better articulated competences for 'vocational expertise', the consequent slippage due to different assumptions and ambitions will mean that the workforce capacity is uneven and undeveloped. The CAVTL aim of learning in vocational areas to be within 'the line of sight to work' is an example of how a physical relationship is seen to provide a solution for conceptual coherence. While one could see the line of sight to work as being necessary the idea that it is sufficient is misguided. Without explicating exactly how and what is being taught, facilitated, and assessed, the notion is too insubstantial, on its own, to sustain systematic skill development.

The final point around the practical requirements of dual professionalism would be that there is a difficulty in access to workplace practices for vocational lecturers. Again, this is related to the lack of credibility and authority of vocational education and training itself. In most cases such access is only bought because a business case has been made or successful innovation in a product and/or firm's development (Rolls Royce, Apple and Silicon Fen) is then seen to value such relations and innovations around training and professional development. However, these latter examples are inapplicable to firms outside of this trajectory or at best will apply to outliers precisely because the most firms demand a business case for access to workplace training and learning.

The voice of professionals (for example, through the ATL and University and College Union submissions to CAVTL) showed that vocational lecturers wanted better access to workplace learning environments. CPD is important to these teachers to the extent that they engage with a wide variety of additional activities regardless of legislative requirements or

support offered by their employing college. For teachers maintaining subject and occupational expertise was either very important (83%) or important (17%) (Broad 2013), and subject and/or occupational updating was the most common reason for engaging with CPD. As yet however, there are no clear mechanisms or financial arrangements which would allow this to take place in a systematic way.

An examination of what teachers actually do sheds light on the complex nature of CPD activities. There is little doubt that there are avenues for professional development but they are often voluntary, fragmented, and *ad hoc* (Broad 2016). In fact some aspects of vocational knowledge are accessed through trade and/or professional publications. Others access their occupation through networks and contacts. Practitioners attend short non-accredited workshops or courses which may be offered by manufacturers or professional associations. Informal relations with university departments may also play a small part in engaging vocational practitioners. The fact remains, however, that none of these channels are systematised or joined up which is what a high quality and sustainable skills sector would demand.

Moreover, on the ground the reality is that a key reason for doing CPD is to maintain professional connections and update specialist knowledge and skills (Broad 2016). This meant CPD occurred largely outside colleges through work experience (during holidays or through part-time work), reading trade and professional literature, and through skill competitions, which provide the chance to network and try out the latest products and techniques. Prescribed and generic CPD can often be seen as irrelevant or a chore. Broad (2016) provides evidence for a more differentiated and practice-based approach as her focus on the tacit dimension in vocational expertise points to the range of different conceptions of the levels of required theoretical and procedural knowledge which vocational teacher training mediates between.

Finally, the issue of recruitment is an issue: people joining FE from industry, acquire expertise in pedagogy, only for a few years later to find out that their professional or vocational expertise has decayed. This ties in the unrefined notions of dual professionalism and Teach Too with the real practical world of workforce recruitment and retention. The problem is that a recent survey of NEU-ATL members revealed that 70% of respondents contemplate leaving the sector (Survey of English FE College members 2018) which suggests that failing to elaborate a professionalised

workforce strategy that informatively brings in industry, colleges as employers, trade unions will impact on future ambitions in the sector.

An immersive approach to dual professionalism may only offer England a way to demonstrate the merits of an approach to VET which reflects the very character and working practices of the English labour market and economy. But we also need to provide strategies for the up-skilling of the existing and future workforce based on current assumptions. We have seen that without theoretical elaboration this would be like looking for needle a haystack. And, indeed, any needles found may not look the same! There needs to be some indication of what good vocational pedagogy *should* look like, in the absence of clear exemplars.

The localism, fragmentation and ad hoc solutions that characterise the current approaches to dual professionalism can be seen as having an impact at several levels: due to failing to provide a coherent definition of the key concepts of dual professionalism to a substantial lack of clarity on how teacher and industry networks could be developed. Currently, there are no models or plans for such a network, only small projects (ET Foundation Professional Exchange) or ambitions (Teach Too project or the Two-Way Street). Until there is further work on exactly how teachers, industries, occupational and teacher professional associations can work together the landscape looks very uneven.

To sum up the development of dual professionalism would and should have encompassed the Teach Too programme and recognised that it aimed for a limited engagement with employers and industry. We need to develop collaborative projects that tie in to the broader and deeper concerns around workforce identity and practice itself; otherwise it will not have the desired learning outcomes and changes in practice that we need to develop a high skilled VET workforce and sector.

Concluding remarks

We are left with a number of questions rather than answers. We believe we have yet to develop a sufficiently clear direction of travel for key ideas and practices in the sector. We need to ask:

How can and how should vocational teachers and trainers develop and refresh their subject specialist and pedagogical expertise in the light of the context of work and workplace learning? We do not know.

Do FE and skills institutions provide appropriate support to new and experienced practitioners and to those who work part time? No.

How much CPD goes on 'under the radar' as teachers and trainers seek their own ways to maintain their professional connections? 60% report no CPD is evident to them (ET Foundation Survey 2017).

Can we even begin to answer these questions without a more fundamental debate about the nature of vocational knowledge and the interplay between theory and practice that underpins vocational learning? No.

Emerging from this chapter we suggest that the following common strands or issues should be highlighted:

The continuing lack of strong public recognition for and clarity about the purpose of the FE sector leads to problems in determining the nature and function of a professional body. There are currently no grounds to believe that current ambitions (e.g. the promises attached to T levels which are the new technical qualifications at the centre of the new technical education overhaul) will provide a solution to the challenges discussed. For example, there are serious concerns about the future shape of the sector, given the current and imminent funding cuts associated with austerity policies and the difficulties in finding the space and time for professional learning in this context. The recent budget allocation of funds to the future development of T-levels and Institutes of Technology are minor compared to previous reforms and show no evidence of a settlement being reached around the purpose and ambitions of further education. Moreover, there is need to debate what level (whether national, regional or local) is most appropriate to discuss the nature of a professional body and to whom such a body would be accountable.

Continuing professional learning is vital for those working in the FE sector, particularly given the changing shape of workplaces and FE itself, and there appears to be a *desire to see this as a right rather than simply as a bureaucratic obligation.* This requires articulating exactly what competences, abilities and dispositions are needed. This is the case not only when it comes to defining the relation between industry and vocational pedagogy (itself a lacuna in most debates) but also in relation to the ways of working of FE practitioners. Some now talk of 'connective professionals' who have to relate to other areas of the economy and community in order to do their work most effectively (Hodgson et al. 2017). In general there is also a difference of opinion about how necessary teaching qualifications are for those who work in the FE sector. This is coupled with difficulties of ensuring that any required qualifications are

flexible enough to encompass the very diverse workforce that makes up the FE sector.

Dealing with fragmentation and lack of co-ordination in the FE sector. Most importantly we have pointed out that there exists a dynamic range of bottom-up organisations, projects and networks that champion ideas that would be of interest to a developing professionalism in the FE sector.

It is important to understand how a fragmented policy context and *ad hoc* solutions bear on the future for teaching and learning such as the possibilities and challenges presented by technology. Changes to the landscape of work (like the growth of a freelance economy and more people working beyond traditional retirement age) plus rapid advances in ICT technologies (including augmented reality) might create new demand for vocational education and training. These technologies are triggering new forms of knowledge acquisition which are more online and collaborative. So, our concept of 'teaching' needs to be expanded to encompass pedagogical strategies such as coaching and facilitating (in a direction that recalls the advocacy of learner centred pedagogy in the 1970s and 1980s). The online availability of knowledge might mean the growth of amateurs. This raises concerns about ensuring quality in disseminating of knowledge and future curricula via Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). The Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) reviewed the relation of new digital technologies to further education and skills. As a result, they have moved to a pragmatic position of arguing for further investment to provide more efficient resources. At the same time, they argued that MOOCs are a part of the answer to developing skills in the economy whilst also needing adaptation four use. Workforce capacity though was found to be individualised and *ad hoc* (FELTAG 2014). A systematic workforce development plan, however, remained not an option. FELTAG wanted to encourage a more fluid and organic network of colleges, providers and agencies to stimulate such growth in capacity. Whether this is possible in such a complex and competitive market is questionable. Other countries, for example Singapore, have opted for a systematic infrastructure development around digital technology and education.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize a concern about the 'policy amnesia' of national policy makers and the importance of capturing the 'policy memory' that resides with those who have worked or researched in the FE sector over many years. This is essential in order to avoid repeating past mistakes and to encourage genuine policy learning.

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2. How do key agents that support professional practice work together?

How do employers, colleges and providers work together? Can examples of working together be used to construct a coherent framework for the sector? What is the relationship between higher and further education? How does this impact on the sector overall?

In the previous chapter we have discussed the Teach Too project stressing its significance in attempting to introduce a theoretical underpinning to the idea of dual professionalism. The architect of this approach, Guile, sees dual professionalism as emerging from the relationships between employers and colleges. We start this section by providing examples of how this practice could be shaped. Since incorporation in 1993 new ways of working in colleges or new locations of colleges within the skills landscape have been more at the level of potential (through offering promises of what may happen) rather than being effective and systematically established practices. The examples below are also potential but they are derived from a theoretically grounded approach. However, because they are project led they are not developed within what we will be referred to as a 'settlement' involving the structures, stakeholders, or practices of the further education and skills sector.

Working together as being inspired to innovate by:

- lecturers and/or trainers broadening their skill base by working in college and/or provider businesses and employers role playing customers for college provider businesses to provide informed feedback
- lecturers and/or trainers and employers work shadowing colleagues with other specialisms to understand how to incorporate those specialisms more effectively in course design and delivery

Employers, Colleges, Providers working together by:

- employers running workshops to up-skill staff in new occupation specific working practices and technologies
- employers contributing to modules to cross train learners in related VET specialisms
- employers serving as mentors for students (face to face and online) to deepen their practical knowledge and skill
- employers working together to identify VET curriculum content they require in existing courses and set benchmark for VET standards
- employers providing guest speakers for courses and members of panels for plenary events
- lecturers and trainers running workshops to up-skill employers to teach their specialism in college and/or provider environments
- lecturers and trainers using employer inputs to courses as a form of continuous CPD
- lecturers and trainers planning and sequencing employer inputs into courses and employers providing specialist inputs at agreed designated places into courses
- employers bringing industry standard machines and equipment into teaching sessions to model current work practices and their use of technologies, and lecturers and trainers noting how to revise module content to take account of these advances
- employers work shadowing lecturers and/or trainers to grasp the relationship between curriculum and pedagogic theory and design and delivery of courses, and lecturers and trainers work shadowing employers to update their knowledge of current industry practices

Working together to co-design and co-deliver courses by:

- employers, lecturers and trainers creating project briefs that integrate theory and practice in ways relevant to the industry and that also incorporate awarding bodies learning outcomes
- employers, lecturers and trainers providing feedback to students on their progress with their assignments
- employers, lecturers and trainers assessing the outcomes of briefs against awarding body and industry standards. For learners, there are enhanced opportunities to become acclimatised to the workplace and to focus directly on skills for employment beyond the requirements of a formal qualification
- employers, lecturers and trainers evaluating the scope and relevance of the briefs in relation to changes in industry and developments in theory

Some see such developments as potentially jettisoning the notion of a national sector entirely. Hodgson and Spours (2015) stress the importance of a facilitative national policy framework that sets national standards, priorities and objectives but encourages a climate of long term planning, area wide funding and jointly owned performance measures related to learner progression and destination. Nevertheless, there is an argument that examples such as these could actually provide a stimulus to clarify benchmark practices- aligned to the ET Foundation professional standards- that would represent a significant status shift for college practices vis a vis inspection regimes and self improvement strategies. To sum up, these examples alone do not constitute a sustainable framework to work within. However, they may provide a starting point for future explorations of ambitions for the sector.

The relations between higher and further education

Other key stakeholders for FE are Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) either via teacher training, franchising of courses or as potential partners. FE delivers, and has consistently delivered, around 10% of HE provision having a considerable share of the educational market thereby. But while the institutional relationships are fairly well understood and can be mapped, the power imbalance and the way in which HE fundamentally controls post compulsory educational discourse is a deep issue that has not been fully addressed. This is directly linked to the discursive separation of FE from HE as the former is not considered part of academic forms of education. The gradual marketisation of education, including FE colleges becoming autonomous institutions, has accelerated their separation from HE as institutions and are now in some competition. For example, the trend to reengineer polytechnic status or to seek university status– in the form of degree awarding powers– reveals the ongoing contestation of what it is to be an FE college and of how FE colleges can prosper. Whilst FE is basically excluded from academic education, attempts to link FE and HE– such as through the (failed) 14-19 Diploma routes, Foundation Degrees and STEM subjects– have been ineffective. Limited linkage measures are simply insufficient when the FE and HE sectors are so disjunct. The neo-liberal view of the state has undermined the role the FE sector could have developed. Neo-liberalism focuses on the idea of employer interests shaping provision rather than considering the skill formation needs which people and the economy require. Employer led approaches have not produced the required skills and/or a properly functioning occupational labour market (Brockman 2007, Sissons and Jones 2014).

Not a national policy framework: but a starting point and a stimulus to clarify benchmark practices of the sector

Although not often discussed, any real and meaningful reform of the FE sector requires challenging the HE control of discourse. A current instance of this HE interest is in work based learning and related practices. However, such interest does not extend to supporting FE structures as work-based learning is usually seen as an alternative or a supplement to part time work in HE provision. A prerequisite for useful and sustainable change would be that the conversation would go both ways with equal respect in either direction. This is necessary for anything the FE does to have any impact. In this perspective, we can examine references to the 'Higher Education in Further Education project' (HE in FE) which promises to represent a significant development on this issue of HE and FE relationships, particularly as there is an attempt to build college capacity to deliver distinctive higher-level routes.

The HE in FE Scholarship Project is an AoC (Association of Colleges) run project from 2014 to 2017 with funding of 2.75 million. The project works with 46 colleges in developing an ethos around scholarship that is unique to FE but which has the counterpart research model in HE of academic scholarship. The project draws on Boyer's (1996) conceptualisation of four scholarships: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. This framework envisages a holistic and cyclical approach and has proved influential across HE systems (Boyd 2013) and across domains of university scholarly life. Through these concepts the AoC project seeks to design a 'College Higher Education (HE) Scholarship Framework' and effectively enhance 'the three-way partnership between the learning provider, the learner and the employer" (CAVTL 2013 p.19). The project thus uses these instruments to provide structural support to the 46 colleges during the lifetime of the project and build capacity for sustainable roles and activities. Such an approach reflects the need to develop a hybrid model of research in FE and but also to empower colleges to deliver their specific expertise and focus outside of the strictures and different focus of HE institutions, employers and work based learning institutions. However, importantly like many other previous worthwhile projects (such as Teach Too or Two-Way Street) the HE in FE scholarship project is not supported by explicit policy position papers and neither does it have any legislative or funding guarantees.

Current HEI and FE relations are phrased in partnership terms, namely, there are FE partners for a HEI. In reality, the relationship is usually one in which HEI are paid to validate the HE qualification and the FE partners do what the HEI instructs them to. FE partner autonomy and input is very limited. Moreover, these HEI and FE partnership arrangements often have

the consequence that there is no differentiation in provision for school leavers on the one hand and those undertaking the qualification from a background of work experience and/or as part of work based learning on the other. What needs to be much clearer in the HE and FE relationship here is who should take the lead role in the area of vocational expertise. It is important to appreciate that this difficulty about who should take the lead is fundamentally connected to a lack of clarity over how vocational expertise should be characterized. Clarity about the lead role and the very nature of the activity itself is an essential prerequisite for planning the delivery of effective vocational education.

What we effectively see is a gradual creep of HE into FE, such as HEI controlled delivery of Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). Accurate estimates of the amount of this and rate of increase are hard to obtain but around 10% of HE is delivered in FE (AoC 2015). Crucially this delivery is not coupled with support to communities of practice of the kind that can be found around subjects in HE, and schedules remain the same as in HE. We need to understand the way in which current arrangements rather than bridging further the divide between FE and HE and result in enclaves of HE within FE institutions. Furthermore, the HE monopolization of qualifications gives them a commanding role in determining what happens within these enclaves. This state of affairs militates against a main governmental intention of bringing HE and FE closer together (Feather 2011). One should not underestimate the way in which power imbalance and unequal discourse between HE and FE impact upon initial vocation education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET). In reality HEIs frequently supply FE with what they think FE needs rather than responding to what is required by the actual situation. This problem is compounded by the fact that very many people in HEIs (even in vocational areas) have no direct experience of FE and often assume it resembles HE far more than it does. For example, teaching training courses aimed at staff in FE and HE in many HEIs have little or no coverage of issues raised by primarily practice based disciplines and nothing about the overall curriculum integration of activities aimed at improving literacy and/or numeracy.

Since 2016 there has been a lifting of restrictions on awarding powers in FE and under current policy trends, further expansion of HE delivery is likely, with the consequent possibility for universities to further colonise areas of vocational education and training which were traditionally the preserve of apprenticeships or of vocational schools and colleges. These developments must be understood in the context of an expanding HE provision (which, as

we will address in the next chapter, sets limits tackling skill inequalities) (Wolf 2015, CIPD 2015). The result of these developments is that FE is an increasingly low priority area of expenditure while there is a growing lack of learner choice in a context where not much education outside university is seen as a choice at all (Wolf 2015 CIPD 2015). It is therefore not clear that this is a desirable sort of growth for the sector and is definitely one that does not lead vocational education to have anything like parity of esteem and status. If it had a more equal esteem relationship with HE then challenging the rise of HE in FE would be much easier. An important issue here is to understand why those who support VET do not see parity of esteem as an issue and to think about how their perceptions could be changed.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we tackled the vexed issue of who should take the lead in vocational expertise. In doing so we pointed to examples of how colleges, employers and providers can work together. However, we stressed that these examples do not and cannot amount to a unified framework that would support the professionalism of the sector. In the second part of the chapter key themes that emerged are the continuing confusion, endemic disagreement about terminology, and HEI control of post-compulsory education. Our discussion challenged the long-standing dominance of higher education over the content of teacher training courses and argued that when FE and HE cooperated on work-based programmes (such as foundation degrees) the HEI was usually the governing partner. It should also be questioned whether it is appropriate to assume that any one stakeholder should take the lead since there are good reasons for thinking that VET requires a more relational approach. We saw the HE in FE project as attempting a hybrid solution which had a limited effect on challenging the role of HE in and its impact upon the FE sector. Confusion and disagreement about terminology are central concerns for any project that strives to authentically define the sector and foster VET professionalism. No real progress will be made in the absence of significant agreement about terminology, so we should try to get everyone to settle on the usage of a standard set of terms. For instance, we should try to get agreement on a basically sensible view of the relationship between the terms 'knowing how' and 'knowing that'. Recent work that is based on the HE in FE scholarship project could offer significant progress in this area if it was tied to exploring these wider questions.

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3. How does English VET compare to other models in other countries?

We know that there is substantial variation among European countries reflecting the differing status of vocational education as well as greater labour market regulations. Placing the English VET landscape (FE colleges, private training providers, university technical colleges and universities) in a wider comparative context we seek to explore commonalities and divergences in VET systems. What do we do right? What could we do better? Can we benchmark the conceptual and practical state of play of English VET? We focus on these questions by connecting them to the key issue of skills inequality and to how different VET systems succeed or fail at prompting their reduction.

VET systems vary greatly (OECD 2015) with some adopting school-based general and vocational programs in different institutions (Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Finland, Greece, Italy, Japan, Poland and Russia), some comprehensive school based general and vocation provision in one institution (Canada, Norway, Sweden and USA), some tracked school based general education and dual systems of apprenticeship (Austria, Germany and Switzerland) and others mixed systems (Australia, Belgium, Denmark, England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, Spain, the Netherlands and New Zealand). Inequalities in adult skills in England are high by comparison with other OECD countries especially in numeracy and among younger age groups (Green et al. 2014). This matters because poor numeracy undermines personal skill formation and skills inequalities are one of the drivers of wage inequalities and can undermine social cohesion. Where do these inequalities come from?

Skills inequality in a comparative context

We know from previous research using data from PISA that more unequal skills at age 15 are likely to occur in countries where there is early selection, a high proportion of privately funded schools, a lack of standardization in curricula and assessment, and in federal systems where funding is devolved to the regional level (Hanushek and Woßmann 2006, Hanushek and Woßmann 2010, Schütz et al. 2008). However, much less is known about the contribution of the next phase of education and training to skills distribution and about how different types of provision may affect this.

One theory (Boudon 1974), generally suggests that the more branching points there are in an education system the more likely there are to be secondary stratification effects whereby students from different social backgrounds make differential choices about educational pathways, which will tend to increase inequalities. Moreover, it is important to understand some limits that higher education provision encounters in mitigating skills inequality. In fact stratification theory suggests that as participation grows in higher education, social inequality in access will be initially maintained as higher social groups gain disproportionately from the increasing number of available places (Raftery and Hout 1993). As participation amongst children from higher social classes reaches saturation levels, further expansion will favour children from lower social groups more. However the equalising effects from this are likely to be partially offset by the increasing heterogeneity of higher education (Carnoy 2011, Marginson 2016) with higher status students being disproportionately represented in the more prestigious institutions and study programmes (Lucas 2001). This means that as participation rises it will increase inequality in vocational and technical abilities but after the majority start participating, inequality will come down. However, the lack of participation among the least skilled will mean that these positive effects are likely to be small. What part does upper secondary education and training (for 16 to 19-year-olds) play in increasing or reducing skills inequality? And what upper secondary system characteristics might help mitigate inequality?

A country which receives great praise for its model of apprenticeships is Germany and while we will not be able to explore the German system in depth, we can point to the importance of understanding the particular characteristics of VET systems within their particular political, social and historical context. In this direction Busemeyer (2015) has convincingly argued that starting from similar positions England, Germany and Sweden have developed very different VET models that relate to their political views on welfare more broadly. The English model has moved to greater neo-liberalisation over the post war years and this is due to the preponderance of politician influenced by neoliberal ideas of how to run the economy in parliament. In this perspective, the Blair years are considered as continuous with this trend by accepting market and financial assumptions particularly in the post-Thatcher period. By contrast the Swedish model with its strong social democratic characteristics has sought a settlement around VET and welfare which ensures that the state plays a leading role. In the case of VET the state ensures that the school curriculum coheres with VET policy and practice. In another way the strong Christian democratic tradition in Germany has led to settlement around state, trade unions and employers in the concept of co-determination (*Bestimmung*). Busemeyer's conclusion is that these traditions contain either socialist or Christian emphasis on the mediation of potentially conflicting interests that he argues is absent in the English context.

VET systems must be understood within their particular political, social and historical context.

Generally, we need to stress that while we know much about the effects on skills inequality of the different structures and practices in education prior to the end of lower secondary schooling, further research (such as Green et al. 2015 and Green and Pensiero 2016) is essential for understanding the challenges facing specific VET systems. Making international comparisons can enable us to see what our assumptions are when it comes to VET and whether we should review these.

What are the particular challenges facing the English system?

OECD research (Kuczer et al. 2016) shows that at every qualification level low basic skills are more common among young people in England than in many other countries. For example, in England 48% of 16-34 year olds have a highest qualification below UK level 2 in comparison to an OECD average of 29.8%. For levels 2 and 3 England scores higher at 20.7% than the OECD average of 15%. Large numbers of adults between 20 and 45 have short cycle professional education and training as their highest qualification. One third of 16-19 year olds have low basic skills (with weak performance in both literacy and numeracy) which is three times higher than in strongly performing countries. 16-19 year olds also appear to develop their skills slowly, as English 15 year olds have similar literacy and numeracy levels to their counterparts in countries such as Germany, Denmark, Austria and Japan but by age 20-22 their literacy and numeracy skills have fallen behind. This finding suggests that the VET sector has an important role to play in increasing literacy and numeracy if it can be seen by learners that there are clear occupational benefits in doing so. There are several factors to consider in order to understand these findings. One reason for this limited progress is the fact that many young people opt out of education and training relatively early with England, having a low completion rate for upper secondary education. Another is the confusing and rapidly changing array of sometimes low quality vocational programmes (Musset and Field 2013 p.28) which suggests that workplace training lacks sufficient quality assurance mechanisms. This lack results from the fact there is no general framework for the placement of students in workplaces, quality assurance mechanisms are discretionary and depend on the approach of individual institutions (ibid. p.80). Musset and Field claim that when quality standards are not clearly set out and links between workplace and classroom training are not explicitly made, it is harder to realise the full advantages of workplace training.

Foundational degrees appear not to have established themselves in the way that was initially hoped. It requires time to establish qualifications in the minds of students, employers and providers. Taking this into account a strategic expansion of postsecondary vocational provision would recommend making good use of existing qualifications rather than inventing new ones (Musset and Field 2013 p.50). There is a significant space which is yet to be mapped around technical qualifications and unaccredited expertise (Musset and Field 2013, Fazekas and Field 2013a

Key obstacles are low completion rates, system fragmentation, insufficient quality assurance mechanisms and clear links between workplace and classroom

At every qualification level, low basic skills are more common among young people in England than in many other countries

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and 2013b). For example, in Switzerland expertise can be developed over periods ranging from 6 months to 2 years, in Germany it could lead to professional examinations such as those conferring Meister status and in the USA it can be acquired by 65 million computer based routes. However, in the UK there appeared to be major obstacles to developing high quality VET some of which are connected to the shortcomings of foundation degrees.

> Key challenges in post-secondary vocational education:
>
> - nomenclature
> - lack of work based learning models
> - weak institutional basis
> - failures to meet the needs of adults
> - problematic transitions and articulation
> - insufficient recognition of prior learning

Which factors have the greatest impact on skills inequality?

Research from the Centre for Research on Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES) focused on the issue of skill inequality by using data from the OECD *Survey of Adult Skills* and other sources (Green at al. 2014). Previous research on upper secondary education and training (Lasonen and Young 1998, Raffe et al. 1998 and 2001) suggests that where there is greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational tracks this is likely to reduce skills inequality. Countries with strong traditions of vocational education are more likely to achieve this through differentiated dual systems of high quality apprenticeships. In contrast countries with weak vocational traditions are more likely to achieve this by developing more integrated school based systems which combine general and vocational programs in a single institution with integrated examination frameworks. The LLAKES research confirms this and finds that factors tending to reduceskills inequality are having compulsory core curricula (including study of mathematics and the national language) and greater parity of esteem between the academic and the vocational.

Parity of esteem between vocational and academic tracks as well as compulsory core curricula including maths and national language reduce skills inequality

The LLAKES study explores changes in inequality in literacy and numeracy skills after lower secondary schooling. These are estimated by an analysis combining the PISA 2000 survey (participants aged 15) and the OECD *Survey of Adult Skills* conducted 11 years later (participants aged 25-29). The study measures both inequalities in skills outcomes and skills opportunities by comparing skills achievements of those with graduate parents to those with parents with no more than lower secondary education. Findings show that some countries are considerably better than

others in mitigating skills inequality between the ages of 15 and 27. Higher education participation rates have little impact on this inequality. The prevalence of mathematics and national language learning, and completion rates for full upper secondary education have the strongest effects on the mitigation of skills inequalities. High rates of participation in upper secondary education and training with standardized long cycle (2 or more years) tracks leading to International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3 qualifications will reduce skills inequality. In summary this research demonstrates that:

- Countries vary considerably in how far skills inequalities are reduced or increased during this phase.
- The post-16 systems in England and other English speaking countries mitigate skills inequality less than most other countries.
- The skills gaps close most substantially in countries which have dual systems of apprenticeship (three-year apprenticeships combining workplace training with education) and/or high completion rates of full-time (two or more years) upper secondary education and training. Central and eastern European countries are also relatively successful with high level 3 completion and mandatory core learning.
- This appears to be due to the fact that these systems combine three salient characteristics: high rates of completion at full ISCED Level 3, mandatory mathematics and national language learning on all programs, and relative parity of esteem between vocational and academic programs.

This suggests that in order to reduce its serious skills gap England needs more standardised pathways through upper secondary education for all 16-18 year olds with high expectations for everyone, and mandatory learning of a high standard of mathematics and English.

Concluding remarks

In this section we examined the English VET system with a particular focus on skills inequality. Different systems are difficult to compare because of their infrastructures but also because of their definitions of what constitutes qualifications, what is meant by vocational, and what people actually thought they were doing. This is why proxies are often used to measure 'similar' effects. The LLAKES analysis stresses our lack of statistical grip on the effects of post secondary or upper secondary education and training. Higher education participation rates do not seem to have much effect on skills inequality. Part of the reason for this is probably because much of the inequality is in the long tail of lower achievers who do not participate. At the same time upper secondary education and training systems seem to be most responsible for changes in skills inequality between the ages of 15 and 27. Dual systems of apprenticeship seem to be best at mitigating skills inequality between the ages of 15 and 27. Other

systems (as in central and eastern European countries) with low rates of early school leaving also seem relatively successful at reducing skills inequality whatever their other systems characteristics. The system characteristic most correlated with inequality mitigation is high rates of completion at the full ISCED Level 3 including type A and B qualifications and ISCED 3 C long (that is 2 years or more) qualifications. The extra 3 years learning maths and the national language may be helping the lower achievers to close the skills gaps.

When measuring such proxies as parental occupation and educational background the UK seems to be actually increasing inequalities rather than reducing them. For England major barriers appear to be a high dropout rate, a low completion rate, short courses and low normative expectations. This raises issues of governance and infrastructure. For instance, do we have the right relationships between colleges and schools and/or colleges and universities let alone colleges and employers? These conclusions also appear to confirm a view that sees the English context on a path dependency model leading to greater marketization and fragmentation in provision (Busemeyer, 2015). A 'path dependency' policy pattern means that decisions taken now are affected by previous choices. This means that future options become continually restricted with respect to the availability of alternative models. Problems and solutions are only seen through the lens of the current dilemmas. Solutions thus become ever smaller, even 'more obvious' as to what needs to be done, but change becomes, ironically, harder. Further, as structures are continually broken up the communities of practice, knowledge and even vocabularies that could join the pieces back together again are lost. Checklists of the kind which respond to the need for better completion rates by raising the participation age, to better literacy and numeracy achievement by making English and mathematics compulsory and to low completion rates by introducing performance league tables for technical vocational qualifications and so on are imagined by the current government to be effective. However, these kind of checklists will produce little benefit without the structures and established normative expectations that would allow a top down policy to work.

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4. How do trade unions and employers support professionalism and skill formation?

There are several questions that arise when we try to understand the way in which unions and employers support professionalism. What value does public money get when it invests in employer engagement projects? What are the effects? What does current practice tell us? With government investing in contributions to increase apprenticeships and in major public projects (such as HS2, Northern Powerhouse) as well as devolving skills funding to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and City Councils are there any signs that these policies are working? Are the FE and HE systems responsive and agile enough to take advantage of the degree of local devolution that is being offered by the current Conservative government?

What are the implications for students, staff, and employers of a radically reshaped FE landscape that will be supported by significantly less public funding? Do employers want localism and devolution and are they willing to make more of a financial contribution to pay for post 16 and 18 skills training? Is the collective leadership of the FE and HE sectors robust and united enough to lead positive change and transformation? Have their leaders used the last five years effectively enough to build trusted partnerships with the LEPs and local authorities so that the sectors leaders are now in a position to influence the design and funding of local commissioning models?

Traditionally FE has its roots in part time study with learning at night school existing alongside work. However, the culture, structure and funding of our education system as well as the global economic and political situation have changed significantly over the last 40 years. Plenty of people in work still undertake professional development and other work related training, often completing their professional qualifications whilst earning. Nevertheless the idea of a significant number of young people (at 16 or 18) choosing to study part time at

the same time as holding down a job, is currently undergoing a revolution. Loans, university tuition fees, bursaries, absence of maintenance grants and the introduction of an apprenticeship levy are all changing the educational landscape.

Up to 1997 the opportunity of a non returnable means tested grant funded university education enabled some to become the first person in their family to go to university and to experience four years of blissfully uninterrupted intellectual enquiry and personal development. Today, this model remains possible only for a handful of students and faces a shift in attitudes in how it is regarded. The majority of students starting university need to earn and learn and when finally they are earning full time, if they have chosen a full time degree course, they must repay the student debt they accrued whilst at university. It is not surprising that a part time university degree course offered in a range of modes (face to face group teaching combined with on line learning) combined with home living and holding down a job is an option chosen by an increasing number of students (Limb 2015). There is a case for the government to do more to promote and support this route to learning and earning. The Open University's campaigns encouraged more students to pursue part time degree courses and combined these with work and other life choices. Government commitment to part time learning would represent a cultural change which would mirror the government's promotion of apprenticeships. It would require embracing the value of part time university degrees and promoting their importance with the same vigour as the pursuit of 3 million apprenticeships.

Next to this changed educational landscape, current challenges and pressing issues need to be understood in the broader context of the English labour market and the unions' position within it. In England there are 52 unions with 6.4 million members. This amounts to around 25% of the workforce and membership is growing proportionally more in the private sector due to the austerity cuts following the financial crisis of 2008. The proportions are currently around 14% in the private sector and 54% in the public sector.What the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and trade union movement aims for is rewarding work in all senses of the term and valuing participation in the world of work. This would be most improved by some forms of ownership in the workplace. However, there are different ways in which this can be achieved (Nowak 2015). There are many low status

but not necessarily low skilled jobs. Secondly, the current experience of work and productivity in terms of economic efficiency is fairly poor. These challenges were explored in the Sweeney Report (2014) from the Smith Institute, which also found high levels of job insecurity and rising levels of anxiety within the workforce. These results emerged at all levels of the labour market and not just in low status work. In a survey of over 4000 workers more than half said work made them feel anxious and stressed (Sweeney 2014 p.30). These concerns are connected to claims that the UK is becoming a low wage economy with median wages stagnating and becoming disconnected from growth (ibid p.44). Additionally elements such as the progressive fragmentation of the labour market, organisational pressures to save costs in a poorly performing economy, and a lack of investment in people and resources all shape the different occupational sectors with little training occuring in the workplace.

In the FE sector itself we witness a growing casualisation and pay and conditions worsening over time. Austerity cuts affected the shape of the sector through the current Area Review process (which aims to rationalise the sector regionally by ending duplicate provision), rationalising the curriculum and encouraging colleges (both FE and Sixth Form colleges) to share services. This is having the unintended outcome of Sixth Form colleges moving to 16-19 Academy status and effectively ending the independent voice of Sixth Form colleges in England. Those colleges will now move back into the Department for Education and end their interest and involvement in adult skills and Tier 4 students (overseas funded students). Most will become a part of multi-academy trusts and develop stronger relations and ties to schools and school governance, for example, through the Regional School Commissioners. It is within this context and these challenges that this chapter will discuss the current role played by unions with a particular focus on Unionlearn.

Unionlearn

Unionlearn is the education, learning and skills arm of the TUC. It was set up in 2006 and is unique in the world. It is almost the only skills organisation to survive today from the many skills bodies created by the then Labour Government. It grew out of a recognition that it made sense to pull together all the TUC's learning and education activities into one distinct organisation. It is governed by a

Board which is elected from the TUC General Council. Although part of the TUC and housed in Congress House it has a distinct identity. It was developed over two years of discussion and modelling of different options. It evolved out of much previous work on education and skills spanning several decades (Wilson 2015). A review of its first ten years can allow us to cast light on many current skills issues as well as on unions and skills.

Unionlearn has three main purposes:

- support learning in the workplace by managing the Union Learning Fund (ULF)
- train union reps and officers through TUC Education
- develop and argue for policy on all aspects of skills, training and education

Throughout the 90s there was a growing range of activities under the general heading of 'Bargaining for Skills'. This was led by the TUC, and strongly developed in the six TUC regions in England and in the Wales and Scottish TUCs. Much of this activity was funded by regional bodies with this initially being Training and Enterprise Councils and then later Regional Development Agencies (or their Welsh and Scottish equivalents). Some had also been funded by the European Union mainly through the 'Equal' programme of the European Social Fund. The University for Industry (Ufi) also supported union learning as did the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Adult Basic Skills Unit. All this was grouped under the heading of TUC Learning Services. Workplace learning received a major boost with the advent of Union Learning Reps (ULRs) who were formally recognised under the 2002 Employment Act which came into force in April 2003. As a result of this ULRs gained legal rights to paid time off to support workplace learning.

Overall Unionlearn has plainly achieved a great deal with over 2 million learners and 34,000 Learning Reps. TUC Education has trained almost half a million reps. Unionlearn has become an established part of the skills landscape. In 2010 an independent University of Leeds assessment concluded the evaluation of the ULF and Unionlearn was positive with Unionlearn largely meeting its stated objectives and delivering demonstrable benefits for learners,

employers and unions (Stuart et al. 2010). Nevertheless it is important to tackle some key questions that have emerged with respect to Unionlearn.

Has accepting government funding compromised Unionlearn?

McIlroy and Croucher argue that

... training continues to be determined by employers, and strategy by the state. Unions have retreated to 'Employee Development Assistance Programmes'. How that contributes, at least in planned, coordinated fashion, to national training strategy – as distinct from facilitating individual goals – remains questionable. (2013 p.279)

They claim that Unionlearn has been a failure inasmuch as

... there is inadequate evidence that an initiative launched in 1998 [the Union Learning Fund] has meaningfully influenced revitalisation. (ibid.).

An important issue which they raise is whether it makes sense to fund training which should be done by employers when public funding for education is being cut (particularly on the grounds that such training adds value for employers but is of questionable value for employees and benefits union members who are on average not the most disadvantaged). McIlroy and Croucher also challenge the idea that learning has helped revitalise union organisation.

These are fair questions for trade unions but there is room to argue that they do not stand up to scrutiny. For example, one response to these challenges is to stress that training is not determined by employers. The ULF prospectus is drafted jointly by BEIS officials and Unionlearn before being approved by the Unionlearn Board. It invites unions to bid for ULF funding and sets out what kinds of training are being funded. For example, this has meant that in every funding round there has been a very strong emphasis on disadvantaged workers and equality. With regard to the role played by the state it is true that skills strategy continues to be largely determined by the state. However, Unionlearn has arguably helped increase (or at least maintain) union influence over skills strategy.

There were union reps on the 20 Sector Skills Councils and the national UKCES, all of which were supported by Unionlearn. However, there are no union reps on the board of the Institute for Apprenticeships and UKCES has been discontinued by the government. Reflecting on the experience of the decade it seems the existence of Unionlearn helped to lobby ministers or civil servants in two main ways. Firstly through capacity to compile a strong case, including with evidence gained from unions' direct workplace experience. This is something no other organisation can do. Secondly because Unionlearn had become a significant organisation within the skills landscape with strong employer and other stakeholder support. Both factors gave Unionlearn and TUC arguments significant weight.

However, it is necessary to push the discussion forward, for example, by asking what unions can do to improve the quality and the quantity of employer investment in skills. In answering this question attention must be paid to the regulatory framework. There is a vast literature on employer engagement on skills, and most assessments have concluded that strong collective measures are important and that the significant participation from social partners is also very helpful. Neither factor is prevelant in the UK (Wilson 2015). This means that unions need to pursue a twin track strategy. Firstly, continue to press the case for a stronger regulatory framework including social partnership. Secondly, work within the existing framework to make whatever gains are possible. How successful unions are on these two fronts and what Unionlearn has achieved in these respects remains to be established.

Unionlearn between State and employers: the need for a twin-track strategy

If we compare Unionlearn's experience with that of other unions around the world we find that international comparisons paint a mixed picture. There is no other country which has a union body like Unionlearn significantly supported by the state (although Singapore is currently considering a similar body and New Zealand and Norway have ULRs). However, there are many countries where trade union influence on the skills system is much stronger than in the UK. In almost all of the EU, the USA, much of Canada, South Korea and Japan, there are collective skills bodies and measures with strong union involvement in the skills system. Germany and the nordic countries are best known for social partnership but there are other examples such as the construction industry in the USA which has very strong union involvement in the content and management of

the apprenticeship system (Wilson 2015). Our ULRs are widely admired but many other countries would say that their union reps include learning issues as a matter of course. For example, in Germany there are strong national, regional and sectoral agreements or legal rights governing changes to occupations, apprenticeships and the curriculum, and union reps would be involved in those institutions and practices, as well as enjoying other rights. There have been significant debates around the fact that trade unions have suffered membership loss in 'good' times. We can see that there have been variations in European unions with the picture not being invariably positive elsewhere (since, for example, Germany has experienced a loss of trade union members). Instances such as the rise in membership of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) membership in England show that the picture is more complex than is often suggested.

Unionlearn and the skills agenda

There is a common view that unions are not very interested in education and skills as their main concerns are 'bread and butter' pay and conditions issues. This is inaccurate as there has been a long history of union engagement with wider issues. In the UK the history of union involvement in skills arguably begins with the mediaeval guilds which collectively defended their occupations largely through regulating apprenticeships. The early unions of the Industrial age often had 'Educate, Agitate, Organise' or similar slogans on their banners. The Workers' Educational Association, the Plebs League and the National Council of Labour Colleges (all working closely with the TUC and various unions) took up the challenge of providing education for working people winning government support from 1907. By 1943 the TUC had evolved a detailed plan for post war education (similar to the Beveridge plan for post war welfare which was largely drafted with TUC support) that included calls to end fees for secondary schools, raise the school leaving age to 14, introduce an allowance for attending secondary school, and extend the provision of technical training. The 1944 Education Act and the Employment and Training Act of 1948 included many of these demands. The TUC supported the 1964 Industrial Training Act which introduced the levy systems and Industry Training Boards which notably included employer and union representatives. Throughout the 80s and 90s the TUC and unions were heavily involved in the

NVQ system, sought to defend Training Boards, and argued for paid time off, levies, and stronger bargaining rights on training.

Along with this history of showing the variety of forms of union engagement it is important to understand that the union agenda does not spring forth fully formed. It develops through listening to members, and engaging with the skills system and employers. Where unions are excluded from engagement it is surprisingly difficult for them to develop an informed view. It is partly Unionlearn's role to help unions understand the skills system and reflect union experience and demands. Unionlearn achieves this through seminars, conferences, briefing papers and organising meetings for unions with key players in the skills system.

Over the past 10 years there has been a major change in union engagement with skills. The great majority of unions now include ULRs in their rule books. Many unions have established learning committees at regional and/or national level. There are a growing number of motions about education, learning and skills at union conferences. For example, 25% of all the motions and amendments at the 2014 TUC Annual Congress were in some way related to education with many about schools and apprenticeships. The ULF supports an estimated 250 jobs within unions, which is around 10% of all union employment. Many unions have found that learning attracts recruits and encourages members to take up a ULR role. It is often seen as less traditional and/or confrontational than the normal union rep role. Reps engaged in learning are often younger and more likely to be women or BAME than other union reps although many also go on to take up wider rep roles. For example, ATL found that almost all branch secretaries were previously ULRs and it runs a very large in-service CPD programm partly funded by ULF. It is not just unions with relatively well qualified members who are changing. For example, USDAW has a very successful 'check-out learning' project and the large general union Unite has developed a new 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' package for migrant food workers. Another instance is that the Public and Commercial Services Union which organises low paid civil servants has found, as ATL did, that learning greatly helps in recruiting new members. Unionlearn has tried to quantify and research the connection between learning and organising but beyond the collection of case studies this has proved

difficult. Since so many factors are involved in the link between learning and organising, further inquiry is clearly needed.

A critical question concerns whether the involvement with skill development at work will

> *... give unions a new role in the workplace and a new role in public policy relating to skill, or will these emerging issues merely be assimilated to existing forms of union activity?* (Cooney and Stuart 2012 p.9)

While the case for the impact of Unionlearn has been impressive in the English context its sustainability is less certain. As the budget decreases and its outcomes focus more closely on steers from government policies, the space for unions to develop innovative work both for themselves and for the workplaces they are involved in decreases. Is there a new role for trade unions or have they merely been opportunistic in their approach to the Unionlearn project? Have trade unions diverted energies away from industrial relations and dissipated their work by involving themselves with the skills agenda? There are positive and negative responses to these sorts of questions with a need for clarification of the issue actually being addressed.

There are complex issues around how skills are recognised. Cooney and Stuart claim

Defining 'skills': the gap between Unions and employers

> *... while it is true that unions and management need a framework for recognising skills in order to settle these issues, the kind of framework that is provided is not self-evident.* (2012 p.14)

This may be because employers, individuals and unions have been focused on defining skills in an inappropriate way. Employers

> *... have less interest in the production of general skills, which are the preserve of the education system and the responsibility of individuals*. (ibid p.15)*.*

Whilst employees and unions

... are more interested in certifiable knowledge and transferable skills and relatively less interested in informal knowledge and firm specific skills . (ibid p.16)*.*

Establishing what 'a firm specific skill' is remains a key issue here. A wider concern relates to the amount and nature of training that is currently established and operational in English firms. A 2011 report by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) put the figure as high as 90% compared to a European average of 60% where the latter was based on research conducted in 2005 (CBI 2011). The CBI make a strong case for employer investment in training of both IVET and CVET kinds, arguing that firms invest £39 billion a year in formal training (ibid p.6). UKCES report that total expenditure was higher in 2015 with £45.4bn cited (UKCES 2016 p.10). Increases were due to the greater number of induction days (rising by 4%), health and safety courses and workforce growth. However, compared to 2011 investment per individual trained had not risen.

To sum up there are questions as to how the Unionlearn agenda can be placed within the overall industrial strategy for skills growth. Rather than seeing this agenda as either distracting trade unions from their primary industrial role or as making them complicit in the shoring up of market failure to provide appropriate skills, it could be argued that English trade unions are actually manifesting a much needed 'co-ordination' mechanism which the liberal market per se cannot provide. Coordinating mechanisms (although their function is often not expressed in policy formulations) are as necessary to liberal markets as coordinated market economies. The lack of articulation of their function might be due to their being seen as marginal or supplementary to the proper working of how the market is conceived in a liberal state.

How do trade unions, employers and the state work together?

Turning to the broader issues of how trade unions, employers and the state may work together to better the economy, improve social justice, and contribute to the social good we need to further reflect on the current state of those relations. Are these actors moving together or apart? The FE sector is at yet another crucial turning

point with a new lead sector body, namely, the Education and Training Foundation and a new government (a minority Conservative administration with Theresa May as Prime Minister). The sector is also faced with the implications of the UK leaving the EU. Political parties want more skills, higher level progression for vocational students, more apprenticeships, and a high quality VET system. In face of these demands do we have the sustainable and robust collaboration in place to deliver what must be a coordinated approach to the skills system? Do we have an ethos of collaborative working? Do we have shared values and beliefs as well as aims to enable us to accomplish the task? In this final discussion we will be looking at national and local models of working that may help us to formulate a shared understanding of what needs to be done in the area of industrial democracy and partnership working. If we are in a new period where the market and market mechanisms are given priority over industrial democracy, what are the implications for unions?

Understanding the English context

In the previous century there have been many examples of trade union movement participation in formal relations with the state at a national and systematic level. In particular the involvement of trade unions in a national insurance system that emulated similar collaborative relations in Scandinavian countries and middle European systems. Following efforts by both Labour (Castle's *In Place of Strife* in 1969) and the Conservatives (Heath's tripartite relations policies in 1972) the Bullock Report[3] attempted to put trade union representation into all productive workplaces with over 2,000 employees. All such proposals were rejected by the Trade Union movement as a whole, although prominent trade unionists such as Jack Jones and Clive Jenkins gave their support.[4] In terms of European collaborative arrangements there was a British rejection of the Kohl, and Mitterand and Delors advocacy of social and fiscal partnership in Germany and France. Within this context it could be

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[3] See Lewis and Clark (1977), Davies (1978) and Dromey (2016) for attempts at understanding the history of ideas and policies in the trade union movement.

[4] An early fairly straightforward and negative socialist response to issues of collaboration and partnership was given by Scanlon in his pamphlet *The Way Forward for Workers' Control.* Currently some still generally agree with his views so a key issue is how to present a vision of industrial democracy which both has impact and gains public acceptance.

argued that the decline in trade union membership was not about needing more benign governments or a lack of overtures to the trade union community to engage but rather that trade unions faced a challenge about how to engage with members and potential members with opportunities not always being taken. Workplace involvement is perhaps key for this. Trade union membership in Scandinavian countries and the Republic of Ireland has gone up due to involvement in workplaces. Greater workplace involvement seems to be related to collaborative ways of working at national level in those countries.

Historically Blatchford's view of 'Merrie England' (1893) stressed that dominance of England in the world was the key to better industrial relations. In other words a cascade model was envisaged in that if the country does better then the workers will do better. The English trade union movement appears to have rested on the assumption of the validity of the cascade model. As a result trade unions did not feel the need to develop a key industrial strategy and more significantly a collaborative industrial strategy. Such an industrial strategy would not solely be for persuading the state or employers but would also persuade the public by stressing what trade unions do (or at least what they could do if given a chance to use their freedoms more constructively). One of the potential arguments here is that trade unions have autonomy to do many things, but this automony has not always been well used. This criticism could pose a challenge to the TUC and a failing trade union movement. It is important to acknowledge that we cannot afford the movement to fail as England would then lack the checks and balances that social and economic policies arguably need to create a richer and meaningful democratic public realm. By comparison Ireland has a different tradition (Langhammer 2016), as trade unions were a fundamental part of both Protestant and Catholic traditions, and these in turn established the modern Irish state. In Scotland, policy in the 2014 Mather Report has moved towards embracing a Scandinavian model of partnership. In Wales there are also signs of greater awareness of the value of partnership agreements and collaborative working.

Nationalisation policy in the post war Labour government did not involve trade unions as a collaborating partner. The ensuing response by trade unions was to organise and create favourable

rewards and conditions in those large scale industries and occupations. This potentially led to a more adversarial relations than if the trade unions had been engaged in the process in the first place. Subsequently in the English context the current regional models of working with devolved administrations have been translated into a form of localism with no specificly steered outcomes or transparent policy aims. City devolution deals actually uncouple the locality from central responsibility for targets or specific aims whilst leaving the steering of policy and funding with the centre (Keep 2015). Whilst such a devolved strategy suggests that new partnerships could emerge they would only do so on the basis of *ad hoc* and voluntaristic opportunities. Without the necessary social skills, resources, and strategic thinking these networks are fairly unmanageable, with no evidence base for how they will work.

Moving together or moving apart?

There are a variety of terms that can be used for industrial democracy and social partnership. Disputes over terminology conceal wider tensions. For instance, in the English context social partnership is contested by those who believe that workforce interests may be eclipsed by buying into local sector or workplace benefits at the cost of a wider more egalitarian policy. The problem appears to be one of adversarial assumptions, traditions and approaches within the trade union movement itself rather than with employers themselves.

When we turn to evaluating current practices and strategic decisions we can explore current examples of collaborative working. The TUC agenda aims at improving productivity by engaging people through stronger forms of collective bargaining and agreements but also by broadening engagement in terms of a range of 'worker friendly' policies that make work more attractive. There are a number of partnership agreements in a variety of forms which show how this can work. For example, in a range of public services there are coproduction strategies, as the healthcare and education systems both had social partnership relations at national and local level (Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group). However, the latter was disbanded by Gove as Minister for Education in 2010. By comparison the Welsh model of social partnership appears to work well (as will be further addressed below). In the private sector there are

examples of strong partnership working such as the USDAW and Tesco partnership, Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union with 3 year binding agreements, the 2012 Olympic Games partnership, and agreements around the HS2 and EDF Energy projects. When discussing social partnership or collaborative working it is necessary to develop union reps training and employer understanding of the roles of reps. However, none of this can replace collective bargaining around pay and conditions. What remains to be seen is whether (and how) it is possible to square the circle of collective bargaining and various forms of partnership working.

English industrial policy seems to having given finance and the city priority. How would unions counter that? There have been successes such as the Low Pay Commission and sector policies which have had an impact. The educational sector demonstrates attempts to overcome the democratic deficit, as evidenced in the Sweeney Report. Here we find an example of leadership that embraces a democratic voice in the workplace and recognises that engaging with trade unions can develop a more trusting, civil and mutually beneficial set of interests. However, a crucial question is whether educational culture differs from other organisational or sector cultures? Although workplace reps are in place and recommended in the Sweeney Report how much voice can they have? By placing reps at the level of strategic and executive decision making there is real encouragement to move forward collaboratively. However, reps need a better understanding of their role, new information from their trade union, and to develop a new mandate from members about collaborative strategies and working practices. In the context of current global pressures developing the role of reps may be a good example of fluid and adaptive organisational behaviour.

There has been more discussion around the differences between various trade unions and their histories than of forms of modelling around shared employer and trade union interests. As a result particular cases and relations produced no general model which could be applied elsewhere and no 'mediating' mechanism which was sustainable and grounded in shared understanding emerged with the result there was no clear reference for the English tradition of social partnership. For example, the teachers' Workforce Agreement Monitoring Group included most but not all teacher trade unions, with the National Union of Teachers being one of those

choosing not to participate. Another case is that in the post 16 sector 'social partnership' arrangements have been *ad hoc* and informal with conversations being held between various parties such as the government and sector agencies.

A key concern is how much control over the means of production the workforce can have, either through its trade union representation or other means. (Here the 'means of production' is understood to mean the material technologies, products, and resources needed for producing particular value for the consumer or public. How that is accomplished is inextricably linked to the social relations of production which are formed around the means of production. That is to say basically the employer and employee but also introducing further distinctions of leader, manager, worker, and ancillary stuff who support but do not actively contribute to the production of value.) There are a number of models that have been used to meet the aim of 'collaborative' working, such as staff fora or cooperative models, and these need not be seen as opposing or alternative options. The rise of professional association memberships could either suggest a new form of compliance within workforces or a space for new centres of authority and challenge to control over workplace practices. As we saw in Chapter 1 Abbott conceived of the remit of professional occupations as having jurisdiction over their practices, judgements, and expertise. The more this is visible and acknowledged the greater the 'control' over the means of production. It follows that the jurisdiction of 'workers' qua professionals is to extend their voice and control over the means of production, and to impact on their position in the social relations of production. In this sense the barriers to defining the FE sector's professionalism which we have highlighted also hinder forms of collaboration and control over the means of production.

Concluding remarks

It is important that we also remind ourselves of the intertwining themes in the debates presented in our discussion. While here we are focusing on social partnership models and the forms of industrial relations, we have three other cross cutting themes: professionalism, continuing vocational education and training, and the engagement of trade unions (notably Unionlearn) as key agents in this process. Trade unions have responded to these themes as a way to support

their members (at least in the cases of those unions which regard themselves as and/or are closer to professional associations with Unions21 being the best example of this approach). They have set out a new agenda for union legitimacy around workplace training. This does not mean overlooking the fact that defining what is a gain can be complex and difficult. Indeed sometimes it can look as though upskilling strategies are merely making up for employers deficiencies. Lastly there remains a question of how new partnerships are formed between employers and trade unions, acting as key agents to deliver these interlocking policies and dynamics (Stuart 2010).

Furthermore as we saw above, trade union action must be understood in the context of pressing problems for the professions as teachers, university lecturers, medical professionals, and opticians all suffer from the forces of deprofessionalisation. Arguably this can be seen as mainly resulting from a market inspired ideology. We can thus attempt to explain different skill trajectories in different market economies. Busemeyer (2015) shows that the political constituencies of the respective models of industrial relations (social democratic in Nordic countries, Christian democratic in middle Europe and neo-liberal in England and US) have determined those models over time. While there have been twists and turns in political events and campaigns the enduring political constituency in each geo-political region has shaped the form of industrial relations, and in turn, of skills policy including its impact on inequality. Busemeyer's fundamental insight here is that those political constituencies hold their own destiny. For example, the Nordic model has an enduring ethos of social democracy which has shaped the type of settlement reached by trade unions, the state and, consequently, what is found to be acceptable and publicly intelligible. In this geo-political culture the articulation of skills is found in the English state's juxtaposition of vocational education and training and school curricula. Instead in middle Europe the Christian democrat tradition has found a mediation of skills policy between the state, trade unions and employers (*Mitbestimmung* or co-determination). In both these geo-political cultures the ultimate aim is based on the premise that there is a mediating mechanism and ethos of either a social democratic or a Christian kind. In this light, whilst challenges occur there is a shared aim to resolve differences by bringing parties together. However in neo-liberal contexts this mediating mechanism and ethos is not present. The interests of workers (with vocational education and

training as a specific interest) are not met as a necessary element of agreement but instead the adversarial relations of state and trade unions (workers) has remained a premise and an intractable problem. There have been attempts to challenge these relations (as has been noted) but they have failed. As a result of this England has steadily moved to an unregulated set of market mechanisms. Busemeyer (2015) understands this as showing a 'path dependency' policy pattern which means that decisions taken now are affected by previous choices. This means that future options become continually restricted with respect to the availability of alternative models. Without assuming that this entails an overly cynical perspective on the possibility for change (as the future must resemble the past due to some overriding assumptions or forces) this analysis does set a realistic challenge for current alternative thinking around VET policy. Alternative thinking, models of practice, and even TUC strategy have all found it difficult to see how an adversarial set of relations could be overcome, given the current advancing neoliberal economy. At the same time it remains unclear whether the situation since the 2008 crash has become more fluid and whether there is a bigger picture than the neoliberal notion of a homogenous global economy.

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5. Conclusions

The discussion of our four key themes has specifically indicated the fragmentation of the English VET system and the fragility of skill formation. We believe there is no greater task and no more urgent issue than skill formation to benefit the economy, workplaces, people's quality of life, and communities up and down the country. Without a coherent and robust vision of how we may deal with the gaps, confusions, and challenges that the discussions here have revealed, we run the risk of not just a post-Brexit crisis but a much more general crisis. The very position of England and the UK generally depends upon meeting the fundamental challenges of how we develop skills, how we identify them and who has control of their development. However, we detect little of this in the recently published Industrial Strategy Green Paper of 2017 and this is worrying. The government should demand evidence and arguments to improve ideas, policies and practice. This account of the seminar series attempts to meet that challenge.

Our discussion set out to explore the key concepts, ideas, and practices in the FE sector. We posed questions about their clarity and implementation whilst also trying to establish whether these practices make up a coherent policy ensemble. We acknowledge the many policy changes and shifts in governmental direction during the lifetime of the seminar series and during its writing up. This is expected and confirms our initial view that deep thinking around fundamental concepts, practices and policies surrounding the sector and more specifically around vocational education and training has not been explored adequately. Such changes are symptomatic of a policy field, which is in a disorganised and contested state.

We also contend that the fora for ending such 'policy busyness' do not currently exist. It follows that current changes will only modify previous patterns of policy making as there is no strategic vision as to what exactly those policies will culminate in. Periods of bureaucracy and regulation in the FE sector have failed to manifest a settlement that could match the public intelligibility of the schools or university sectors (primarily because the shared understanding of school and university curricula and the notion of the respective teaching profession is lacking). Moreover, at the present time the market and deregulated approach also proposes no answers to these questions in a way that would satisfy our ambitions. And, finally, the

prioritising of Parliamentary opinion over educational expertise and the independent formulation of policy – even as a check and balance – is lacking. Each government is accountable for wanting to own such failure.

- **What does professionalism and continuing vocational education mean today?** It means a deregulated, voluntaristic and commercialised services which is at times supported by collaborative working if there is funding for this.

- **How do key agents that support professional practice work together?** Either mutual support is given via mutually beneficial relationships or funded projects support mostly short term collaborative working.

- **How does professional formation compare to other models in other countries?** The English model mostly sits within that for other neoliberal societies (such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA) where VET is also fragmented and a supplement to academic routes.

- **How do trade unions and employers specifically support professional formation and skill formation?** We have a mixed picture with some aiming for a 'new' learning ethos and others not being so focused, with activity once again seeming to be funding driven. The levy promises to shape new priorities but not necessarily new collaborative working.

It appears necessary to test the current thinking that a market based neo-liberal approach to skill formation and the VET system would improve things. Doing so would exceed the scope of the current report, so accordingly this work does not point at stringent conclusions or solutions but instead strives to show how current problems stem from some fundamental confusions, incoherent concepts and fragmented practices. Everybody wants to do better but it is important to stress a major barrier is the seemingly very poor vocabulary that exists around VET. There are reasons to doubt that the current policy field is sustainable and hence capable of giving government a proper system of checks and balances on the operation of the VET system. This report highlights gaps and pressing issues within VET and hopes to new open directions for addressing them. Importantly it encourages others to see the benefits of a collaborative approach which develops a cross party broad alliance of stakeholders to move debates forward.