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Special
Supplement

Practical learning

Breaking down the barriers to success



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Introduction

Despite many initiatives over the past 100 years, academic and vocational pathways to learning have remained largely separate, with the academic route seen as being for “able” students and the vocational route for the “less able”. This round-table discussion, held on 26 April and organised by the *New Statesman* in conjunction with Edge, the independent charitable foundation campaigning for practical learning, explored the issues that allow this perception to persist and how we need to challenge it if Britain is to remain competitive.

Participants



CHRIS BANKS CBE

Chairman,
Learning and Skills Council



MARTIN BRIGHT (CHAIR)

Political editor, *New Statesman*;
former education correspondent, *Observer*



MARK FISHER

Chief executive,
Sector Skills Development Agency



RICHARD HAMER

Education partnership director,
BAe Systems



JERRY JARVIS

Managing director,
Edexcel Ltd



LORD SANDY LEITCH

The Leitch Review of Skills 2006, HM Treasury;
former chairman, Zurich Financial Services



DR ANN LIMB

Chair,
Student Volunteering England



SPENCER NEAL

Publisher,
New Statesman



MURZILINE PARCHMENT

Director of major projects and service delivery,
Mayor's Office, GLA



ANDY POWELL

Chief executive,
Edge



M T RAINEY

Former co-chief executive and founder,
Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe/Y&R



BILL RAMMELL MP

Minister for lifelong learning, further and higher
education, DfES



PROFESSOR SIMON ROODHOUSE

Chief operating officer,
University Vocational Awards Council



DR LEIGH SANDALS

Head of education, Prime Minister's Delivery Unit,
Cabinet Office



LIZ SMITH OBE

Director,
TUC's Unionlearn



PROFESSOR MICHAEL TOTTERDELL

Director, Institute of Education,
Manchester Metropolitan University

Editor: Caroline Stagg Design and cover: Leon Parks Publisher: Spencer Neal

newstatesman subscriber services: Stephen Brasher Freephone: 0800 731 8496 E-mail: sbrasher@newstatesman.co.uk

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Practical learning

Breaking down the barriers to success



Martin Bright When I was education correspondent at the *Observer*, as a young, keen specialist, I thought practical learning was a subject of importance, and was clearly central to the new Labour project, to Welfare to Work, lifelong learning, University for Industry, individual learning accounts and the continuing difficulties of further education (FE) colleges, which were grappling with the independents and the local education authorities. I thought the subject was going to present me with a stream of stories, but it was almost impossible to persuade anyone to take the subject seriously, including ministers (apart from Margaret Hodge) and editors.

Ten years later, little has changed. Research shows that, despite all the recent vocational initiatives, younger teachers are more inclined than their older colleagues to consider vocational qualifications as suitable for the “less able”, and that most adults think their schools did not teach them useful skills. A lot of evidence suggests that the only thing which makes a difference to people’s life chances and reduces inequality is returning to education as an adult learner. Andy?

Andy Powell Edge and I are passionate about encouraging more of this “learning by doing”. We have had a two-tier system for more than a century: an academic pathway and what is variously called a vocational pathway, a technical pathway or a skills area. Every five years for the past hundred years, a prime minister, a bill and/or a select committee has said: “We really must do something about our vocational and technical skills.” Yet things are not improving; if anything, they are getting worse. Fifty per cent of people are not reaching the level necessary for future success and fulfilment. As Helena Kennedy said, “If at first you don’t succeed, you don’t succeed.” We are much further behind in this country with regard to people coming back into learning if they do not succeed in the first place.

Currently, the idea of parity of esteem for academic and vocational learning is a nonsense. We need one destination for young people, and that is about learning for life and work. There are different ways to get there; for some an academic route is fantastic, but others need more practical learning. ►



break down the artificial barriers between the academic and the vocational, as Andy was pointing out.

Many of the degrees that are seen as prestigious, that are the most over-subscribed, are vocational in content, such as medicine, law or engineering. Esteem and recognition needs to flow cohesively right the way through the system. If you look at the legacy of the deep-rooted problems on skills and training, the real challenge is the proportion of young people studying at the age of 16 in this country, which is still pitifully low by international standards. Six million people do not have the equivalent of five GCSEs, and the way that affects their life chances is astonishing. Even with the progress we are making, we will not close the gap between us and our

► What we are suggesting is extremely simple but has profound implications for structure. Everyone should have real-world learning, learn by doing and reflect on their experience with experts so that we counter the argument from employers that young people do not have initiative and confidence when they come out of education, even when they have finished a degree. Such an approach has implications for the curriculum, assessment, teacher training, marketing and PR. It is an attitude issue.

If Britain is to compete with India and China, it will need passion, creativity, initiative and know-how, not just knowledge.

Richard Hamer At BAe Systems, the vocational pathway has always been real. Our chief executive, Mike Turner, was an apprentice and he went to university as well. Sarah Pullen, the Young Woman Engineer of the Year in 2005, was also an apprentice with us. We have more than a thousand apprentices in training and a culture that encourages practical learning. We offer over 500 work-experience placements each year. We engage with local schools and colleges, and ensure that young people have a good practical understanding of what we do. Being an engineering and science company, we have some difficulties in persuading young people that this is something they should be doing.

Bill Rammell Applying academic learning to vocational and practical ends is an issue of enormous resonance in this country. I am constantly challenged by people in my constituency who have strong views about the need to get back to basics and focus on vocational training. We have to do much more to

international competitors without further action, because they are improving too.

So how are we responding? In higher education (HE) we have set ourselves a target of increasing participation to 50 per cent of the under-30s. The major area of expansion is going to be at the practical, vocational and work-based end of the higher-education spectrum. Fifty thousand foundation degrees have been designed with the needs of employers in mind and this will increase to 100,000 by the end of the decade.

Some interesting work is being done with companies such as BP and GlaxoSmithKline on developing the accreditation of far more in-house training programmes towards a higher-education qualification. Linked to that development is our recent announcement on creating a higher education strand to “train to gain”, with the workplace and higher education coming together. There needs to be a cultural shift in the way universities respond to the world of work.

In relation to FE, the 14-19 Education and Skills white paper talks about a much stronger clarity of mission for colleges, focused around skills for employability.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has been fundamental in bringing to the system a focus on skills in employment which had been absent. The creation of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) means that we have employers driving the system, which is crucial. The skills academies, which we are setting up to create centres of excellence, are a crucial development as well.

The train-to-gain initiative is really radical. For the first time, if an adult does not have the equivalent of Level 2,

the state will step in with the support of a broker and provide that education and training.

Finally, on the schools front, the focus on practical skills is particularly important, and the main challenge within the 14-19 agenda is offering more to those youngsters at the age of 14 who are switched off by the academic route. The creation of 14 diplomas, with the involvement of both higher education and employers, is the important element we need to increase post-16 participation from 74 per cent to our target of 90 per cent.

When talking to employers and those in the university world, I am constantly told that, as well as everything else we are doing, softer skills, such as teamwork, leadership and critical thinking, need to be much more a part of the system.

Lord Leitch The UK is strong economically, with world-leading employment rates. We start from a strong position, and the many good initiatives that have been put in place are now delivering. As you will see from my interim report, our productivity trails that of key comparator nations. We have to solve that. Our skills are not world class. We must raise our game and, in the next stage of my report, I will be looking at that.

Chris Banks Things are getting better. More people are participating in vocational learning and training and they are achieving more. We have more apprentices and they are ending up with the full range of qualifications that they set out to get. It is happening.

Much of what Bill has been talking about in terms of framework is relatively new. The 14-19 implementation plan was published only a matter of months ago, yet remarkable progress has already been made in building strong partnerships between schools, colleges and other providers. However, the rest of the world is accelerating and we have to get better faster in order to improve and maintain our position internationally.

One of the barriers is the perception of vocational qualifications, and this is worse among younger people than older people. As people get older, they appreciate vocational learning more. We keep hearing about the equivalent of an A-level, the equivalent of five good GCSEs, or whatever it happens to be. Why does it have to be equivalent to anything? Why can it not be valued in the same way that other things are? Apprenticeship



is a good example of that. We have an opportunity to engage employers to act as ambassadors for the vocational learning apprenticeships, to give good information, advice and guidance to young people so they understand the range of opportunities when they have choices to make.

Murziline Parchment I want to investigate this perception gap. As long as that prevails, people believe that you are going

We have to get better faster in order to maintain and improve our position internationally

slowly and nothing is happening. People do not perceive it as something to get on the back of and support because they do not see it happening. Although, understandably, you are going for substance, you have to take perception seriously.

Liz Smith City & Guilds did an advert targeting young people a year or so ago, and the response was exciting but there were issues over how that was followed up with providers and so on. At the TUC, we have a long history of commitment to vocational training. It was on the agenda at our first congress in 1868. People learn in different ways. ►



► You might gain more through practical learning at one stage in your life, but might be responsive to other sorts of learning at different stages.

We do agree with Bill that the framework is broadly right. There is a lot of consensus around it. We are particularly on board with the analysis in the Leitch interim report around this issue of the workplace because, at the moment, people enter the workplace with different levels of learning and leave it with even worse differentials.

We need to transform the workplace into a site of learning where the gap is bridged. That is at the heart of the Leitch analysis and we are committed to playing our part. The LSC has been pushing forward a few important issues such as who pays for what. What are the responsibilities of employers to pay for learning? What are the responsibilities of the state and the individual? A wider public debate arriving at a consensus around that would be welcome.

What are the new policy levers that are required to empower more people to take up learning and to increase the engagement of employers? What can we do to build a new collective approach within which unions, working as a voice of the employees, whether they have members in a particular workplace or not, are fully engaged in trying to get a consensus around skills and qualifications that are good for everybody?

Simon Roodhouse Part of the problem with perception is that there is no ultimate goal. If you do A-levels it is pretty simple what the choices are and what you can aim to do. If you get good grades in your A-levels you get a chance of going to the

top ten universities. Where is the vocational route? Where is the vocational Oxbridge? How does a young person know how to move through the system to achieve the highest possible levels of vocational learning? It is downright confusing.

The answer to the perception question is not to talk about esteem but to talk about a clear route that somebody can aim for and achieve.

The levels of competitiveness worldwide are frightening. From where I sit, we need continuous re-invention. We have to produce new products and services all the time; more and faster. This places greater emphasis on creativity or where is that in all of this?

Creativity used to be one of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) key skills. It was suddenly dropped, but if we are serious about what we are saying here, we need to re-introduce the importance of innovation

and creativity. We are looking for people who can create and develop businesses. How are the FE and HE systems going to achieve that?

We are not joining these things together effectively with the business support agencies to achieve that level of conversion and growth of businesses. We need to create the supportive context in which that happens.

Large businesses are important, not only in terms of the numbers of people they employ and what they do with them, but in terms of how they are engaging with their supply chains on the issue of training, development and learning. Why are we not working with the large employers and their supply chains to improve performance all round? If you improve the productivity of your suppliers, the quality of what you get is far better and it is delivered on time.

We also need to understand markets better. Markets are constantly changing. We should look at the way that universities' research capacity can be used to provide the kind of information needed to support this kind of growth.

As regards FE and HE interaction with business and employers, as Bill has already said, a lot of brokerage and interaction can be done. With the BP and GlaxoSmithKline project, we are working to convert a global managers' training programme – by adding critical thinking, accreditation of prior learning and experience, and work-based assessments – into a postgraduate certificate with 60 credits towards a masters degree. This builds on what the company already does and adds value.

Let us stop having too many initiatives and look much more closely at what we already have and how we can add value

to that. We could look at new financial packages, a triangulation between the employer, the state and the employee. Companies are not interested in certification and assessment. The employee is interested in certification for progression and for career development.

The state could and should support certification, assessment and diagnostics. Companies should provide the training for their employees. Put those two packages together with the commitment of the employee to provide time and we might have the basis for a sensible discussion.

I welcome the introduction of training at Level 4, but we have to look at the way we use that to connect, for example, apprenticeships with foundation degrees. The work of the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) shows that the progression of apprenticeships to higher education is absolutely minimal. My worry on the 14-19 specialist diplomas is that we are in danger of re-inventing the problem by not connecting them to apprenticeships and foundation degrees.

The framework for achievement is meant to be a collection of levels and qualifications in which we can slot all these different initiatives and activities. Frankly, I do not see how Level 4 to



Let us stop having too many initiatives and look much more closely at what we already have

Level 8 are to be populated. I do not see how the connection is going to occur between FE and HE in the framework. I do not see how the credits are going to work across all levels.

Ann Limb One of the answers has to do with what we are doing now, which is raising the profile. As an FE college principal, and after 25 years in FE, I would not want an body to underestimate how highly this is prioritised on the agenda; it is a huge step forward in terms of attitude and culture. The fact that the delivery partners, such as the LSC, the employers and SSCs, are around the table with others is a huge step forward.

I am not attacking the media, but as we launch this, despite huge efforts by Bill and his colleagues and the press officers at the Department for Education and Skills, the main education headline will be something to do with the QCA and testing, with no mention of FE. So it is not just an issue of profile and prioritising, but of finding ways to reach large numbers of people. That is why the unions and the employer schemes are crucial. We can let a lot be market-driven by the consumers.

What are the new ways of engaging new citizens, wherever they happen to be working, and getting them to buy into the personalised learning that will increase their motivation to get a skill? That includes soft skills and qualifications, because most people want to have some credit for their learning.

Mark Fisher The Skills Development Agency (SDA) leads and manages the 25 SSCs which are there to ensure the needs and views of employers are communicated to the supply side in terms of qualifications and training, and also to boost employers' investment in skills. Foundations are laid and lots of fantastic things are happening, but I feel we are at a base camp on a mountain that needs to be climbed. How do we engineer a shift in perception and investment in skills to meet the growing productivity challenge we face? It is about a balance between employers, individuals and governments, and ►



► how we are using all the tools and techniques we have (and perhaps some new ones) to engineer that shift in UK society.

Bill Rammell To put things in perspective, a lot of this – the 14-19 agenda, the diplomas – is new. So young people are not talking about it, because it has only just been launched.

Murziline has hit the nail on the head. Historically within Britain, we have failed to deliver practical training and the vocational agenda. It is a failure of not just of government but of all of us, due to deeply embedded attitudes. To use some very old language, there is a link to the class system here and the way it operates. Involving universities in the design of the new 14-19 diplomas is critical. If we want those diplomas to work, what we have to do is deal with the most selective universities and then, in time, they will take people who have gone through that route. The role model is the most important thing that begins to change perception. The media is fundamental to this. In media terms, Alan Sugar's *The Apprentice* is doing great work driving this issue up the agenda; it is getting people interested.

Simon set out an important challenge for the vocational route. The number of options it has is Byzantine. One ought to be able to take the vocational route right the way through to higher education.

One of the most challenging statistics I know is that, if you have two A Levels, you have a 90 per cent chance of going to university. If you have the vocational equivalent, you have only a 50 per cent chance. Until that vocational route can take

you through to higher education, we are not going to succeed.

However, we may be creating the impression that the only route to success is going to university. An apprenticeship can and should be an end in itself, if that is what people want and what suits their circumstances.

Finally, and fundamental to what we are talking about, I come to Mark's comments about the balance between the individual contribution, the employer contribution and the government contribution. Government has done its bit over the past nine years by expanding the resources available in these areas. We are not going to be able to meet the demands unless individuals and employers step up to the crease in a similar way. We are starting that process through our FE strategy and we have done it in HE through the individual contributing more but we need that cul-

tural shift among employers as well.

Martin Bright I accept that you believe a lot has been done by this government but, as we have a representative of the Delivery Unit with us this afternoon, I would be quite interested to know why there is a perception in some quarters that there has not been delivery.

Leigh Sandals A lot of it comes down to the quality of provision on offer, which is variable, as is its delivery. I have seen examples of what world-class provision looks like. I have seen facilities that simulate those used across the sectors of industry. I have seen young people studying hospitality and catering, cooking in state-of-the-art, Gordon Ramsay-style kitchens, doing silver service in mock restaurants. I have seen professionals with industry expertise delivering that provision and I have also seen the skills we have spoken about concerning team building being delivered. I have seen young people moving around the system between providers, moving from schools to colleges and vice-versa, with schools collaborating. I have also seen professionals moving around the system to go to different providers. I am encouraged by what I have seen.

However, the challenge is to identify where in the country that effective provision is, who else can learn from it and how we spread it around the system and embed it, so we can offer all young people the same high-quality provision. That is a big challenge, but I have seen it done so I am optimistic.

M T Rainey I would like to say something about the image problem. People are extremely frustrated that, despite progress on the ground, all that is seen or that persists is stereotyping and sensationalism.

The broadcast model for reaching people through media – how people communicate within society, how institutions reach them and how institutions communicate with them – is breaking down. The biggest untapped resource in our education system is young people themselves. They are finding ways, which I bet are largely invisible to the people in this room, of communicating with each other. Using technology, they will create, and form networks for talking to each other and trading knowledge and expertise.

If young people who have been successful using non-academic pathways can mentor and give encouragement to other young people who may be contemplating following such a pathway, that is more likely to effect change quickly.

Young people are creating a network that is essentially private to them. They are talking about careers and educational choices with each other. It is a matter of recognising that and allowing it to flourish, giving it the right conditions which will perhaps allow us to begin to change this perception problem from the grassroots rather than from a broadcast perspective. Broadcast is the old model; this is the new model.

Someone can put out a message – “Has anyone out there been in this situation?” – and ten people get back, saying: “Yes, I was, and this is what I thought, what I learnt and what I did.” You cannot control the quality of response, but it is a phenomenon that is happening.

Jerry Jarvis The vast majority of what we are doing in education has little relevance to the workplace or life. Perception is a problem, but so is the way we tackle our competitiveness. We tend to focus on skills as vocational learning but the reason we are not competitive concerns management skills, which probably none of us has had formal training in, unless you have done an MBA on your own initiative.

Perhaps one of the most successful vocational qualifications has been around since I was a lad: I was an apprentice. I had to



go to university to get recognition. An employer such as BAE Systems can recognise the difference between a student who has a national certificate and a student who has an A-level. One is contextual and hits the ground running and has teamwork embedded before starting.

Much of the conversation so far has seen success as a university degree, whether it is achieved through a vocational route or an academic route. We are a long way away from two parents having a discussion in the backyard, with one saying: “My son has failed, he has only got A-levels. He has had to go to university, whereas your daughter has gone into plumbing.” That is not going to happen. We need to find a way to break that perception.

The only positive point I can make is concerning the new diploma that is being introduced. It recognises that a huge amount of contextual learning needs to take place.

Andy Powell As an independent educational foundation, we are called Edge for a reason. We had a series of independent surveys done by YouGov, and regardless of which demographic you look at, between 70 and 90 per cent of people surveyed said that they wished they had had a chance in their formal education to do a few more things for real, to get out into the real world, to do some work that had real meaning in the community or industry. If everybody says that and wants it, why does it not happen? It is an attitude and a cultural point. ►



► We have always had a two-tier system and it is deeply ingrained. It is, if you like, a paradigm, a cultural issue, and we do not question it.

I still see diagrams, used to illustrate many well-meaning initiatives, with arrows going everywhere. There is always a no-left-turn arrow to a destination over on the left-hand side, which is work. The arrows always have a right turn into the academic route “higher education”. I thought everybody went into work and I thought that everybody should carry on into further learning.

If you talk about the academic route, everyone says: “Let’s have a liberal, balanced and broad education.” If you swap on to the other, vocational route, the talk is about the skill needs of the country, not about a broad education. Where is the liberal, practical route? There are no teacher-training courses for practical teaching. It is all about academic teaching.

The danger of a paradigm is serious; this is Edward de Bono thinking. It means that we keep preventing wonderful new ideas and new tributaries joining the river, and start to dig the same bed a bit deeper. We are compensating for it with the collaboration we are doing with M T Rainey.

As middle-class parents, because there is not much practical world learning, we say to our children: “I can help you out with that. I’ll get you to talk to so-and-so. We will show you about that real world.” However, if you do not have those resources, you do not have access to it. That is why we are supporting M T’s Horse’s Mouth website, which is not about talking to career experts. If you want to know whether you

want to be an architect, an engineer or a refuse collector, the project can put you in touch with one by e-mail and they will tell you about it.

We support Simon’s point that degrees are not things you do only at 21. If you are a high-level learner in an occupation, why can’t you get the equivalent of that based largely around what you are doing in work? Why can we not have this practical liberal route? Why don’t we have businesses within schools? Why is school separate? What we are looking for is a campaign to pick up on all these things and to start integrating the theory with the practice. Some people need that opportunity, which is largely based around the practice, to draw them back into the theory.

Michael Totterdell The idea of lifelong learning was one of the first target campaigns of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in 1961, and it was shaped not by Anglophone thinkers but by Francophone ones. They had a notion of “educational permanence”,

which is a more elegant term than “lifelong learning”. At the heart of that concept was a notion of expansive rather than defensive learning. It was not about protecting ourselves in the global market but, rather, about the capacity to act both for the collective good and for personal good.

I am interested in research from Germany and Sweden about self-dependent forms of learning. This shows that, in practical learning, the learners rarely have the opportunity to influence the conditions of learning for the purposes of learning. What is absolutely energising about Alan Sugar’s *The Apprentice* series and the Jamie Oliver series *Jamie’s Kitchen* is that those learners are not compliant. They engage in trying to reshape, reform and reconstruct the conditions of the learning and the purpose of the learning. The programmes get riveting at precisely the point when they engage with the maestros.

The way generations X and Y think about learning has changed. Broadcast learning takes the concept of similarity or identity: “If you want this, be like that and it will accrue.” The kind of learning that is embedded in networking is based on affinity. You try to find something in others’ experiences that you can recognise and draw upon for your own. To engage with people who are currently non-learning and disengaged, practical learning must move beyond expropriating their motivation. We need to give these people a role in shaping the conditions of learning in the workplace, as well as in the institutions, to appropriate their motivations as well as give them societal opportunities.

Richard Hamer We are using theatre and drama as a way of engaging young people in learning engineering. We are aiming at the 9- to 13-year-olds, before they have to make decisions about GCSEs. It is a great way to tell a story and get their attention, and to get them to think about vocational options. You can also embed some subtle messages within that, which they can take on board as well as the overall experience of what they are doing; that is valuable.

Liz Smith We have made some interesting discoveries about networking between people through union learning reps in the workplace. These reps talk to individuals, influencing the provider chain to try to get it to meet people's needs within the workplace. Our experience has overwhelmingly been that even people who would seem to be the least likely, the so-called hardest-to-reach, group can be reached and engaged if the context is right.

Lord Leitch I was interested in what Andy said. How would you translate what you said into "Let's do something"?

Andy Powell The key word is engagement. If we do not engage our academically most-able youngsters and make them as hungry to learn and develop as I imagine they are in China and India, we are going to be in trouble. We must introduce more "learning by doing" for everyone. We need more work placements and more enterprise, more real projects in the community, such as more schools running their own radio stations for the local area, being journalists for their local papers and running their own canteens. We must also find a route based on that approach. Our goal is to equip people for life and work, but there are different routes to get there, including new types of qualifications, which involve visiting different industries and combining those skills. We are putting together a manifesto over the next couple of months. It is moving away from academic/vocational to one with different paths. Nobody learns unless they are motivated. I must say that it is not just for those who are not doing well academically. As long as we are in that trap, we will never get any further, whatever wonderful diplomas we have. To the most academically able, it is a matter of saying: "You need some more practical real-world learning." Maybe everyone should do 20 per cent real world learning, whatever that means. Then someone could say: "Personally, I am going to do 70 per cent of that and 30 per cent reading, writing and other subjects."



Bill Rammell It is a big cultural shift. We are a long way from getting a middle-class, aspirational family to say to their kids, where it might be the right thing to do: "Actually, the vocational route is the best route for you."

Andy Powell If there were a diploma that allowed you to work in four different industries, through which you got

We need more work placements and more enterprise, more real projects in the community

experience of teamwork and communications, an understanding of how to present yourself, where you got a strong component of English and maths and so on – if employers and universities were both backing it, I would recommend my child to do that. Unfortunately, such a scheme does not exist. There is no such Oxbridge.

Simon Roodhouse We need to distinguish between entry-to-work programmes and workforce development. The big ►



► challenge facing the universities is that they expect people to go to them but they have nothing to do with workforce development. They need to deal with the cultural change issue. Universities should be delivering products with businesses to meet business needs in the workplace.

Lord Leitch The fastest growth in university courses is in MBAs, is it not? That is workforce development?

Simon Roodhouse MBAs may well be the fastest-growing area in one sense, but most of those have not delivered in the workplace. The universities still use the old model, which is fundamentally a course taught in its own institution. We need workforce development to be much more extensive at lots of different levels with different HE qualifications delivered in the workplace, in partnership with the business and validated by a consortium of universities, which is one of the things the UVAC is doing.

Murziline Parchment What is the business case for business to take it on?

Simon Roodhouse Business is already doing a lot of the training. What you can do is reorganise that training and put it together in more sensible and clear packages against the HE qualifications. Then you can look at different combinations of delivery. Private training providers can deliver some of it; FE and HE can deliver it. HE is using one of its greatest assets, which is validation and assessment. In other words, universities have these functions: learning, research, assessment and certification. We always talk about learning and research; the ones we rarely use outside the institution are assessment and certification.

The other combination, which ties in the SSCs, is to use the National Occupational Standards. We have invested millions in these since 1986. They were created with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) to answer the competitiveness question. They are employer-generated standards. Why are we not using them? If we tie them in with the kind of new qualifications we are talking about here to get greater synergies, we would be using a system we have already paid for.

Mark Fisher The National Occupational Standards and such like must be an imperative to drive qualification reform through this system end to end. I have a good example of the importance of the relationship between HE and business. The board of e-skills UK, the SSC for IT, met a number of HE vice-chancellors and said: "Frankly, the IT courses you offer are more or less useless to the IT industry." Now they work together to produce curricula that are useful, that business has helped to support and business has helped to create. This is not a conflict between liberal education and business and education for the workplace, it is about tuning the system to be responsive in a dynamic way to the needs of employers and business.

MT Rainey While I support the need for increased workplace learning and the increased involvement of employers in learning, I feel slightly uncomfortable about a totally needs-driven model of creating futures for our kids. What about the talents of our unique population? Would creative industries here ever thrive if we were building a needs-driven education system? Would medicine ever have thrived in the UK as a fantastic skill/talent base for the world if we had been pushing a needs-driven approach to education?

There has to be a way for talent. We will have a different

talent pool from, say, China. How do we support the talents, the desires and the aptitudes of people and not force them into a needs-driven model?

Bill Rammell I do not think anybody is saying we are going to move to a totally needs-driven model. People are still going to be doing subjects that are non-vocational right the way through the system up to university level. It is about getting the balance right.

As a government, through the SSC and other mechanisms, we are trying to shift so that we are responding to what employers want. There is not always a coherent voice from employers about their needs and we must have a better debate with them about that.

I am attracted by Andy's point about a broader, more liberal package of vocational skills. I would be the first to admit that we have an awful lot further to go but, if you look at higher education statistics, the number of young people from poorer backgrounds is increasing.

I was struck by Michael's point about practical learners having an influence over the system. How you unlock that within the vocational realm is important.

Liz's point about union learning reps, peer encouragement, people who work and live beside you showing you what you can do, is fundamental to beginning to make the change.

People do what they need to do to satisfy their individual needs, as they identify them

Historically, there has not been, certainly in England, sufficient respect and recognition for education and learning such as exists in many other countries. However, if you look around the country you can see that things are working. What we have to do is spread it far more widely.

Martin Bright We seem to romanticise certain institutions, particularly the Open University. We are always asking ourselves why it is that this Labour government has not been able to provide a new OU. A lot of the models we have been talking about are remedial models and we always think of further education or adult education as being



something that provides for something that is missing in people's education. That is why I find what Andy was saying fascinating because, if you want to shift that paradigm, surely you have to stop thinking about education as remedial. I wanted to ask what has happened to lifelong learning? That was something we would do, not in order to fill gaps in our education or our skills particularly, but just because we are a citizen in the world and that is what you do as part of your working life.

Ann Limb I do not think it has gone away. I do not think the average citizen ever thought of it in terms of lifelong learning. That was the policy-makers' language. The reality is that people do what they need to do to satisfy their individual needs, as they identify them.

Learn Direct has now been involved with two million learners, precisely because of its different methods of practical engagement, driven by new technology. The OU now has to re-invent itself as a new kind of brand and a new way of learning, because everybody is doing it. It is about looking at the spaces in which people find that they are able to learn, where they take responsibility for the learning.

I just want to say something about volunteering as an opportunity. So much learning goes on through students doing voluntary activity, not just as representatives through students unions but through community-based projects. There is a route to be exploited there. ►



► **Murziline Parchment** I will use this opportunity to bring in the Olympics. We are looking at volunteering opportunities in the 2012 Games, with 100,000 opportunities. We are working to link those volunteer opportunities with skills.

Throw me three balls and I will drop them all; throw me one and there is a good chance I will catch it

My personal experience was with the International Baccalaureate. One of the things that I had to do for this was volunteering; the stuff that I learnt from volunteering I use to this day.

Chris Banks A couple of words that have been used a lot this afternoon are “challenge” and “culture”. The way forward is partly about challenging cultural stereotypes, but also challenging each other’s perceptions and prejudices. Trident Business Centre in Leamington Spa is theoretically an

FE college but it does not look or smell like one. It looks like, and is, a facility for employers and young people to learn in a way that is practical and relevant to their careers and futures. It is designed to meet the needs, wants and aspirations of the individuals and local employers.

South-East Essex College in Southend is new and fresh. As we renew the estate (50 per cent of colleges have been refurbished in the past five years and that programme is carrying on) it attracts more learners and more employers and they get better results.

The question is: what are our ambitions? We could say that our ambition is for 100 per cent of young people in school at the moment to come into the world of work with some practical experience, and with a qualification or recognition which employers will find useful and which they will find useful themselves.

We need to move away from the 75 per cents and the 80 per cents and say that our ambition is for all young people to come into the world of work properly prepared for that experience.

We need to keep it simple. Throw me three balls and I will drop them all; throw me one and there is a pretty good chance I will catch it. We should simplify the system and we should make it simple for the young person as well. It is a terribly complicated range of options at the moment, and people default into the natural, easy option.

Just look at the proportion of people going into a building career who are men and the proportion going into the caring professions who are women. However, 60 per cent of those women who take on caring roles say they might well have considered one of those other, traditionally male roles had they known at the time what the career would be and what the pay would be. We must keep it simple and try to find a way of getting good information, advice and guidance for employers and for individuals.

The danger of not having a shared ambition, and sense of where we are going and being serious about it, is that we can go off in a whole range of different directions. One of the reasons this sort of round-table discussion is useful is that it shows that success looks like different things to different parts of the system. It is our job to make the daylight between these different strands go away because then there is a chance that we will be able to communicate convincingly.

Richard Hamer It is just a reflection about individuals and personal responsibility: there is a shift across the whole country with the result that people are taking responsibility for driving their own careers forward.

Martin Bright I was struck by mentions of television programmes. Are the media tapping into something that others are not? There seems to be a desire for people to learn through television.

M T Rainey But television does not show your caring woman what it might be like to go into the construction field. We need a networking model, not a broadcasting model. We must not ignore the viability of peer-to-peer networks and affiliate networks.



Simon Roodhouse We are making all these changes to the system, but when you look at the timescales that we are making these changes in, for example, the framework for achievement is six years, it is unbelievable.

Is China going to sit there and wait? No. It is going to move faster and quicker than we are. So, how quickly can we put this system in place and then how quickly can we keep it up to date? At the moment, all of these things are unconnected. There is a real lack of connection to make sure that this system is up and running, and can be transformed quickly to meet our needs and the next generation's needs.

I worry about that, because we introduced the National Occupational Standards in order to improve the curriculum in 1986. We did that because the curriculum was out of date and we were uncompetitive. There is a lesson to be learnt here.

I have looked at the National Training Targets we used to have and I compared them with the targets we have today and they are not very different. So we have not moved that much over a period of time.

The other observation that I wish to pick up on is that we have got qualifications for just about everything, at just about

every level, and we have written the curriculum in most cases, but where is the space to play? Music videos were originally created in the early 1960s and 1970s by a bunch of art students. They were not part of any system particularly, so there was a free environment in which they could express themselves. Where are we going to get the new ideas, the new dynamics, which come out of this? I do not see that in the system we are creating at the moment.

Finally, why on earth do we grade everything? Grading induces failure.

Jerry Jarvis I am intrigued by this notion of space, because that is where all the real learning in our own lives has come from, has it not? It is in the spaces between the formal hoops that we have to jump through. I would love to produce, and could produce, qualifications that contribute to our ability to do those things, but I am not allowed to.

Martin Bright I am afraid we have to wrap up there. Thank you for taking part. It has been fascinating. I like the idea of the vocational Oxbridge. I think I was perhaps being unfair in my introduction; clearly things have moved on hugely.



Edge is an entirely independent charitable foundation dedicated to bringing about a fundamental shift in the status of practical learning and vocational training.

For more information on Edge, please contact:

Andy Powell

Chief Executive

Edge, 10 Golden Square

London W1F 9JA

Tel: 020 7734 6414

E-mail: centre@edge.co.uk



3rd Floor

52 Grosvenor Gardens

London SW1W 0AU

Tel: 020 7730 3444

Fax: 020 7259 0181

www.newstatesman.com