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## UK EVIVE Report Feb 2014

### Values in UK VET System

The UK VET System has evolved considerably over the past few years, especially since the 1980s. Youth policies in UK have taken shape since 1870 through the introduction of compulsory elementary education. Government in UK got involved in Career Guidance as early as 1910 though the Education (Choice of Employment) Act passed during that year. This allowed local authorities to engage one career guidance officer to give advice to young people on getting work. The Education and Training Act of 1948 formally recognized that a national policy was needed for youth that were transiting from compulsory education to the world of work.

With changes in the fabric of British society during the past four decades (1960s to 2000), different governments in UK have attempted to implement changes to education policy and emphasise value in its VE and therefore career prospects of its learners. YTS was renamed Youth Training in 1989 and was managed by the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). In 2001 TECs were abolished and the challenge of career advice along with other education policy issues was the remit of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) overseen by the Department of Education. From March 2010, LSC was disbanded and divided into two entities: Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). SFA focuses on the development of vocational skills agenda on a national level and also manages the European Social Fund (ESF) and the many EU projects under this umbrella. YPLA is geared towards managing the 16-19 apprenticeships providing guidance and funding for these much needed skills for youth from compulsory education to the world of work.

The National Curriculum (NC) requires that a number of subjects are included during the teaching and learning at schools that will aim to develop vocational skills or at least engage the youth about the prospects available after compulsory education. From 2015, this compulsory education will be from age five to eighteen. Vocational Education subjects are introduced at Key Stage 3 or 4 depending upon the school and its capacity in terms of staff and their specialism. At post-16 more vocational subjects may be available and students can take these either at the sixth form in schools or colleges of further education. Qualifications gained at age 16 include single subject GCSEs and although 5 GCSEs or more with A star to C grade is a benchmark of achievement currently there is no requirement to 'graduate'.



With the UK education being in constant flux and the development of new qualifications such as the diplomas in various vocations such as finance, law, hospitality and retail ideas have been imported from across the world. From the USA, the concept of Career Academy has transformed the landscape of a number of cities and learners where the career academy is run by schools and colleges that develop learning pathways within a range of disciplines such as finance, law and hospitality. Within these diplomas the learners are taught at their schools or colleges for two-thirds of the time and the other third is spent at an employer. These Diplomas were developed with the specific concerns and input from employers who identified skills that were needed in order for youth to become fully employed.

Debate about Vocational Education in England is an on-going event between politicians and experts. Since the famous speech of 1976, by the then Prime Minister James Callaghan, various initiatives have taken place and Value in VE has been introduced (through various criteria based modules and qualifications) in many areas to make UK as competitive as possible. This started with the TVEI (Technical Vocational Education Initiative) in 1980s and then the introduction of GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) being offered in many subjects such as Travel and Tourism, Business, Retail, Hair dressing and Health and Social Care. These have now been superseded by the Diplomas introduced 2010 where the learners spend about a third (1/3) of their time in employment relevant to their qualification. These diplomas were introduced with the specific help of various industry sectors such as the Hospitality, Health & Social Care, Retail and Banking and Finance.

Although there has been progress made in recognizing Values in the UK VET system, there is still a long way for UK to go if it wants to catch up with other nations and regain some of its earlier competitive advantage. Experts and various reviews (Leitch 2004; Skills Commission Report 2011; Wolf Report 2011) have all pointed in the direction of more funding and emphasis on added Value in VET to promote the next generation of skilled labour in UK. As Peter Jones, entrepreneur and Dragons Den judge said “both Business Studies and French teach skills that are vital for UK industry” (2010). Atkins, Flint and Oldfield (What Young People think about Vocational Education in England, 2011) argued that there is a “paradoxical disjunction between the regards students have for their vocational programmes and the low value they believe is placed on such courses” by society in the UK where traditional curriculum and academic qualifications are still much highly valued. Atkins, Flint and Oldfield further mentioned that if perceptions of the young people already undergoing vocational studies are taken into consideration then these would be useful for future policy and research; instead the policy makers seem to have missed the “lived experience of each individual student.”

An analysis of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) qualifications found that the English further education and skills sector is not producing enough technicians. A plan for growth requires a new strategic focus on technician education and training - a plan for technicians, a cross-departmental government strategy for STEM. (Skills Commission, 2011). Professor Alison Wolf, Kings College, London is clear about how recognizing values in vocational education for 14- to 19-year-olds can be improved in order to promote successful progression into the labour market and into



higher level education and training routes. Key recommendations in the Wolf Report (2011) include:

- incentivising young people to take the most valuable vocational qualifications pre-16, while removing incentives to take large numbers of vocational qualifications to the detriment of core academic study
- introducing principles to guide study programmes for young people on vocational routes post-16 to ensure they are gaining skills which will lead to progression into a variety of jobs or further learning, in particular, to ensure that those who have not secured a good pass in English and mathematics GCSE continue to study those subjects
- evaluating the delivery structure and content of apprenticeships to ensure they deliver the right skills for the workplace
- making sure the regulatory framework moves quickly away from accrediting individual qualifications to regulating awarding organisations
- removing the requirement that all qualifications offered to 14- to 19-year-olds fit within the Qualifications and Credit Framework, which has had a detrimental effect on their appropriateness and has left gaps in the market
- enabling FE lecturers and professionals to teach in schools, ensuring young people are being taught by those best suited.

**The report speaks about the need to:**

- *‘ . . . . tell citizens the truth. It is crucial to provide young ‘people with accurate and useful information, so that they can make decisions accordingly. For young people, which vocational course, qualification or institution they choose really can be life- determining. 14-19 education is funded and provided for their sakes, not for the sake of the institutions who provide it.’*

While UK has some way to go to catch up with nations competing with it such as the Nordic countries, Germany and Switzerland, the government is attempting to reform the education sector with the introduction of new curriculum that places emphasis on skills and begins to value VE in UK. On 22 April 2013, the Education Secretary announced the introduction of a Technical Baccalaureate (Tech Bacc) that will be a performance measure, marking achievement by young people aged 16 to 19 in three areas. It will be introduced for courses beginning in September 2014, for reporting in the 16-19 performance tables from 2016.

The 3 elements are:

- a high-quality level 3 vocational qualification - only the best courses, recognised by employers, will continue to count in league tables; a list of these courses will be published towards the end of the year
- a level 3 ‘core maths’ qualification, including AS level maths (further information about core maths courses for post-16 students will be published by the Department for Education (DfE) in due course)
- the extended project, which will develop and test students’ skills in extended writing, communication, research, and self-discipline and self-motivation



Skills Minister Matthew Hancock said:

“The TechBacc will be a mark of achievement for young people who successfully study three key elements - a rigorous high-quality vocational course, maths and literacy. We are being clear to our young people about the skills they need to succeed and get good jobs. We want an education system in which everyone can reach their potential.

The TechBacc represents one of the final stages in the government’s work over the past 2 years to implement, in full, the 27 recommendations of Professor Alison Wolf’s ground-breaking review of vocational education. All recommendations have been implemented or are being implemented.”

While attempts have been made by various governments to include career teaching in vocational subjects and therefore enhance the value in vocational education or planned times within the school timetables where children are exposed to the world of work, lack of resources or funding have hampered the progress. Additionally lack of coherent strategy, especially among the state (or maintained) schools can be directly attributed to the way education policies of successive governments have been implemented in the UK. Although Work Experience is a necessity and was compulsory under law until 2011, many schools attempted to circumvent this requirement by delivering Work Skills programmes over a 2-3 day period instead of the 10 days of work experience as stipulated by the law. A number of examining boards also specifically developed modules that focus on Work Skills that can be used by schools for such delivery and among these include: AQA, Edexcel, City and Guilds and OCR. This, in a way has diminished the value in vocational education, especially in some areas such as numeracy and literacy and this is reflected in the poor performance of UK in such tests as Pisa organized by OECD.

Nonetheless, attempts by the current government to enhance the value in VE in UK seem to be making some progress. Apart from introducing the Tech Bacc, the government through its Academy Act of 2010 has introduced Academies, UTCs (University Technical Colleges) and Studio Schools that focus on technical education and study of academic subjects through practical projects delivered by employers. Since May 2010 when the Academies Act came into force there were some 34 UTCs, 28 Studio Schools and 2,225 schools that had converted to an Academy Status while 699 new Academies had opened up under a new sponsor ranging from businesses and prominent employers such as BT, Blackberry, Boeing, and Toshiba to educational trusts such as Baker-Dearing Trust led by a former Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker.

Perhaps, finally, UK will see the type of VET systems present in neighbouring countries and provide emphasis to Skills and place value in its VE to further the Lifelong Learning goals of its future generations.

