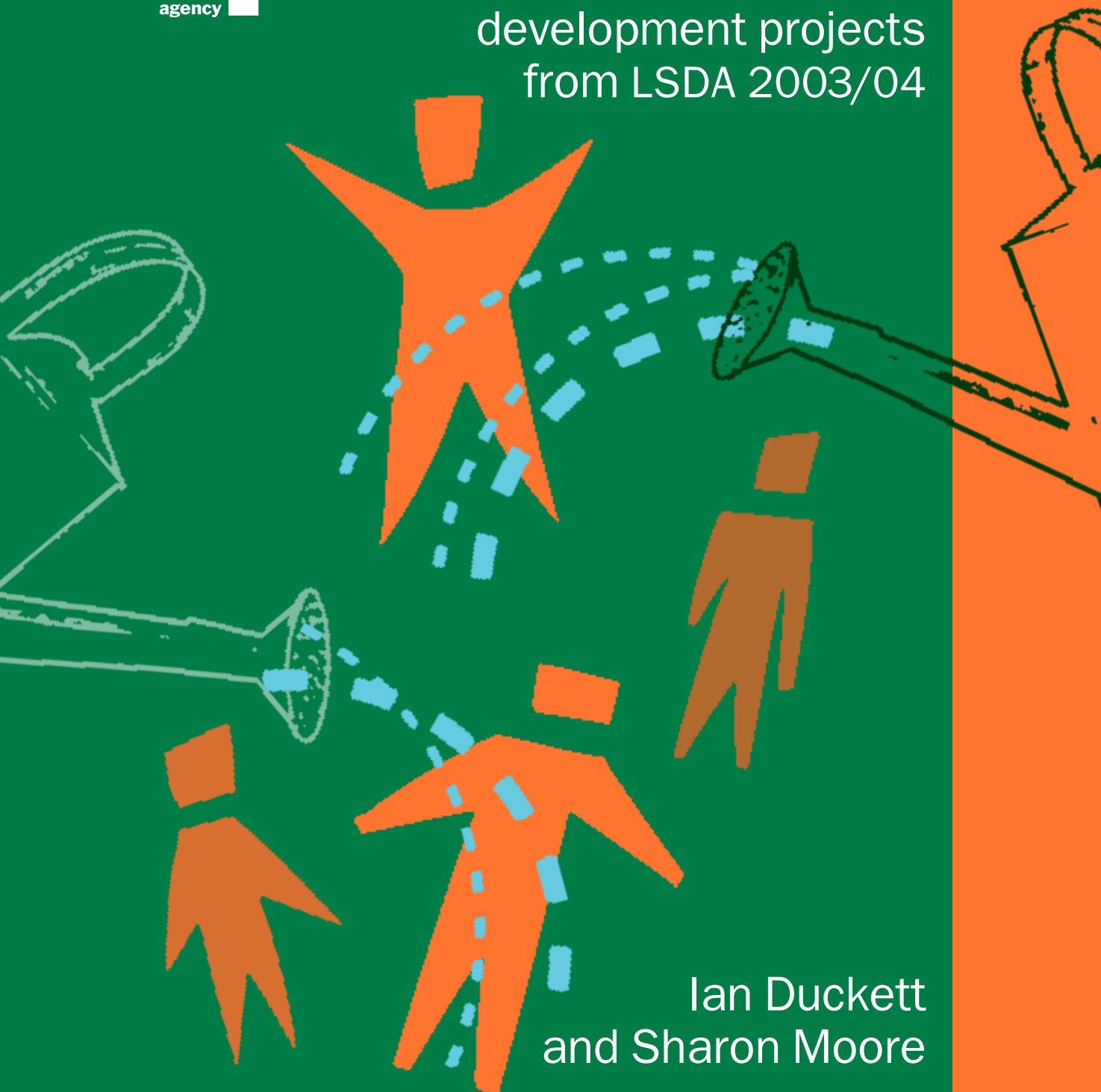


Vocational Learning
Support Programme



developing the post-16 vocational curriculum

development projects
from LSDA 2003/04



Ian Duckett
and Sharon Moore

**developing the post-16
vocational curriculum**
development projects
from LSDA 2003/04

Ian Duckett
and Sharon Moore

Published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency

www.LSDA.org.uk

Feedback should be sent to:

Vocational Learning Support Programme

Learning and Skills Development Agency

Regent Arcade House

19–25 Argyll Street

London W1F 7LS.

Tel 020 7297 9144

Fax 020 7297 9242

enquiries@LSDA.org.uk

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Authors: Ian Duckett and Sharon Moore

Project manager: Ian Duckett

Copyedited and designed by thingswedo

Printer: Blackmore Ltd, Shaftesbury

ISBN 1 84572 157 8

CIMS 041945GR

© Learning and Skills Development Agency 2005

You are welcome to copy this publication for internal use within your organisation. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Further information

For further information about the issues discussed in this publication please contact:

Ian Duckett

Learning and Skills Development Agency.

Tel 020 7297 9000

iduckett@LSDA.org.uk

Acknowledgements

With thanks to Dr Cheryl A Jones for her contribution to this publication.

Contents

Introduction	1
Development project summaries	2
Development project reports	7
Strategies to improve learning	7
Developing vocational learning resources	14
Supporting learning	18
Developing effective progression pathways	24
Learning points	30
Resources for teachers and managers	32
Developing the post-16 vocational curriculum : moving forward with the new A-levels	40
Appendix Themes addressed in the development projects	46

About the authors

Ian Duckett is a development adviser for LSDA's Vocational Learning Support Programme, responsible for supporting vocational A-levels and increasing flexibility in the post-16 vocational curriculum. Before joining LSDA, Ian was a lecturer and curriculum manager in FE colleges. Ian is the author of articles and books on a range of educational topics, including the recent titles *Raising achievement through vocational A-levels* (with Gillian Frankland; LSDA 2004) and *Tutorials and target-setting in the delivery of vocational A-levels* (with Dr Cheryl A Jones; LSDA 2004).

Sharon Moore is an experienced practitioner, trainer and consultant in vocational and work-related learning. Starting with initial development work and the GNVQ pilot, Sharon has continued to be involved in all aspects of vocational education and training. As a consultant, she has worked for a number of LEAs and with individual schools and colleges. Sharon is LSDA's Regional Activities Coordinator for Yorkshire and Humberside – a role that aims to bring coherence to the activities that are undertaken regionally to support vocational learning.



Introduction

In November 2003, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) commissioned 15 organisations to examine and develop their practice in the delivery of the post-16 vocational curriculum. These organisations comprised a selection of schools, colleges and partnerships. This publication disseminates the effective practice developed through the projects.

The projects were undertaken throughout 2003/04, so they often refer to the current Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE) qualification, which will be replaced by the new A-level specifications in September 2005. However, staff in the project centres were asked to consider the implications of the new qualification for their project outcomes and for their centre as a whole.

This publication is organised into five sections. The first section provides an overview of all 15 projects. The complete report submitted by each project centre can be read at **www.vocationallearning.org.uk**

In the second section, eight projects are described in more detail. These 'showcase projects' are grouped into the four themes that project centres were asked to consider:

- Strategies to improve learning
- Developing vocational learning resources
- Supporting learning
- Developing effective progression pathways.

In the third section, the learning points identified by the project centres are given. These learning points are evidence of the value that development projects can bring to an organisation.

The quality of learning in the post-16 vocational curriculum has been the subject of debate in recent years. There is much good practice to take forward and many lessons to be learnt. With this in mind, the fourth section of this publication provides resources for teachers and managers in the form of a presentation. This material, combined with the project descriptions and learning points, can be used by centres to consider creative ways to move forward with the post-16 vocational curriculum.

The final section looks at the concerns raised by staff across the sector as they plan for the new A-level qualifications. These concerns are in the form of questions and answers, proving a useful staff development tool for all to move forward with the new qualifications.

Ian Duckett

Development Adviser
Learning and Skills Development Agency

Development project summaries

This section provides a summary of all 15 development projects undertaken in conjunction with LSDA's Vocational Learning Support Programme in 2003/04. Here, readers will be able to find out the key features and outcomes of each project. In this publication it is not possible to provide a detailed description of all the projects completed. Full reports submitted by all centres can be found on the Vocational Learning Support Programme website: www.vocationallearning.org.uk

Developing independent learning through teaching information literacy and critical-thinking skills on VCE courses

Dixons City Technology College, Bradford

Dixons City Technology College's project focused on incorporating information-handling skills into schemes of work for all VCE subject teaching. The college hoped that the project would raise students' overall achievement and enhance tutors' understanding of how best to develop, teach and assess the skills that promote independent learning. This project report can be found on page 7 of this publication as well as on the website.

Developing the use of accelerated learning techniques in vocational education

York College

Accelerated learning techniques were the focus of York College's development project. The college made changes to its lesson plans, improved the classroom environment and promoted groupwork during lessons for VCE students. The outcomes included a more motivated VCE cohort and improved retention figures. This project report can be found on page 11 of this publication as well as on the website.

Promoting collaboration in Level 3 delivery

St Paul's School for Girls, Birmingham

Through its project, St Paul's School for Girls aimed to promote collaborative working between different curriculum areas within the school. The efforts of staff paid off, with the identification of common content across VCE Health and Social Care and a number of AS levels; the sharing of resources across curriculum areas; and activities organised jointly for the benefit of students. Creating links with the local FE college and local employers was also a feature of the project.

Developing a managed learning environment to support vocational learners

St Peter's Collegiate C of E School, Wolverhampton

The project undertaken by St Peter's Collegiate C of E School focused on developing a managed learning environment to enhance the delivery of lessons and the independent learning techniques of post-16 students. As a result of the project, e-learning materials have been created and shared, independent learning has a higher profile throughout the school and links with partner schools have been strengthened.

Developing electronic learning materials to support vocational science provision

Bradford College and Huddersfield New College

This project undertaken jointly by Bradford College and Huddersfield New College achieved a number of outcomes, with the partnership aspect of the project being seen as a major strength in itself.

The colleges :

- created electronic and paper-based learning materials
- developed links with industry that have enhanced VCE Science programmes
- worked with universities to improve the learning experience of college students and their knowledge of the HE opportunities open to them on successful completion of the VCE Science course.

This project report can be found on page 14 of this publication as well as on the website.

Developing electronic vocational learning materials to support vocational business provision

Laisterdyke High School and Challenge College, Bradford

Laisterdyke High School and Challenge College used a local rugby team – Bradford Bulls – as a context for the online learning materials they produced for VCE Business. Relating business operations to an organisation that students already had some knowledge of made the teaching and learning experience more meaningful to them. Both the school and college plan to nurture the working relationship they have developed with Bradford Bulls, with the aim of collaborating on further educational initiatives. This project report can be found on page 16 of this publication as well as on the website.

78 Derngate : developing a case study for leisure and travel courses

Kingsthorpe Community College, Northampton

The restoration of a major heritage attraction in Northampton, 78 Derngate, was the motivation for Kingsthorpe Community College's project. The college produced high-quality, accessible materials on marketing and customer service for students studying vocational business, leisure and travel courses. A conference gave 100 students studying VCEs in these subjects insight into the marketing and customer service operations of public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

Increasing the vocational focus : virtual interviews

Hayesfield School Technology College, Bath

Finding it increasingly difficult to organise visits for students to the workplace, Hayesfield School Technology College decided to maintain and enhance the vocational focus of the VCE in Health and Social Care by developing an electronic package of learning material. The resulting DVD contains video clips of students interviewing healthcare professionals about their jobs.

Science through VCE – more than virtual reality

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (GLOSCAT)

For its project GLOSCAT developed and evaluated VCE students' use of online learning materials available through the college's virtual learning network. The findings helped to generate effective practice in the use of such materials.

Designing and developing a website for VCE students

Acland Burghley School, London

Acland Burghley School aimed to create a website, based on the experiences of its former students, to promote the value of and increase participation in VCE /vocational A-level courses. The outcome is a website that can be viewed at www.val-ue.co.uk The website contains information on the different VCE /vocational A-level subject areas, presentations, student profiles and comments from ex-students on their experiences and chosen progression routes. This project report can be found on page 18 of this publication as well as on the website.

Raising post-16 achievement through coherence and support

Wolsingham School and Community College, County Durham

The focus of the project at Wolsingham School and Community College was on supporting vocational students through increased contact with vocational 'professionals'. The intention was to provide students with three opportunities to work with professionals, who would assist them in compiling a portfolio. Additional outcomes included improved induction programmes and the structuring of an electronic professional development file. This project report can be found on page 20 of this publication as well as on the website.

Developing the vocational focus of VCEs and enhancing links and partnerships with employers and providers

South Maidstone Federation

Staff involved in the LSDA-funded development project at the South Maidstone Federation :

- set up a business advisory board
- introduced a mentoring scheme
- involved the business advisory board in an interview day
- set up work placements for staff across a range of vocational areas.

Promoting VCEs and increasing participation

Ashton Sixth Form College, Ashton-under-Lyne

The project undertaken by Ashton Sixth Form College had two aims :

- to implement a mentor scheme and an associate student scheme
- to organise orientation days for Year 11 leavers who had applied for a place at the college.

Both aims intended to assist learners in making informed choices and thus improve participation, retention and achievement. The mentor scheme and orientation days were successful ; the college will be evaluating its September 2004 intake to judge the project's effect on participation. This project report can be found on page 24 of this publication as well as on the website.

Improving awareness of VCEs at Key stage 4 and developing progression routes into higher education

Bury College

Through its project Bury College planned to improve potential learners' awareness of VCEs and promote HE progression routes to its existing learners. The project methodology included: analysing enrolment statistics, awareness-raising activities in schools, developing specific learning materials and holding focus groups with students. This project report can be found on page 27 of this publication as well as on the website.

Promoting VCE Manufacturing as a progression route post-16: enhancing the vocational focus

St Wilfrid's C of E High School and Technology College, Blackburn

In the project at St Wilfrid's C of E High School and Technology College, staff focused on raising the profile of manufacturing as a subject area within the school. The institution undertook a number of promotional activities. It held open evenings for and gave presentations to particular target groups and organised an employer-led event entitled 'The world of manufacturing', held in association with the local Education Business Partnership.

Development project reports

Strategies to improve learning

Developing independent learning through teaching information literacy and critical-thinking skills on VCE courses

Dixons City Technology College, Bradford

Context

Dixons City Technology College is an 11–18, mixed comprehensive school situated near the centre of Bradford. It has almost 1100 students on roll, with 250 in the sixth form. Of the total student population :

- 9.5% claim free school meals
- 27% have English as a second language
- 20% have some form of special educational needs (SEN)
- 2% have statements.

Dixons City Technology College is a research and development institution, and a beacon school. The report of the school's Ofsted inspection in 2001 praised the high standards of student achievement and the particularly successful General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results (94% of the cohort gaining five GCSEs at A*–C in 2003). Ofsted identified one area for improvement: the progress of sixth form students. The school is addressing this through its involvement in LSDA's 2003/04 development projects, and through other initiatives focused on raising achievement at post-16.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

The school had instigated a variety of projects since 1997, with the aim of developing whole-school strategies for information handling, information literacy and independent learning. The next step involved incorporating information-handling skills into schemes of work for VCE subject teaching. As a result, the school identified nine aims that it hoped to achieve by participating in an LSDA-funded development project. It planned to :

- develop critical-thinking and research skills required for optimum success in VCE courses
- adapt and extend the recently developed information literacy strategies and materials to meet the needs of Year 12 VCE students

- develop and evaluate strategies and materials to enhance the transfer of the independent learning skills that underpin research tasks and projects
- produce electronic support materials for the development of questioning and independent learning skills
- improve the VCE tutors' understanding of how best to assess, teach and develop information literacy skills as an integral part of subject and vocational teaching
- develop strategies for incorporating information literacy and critical-thinking skills into VCE courses for 2004/05
- provide students and tutors with a clear framework by which to measure the development of information literacy skills
- ensure that students use information and communication technology (ICT) to support independent learning, organisation and revision
- support teaching and learning by focusing on co-planning and by reviewing strategies and materials.

On completion of the project, Dixons Technology College anticipated that there would be :

- measurable improvements in grades
- new strategies developed and piloted
- electronic learning materials developed and piloted
- shared strategies for assessment and teaching of skills
- a student assessment framework in place
- improved knowledge on the part of students about how to use an electronic package, developed as a revision aid
- an overall evaluation of the project, undertaken with staff through meetings, interviews and lesson observations.

Actions and activities

The project aims were broken down into four distinct strands :

- research and planning
- production and use of materials
- delivery of lessons
- ongoing assessment and evaluation.

Strand one, research and planning, involved a strategic planning team, a core curriculum team and focus groups of students. Together, they identified learning needs, discussed appropriate options, decided on priorities and planned teaching and learning strategies.

The production and use of materials, strand two, comprised a number of activities. First, a questionnaire based on the independent learning cycle (see figure 1) was developed, in order to establish levels of students' skills. Following the questionnaire, a student self-assessment grid was produced, which aimed to inform the teaching and learning process in terms of critical-thinking and information literacy skills. Finally, commercial software was networked to the school's ICT facilities and training took place on its use, for staff and students alike.

Strand three, delivery of lessons, focused on integrating support material into existing schemes of work. Tutors for each of the VCE subject groups introduced to students specific elements of the independent learning cycle and the range of support materials (eg self-assessment grids and note-taking templates), explaining their relevance and the requirement for students to use them in their current and future studies.

The evaluation, strand four, was undertaken by the strategic planning team. Members of the team met regularly to discuss progress and review teaching and learning strategies. Students were also informed of the research project and played a part in its evaluation by feeding back comments on their experiences.

Outcomes

The core curriculum team has established good working practices, enabling the importance of the independent learning cycle, and the need for tutors to teach and students to practise skills within it, to be appreciated.

Teaching materials and teaching strategies have been piloted, evaluated and shared. The teaching and learning materials used and generated through the project included:

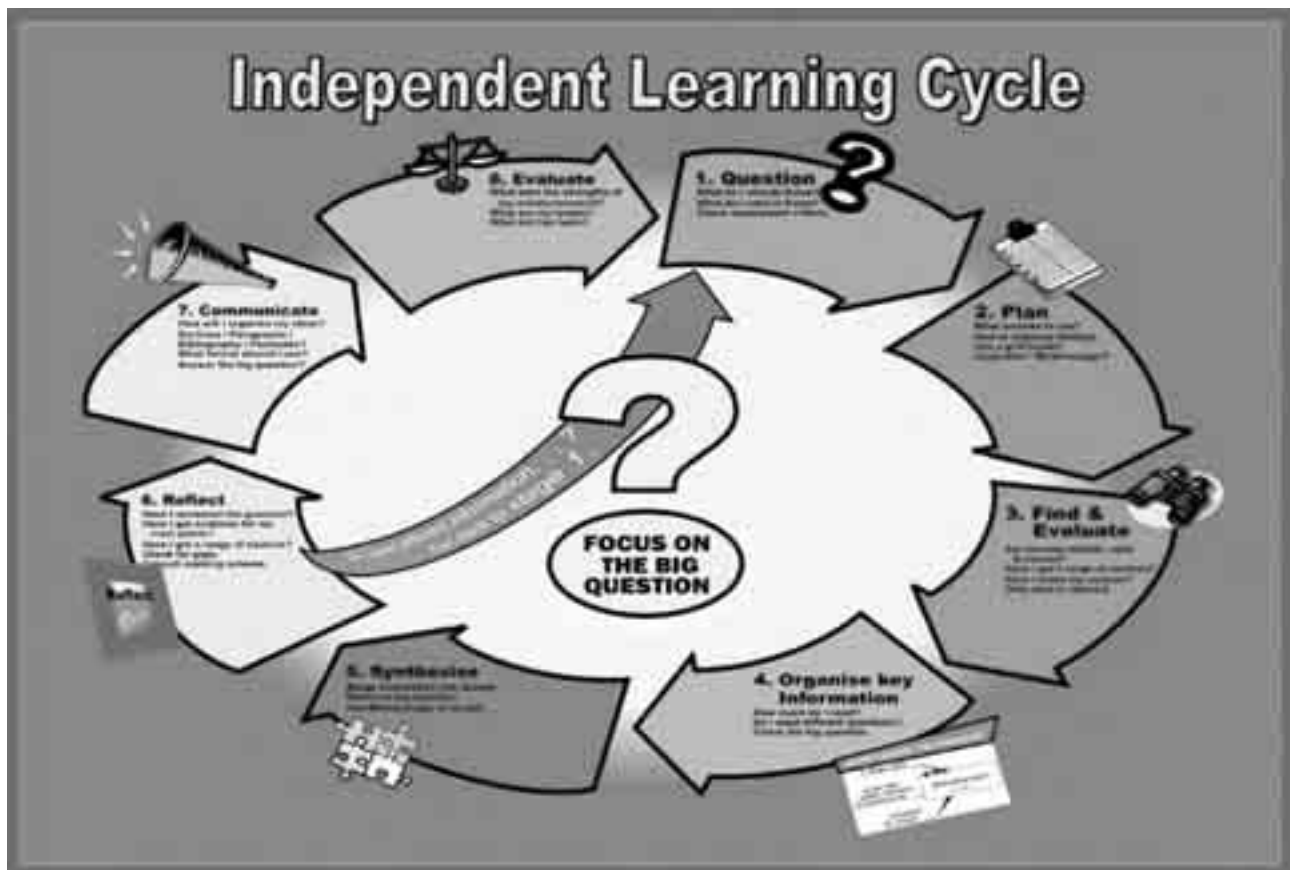
- the 'Mind manager', which was networked to the school's ICT facilities, the focus for staff training and piloted for use within VCE assignments in order to develop key learning skills
- a question generator package
- an interactive version of the independent learning cycle.

A working definition of the independent learning cycle, in terms of information literacy and independent learning skills, has been established and developed. Used by VCE tutors, the definition has also been promoted in classrooms where colourful posters are on display.

The interviews with students at the end of the project revealed a positive response to the independent learning cycle and the self-assessment framework for progression, which were regarded as useful learning development tools. The students welcomed the additional skills-based focus within the VCE lessons and consequently developed a greater understanding of the relevance of more of the underpinning skills highlighted in the learning cycle. They all said that they understood to a greater degree how to develop themselves as independent learners and they all saw the relevance of the skills being taught within the VCE lessons.

Staff also benefited from the project. They understood the underpinning skills that needed to be taught within the VCE and felt more confident teaching them. Staff also reflected upon the way in which there had been unexpected beneficial outcomes, in terms of the new electronic materials and the positive impact that skills teaching had on the revision process.

Figure 1. Dixons City Technology College's independent learning cycle



Developing the use of accelerated learning techniques in vocational education

York College

Context

York College has 3509 full-time students and 8593 part-time students and provides learning opportunities from foundation level to Level 4 across 18 curriculum areas. Qualifications offered include National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), VCEs, A-levels, National Diplomas and a range of higher education (HE) qualifications.

The college is situated in a historic city in the north of England that boasts thriving manufacturing and service industries. York College provides for 80% of the city's 16–18-year-old learners and a large proportion of adult learners. It works in partnership with employers and other learning providers to offer responsive and high-quality learning experiences for all members of the community.

In the year that LSDA's development project took place, York College's provision included VCE courses in hospitality, sport and leisure, business and ICT, as well as the full range of other vocational courses.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

York College, through its involvement in the LSDA-funded development project, planned to test the effectiveness of accelerated learning techniques with groups of VCE learners. The college was keen to develop accelerated learning in all aspects of its provision, especially as one of its partners – the local learning authority – placed considerable emphasis on the use of accelerated learning in schools.

Therefore, York College planned to :

- train staff and gather resources on accelerated learning
- develop accelerated learning techniques and materials suitable for VCE students
- test and evaluate the use of accelerated learning techniques in the classroom.

In terms of key outputs, the college expected to have :

- evidence to support and direct the use of the accelerated learning techniques
- a resource bank of materials to support and be shared among teachers
- a strategy for sharing the good practice identified through the project.

Actions and activities

Two advanced tutors attended training courses and subsequently cascaded what they had learnt to other advanced tutors based at York College. A fieldworker from the Learning Development Unit (LDU), who helped particularly in making and collecting classroom materials, also supported the tutors.

Regular 'stop and share' sessions were held for active reflection and development of the accelerated learning techniques and strategies being used. LDU fieldworkers also observed lessons and interviewed the teachers and their students to find out how the techniques were working.

Towards the end of the project, the findings were further shared and discussed through a series of interactive training sessions with VCE and other vocational tutors and their managers.

The advanced tutors made a number of major changes to their teaching as a result of the training. One of the key changes made was to the lesson plans, which were adapted to incorporate accelerated learning techniques. The most helpful addition to the lesson plans was found to be tick boxes for the six stages of learning in the cognitive domain: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. Boxes were added to show which activities were visual, which were auditory and which were kinaesthetic. An additional section suggested activities learners could carry out to demonstrate their new knowledge. The improvements made to the lesson plans now ensure that all learning styles are incorporated within the delivery of the VCE subject.

The following areas also experienced significant change:

Virtual learning environment (VLE) – prior to the start of the course, all presentations were uploaded to the VLE. This enabled students to look ahead or to catch up if lessons were missed.

The classroom environment – lessons started with music playing in the background as the students entered the classroom. The music was selected by the tutor to reflect the mood of the lesson; for example teachers used tranquil pieces to calm overactive students, or energetic ones to enliven the mood. The use of music contributed to a controlled learning environment. In addition, the classrooms were changed to make them more stimulating visually. One tutor covered her classroom walls with posters the students had made about the key learning points required for the course. The posters helped the class to remember difficult aspects of the course and made it feel as if the room 'belonged' to the students. Another tutor hung giant mobiles of motivational words from the ceiling to stimulate the activities.

The delivery of sessions – the objectives of each session were displayed on the whiteboard for the entire lesson, alongside a question that the students would learn the answer to towards the end of the class. The students were encouraged to discuss ways to tackle the lesson in order to reach the objectives and this promoted student participation and groupwork.

Outcomes

The initiatives were evaluated through observations and the collection of learner and tutor opinions. In terms of achievement, no results were available at the time of writing the project report, but all tutors involved expected a rise in achievement rates and reported dramatic improvements in retention and attendance, from 70% to 99% for the IT group, and from 82% to 98% for the leisure and tourism group.

Key successes

The school deduced that student-led activities and groupwork contributed most to improving teaching on VCE courses. Student-led activities provided a very effective learning environment, where the tutor could easily cascade information to the students while keeping them active and engaged. The activities worked best when they were related to an authentic work situation. Groupwork was more effective if the class worked as one large group, or if smaller groups were selected randomly. The tutor's choice of music at the start of each lesson was a good way to create a stimulating learning environment and a calm atmosphere.

Copies of the materials and documents generated through the project are available from York College's LDU website :

www.ycc.ac.uk/yc/new/lduweb

Developing vocational learning resources

Developing electronic learning materials to support vocational science provision

Bradford College and Huddersfield New College

Context

These two institutions present a contrast within the further education (FE) sector in terms of size and curriculum range. Bradford College is a large, general, city-centre FE college; Huddersfield New College is a medium-sized sixth form college located on the Pennine fringe of West Yorkshire. Both colleges draw students from across West Yorkshire, a county renowned for its links with the science and manufacturing industries. While these sectors of the economy continue to decline, there is still a significant demand for young people with the appropriate science education and qualifications.

Both Bradford College and Huddersfield New College believe that VCE Science is an important course that gives post-16 students who would otherwise 'drop' science the opportunity to progress successfully onto science-related degrees and careers. Managers in both colleges feel that these groups of students, who tend not to be 'high fliers' at GCSE level, can become successful students of advanced-level science, and in the long term enter science-related career paths.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

The project undertaken jointly by Bradford College and Huddersfield New College aimed to encourage more young people to follow a vocational science pathway, to boost student achievement and retention through the provision of stimulating learning experiences, and to help raise awareness of the science-related progression opportunities available in higher education and beyond. In particular, it focused on developing the use of information and learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning for VCE Science.

The project partners worked together to:

- develop innovative and interactive learning materials for VCE Science
- share good practice and develop strategies to raise the achievement of students following VCE Science
- increase the work-relatedness of VCE Science, with the help of local employers
- improve VCE Science students' knowledge of HE progression routes by nurturing relationships with local universities
- improve progression from GCSE into post-16 science courses.

Actions and activities

Work on developing innovative and interactive learning materials began by managers from both colleges meeting to select two units of the VCE Science course on which to focus. Unit 19: Medical Microbiology, and Unit 3: Controlling Chemical Processes were chosen. Bradford College had taught Unit 19 for a number of years and Huddersfield New College planned to incorporate it into its new single award VCE. It was agreed that for Unit 19, an assignment-based unit with scope for using links with local universities and hospitals, a lecturer from Bradford College would develop paper-based teaching and learning materials, assignment briefs and teachers' notes. A programme of supporting work-related activities would also be devised.

The work to support Unit 3 followed a different path. For this unit, web-based materials were seen as the preferred option. It was felt that learning materials that students could access online in their private study time would encourage students to take greater responsibility for managing their own learning in preparation for the external assessment.

Both colleges had a desire to increase the use of ILT in their teaching and learning processes. The development of the online learning materials to support Unit 3 of the VCE Science course helped them to achieve their aim, as did the creation of a website that included teaching and learning materials, interactive activities and specimen exam papers with model answers. The colleges suggested that spending more time planning the website and looking at the technical aspects such as navigation would have been beneficial. However, the process of developing the new materials was regarded as a useful staff development exercise.

A second project strand involved the colleges forging links with HE institutions. A member of staff from each institution took responsibility for making contact with universities in the area then following up telephone conversations with meetings to discuss potential activities. The result was that each college organised visits for its students to a range of universities. These visits enabled Bradford College and Huddersfield New College students to discover the HE opportunities open to them on successful completion of their VCE in Science.

Outcomes

The project succeeded in meeting all its initial objectives. Its impact on student learning and achievement was very positive, although the full impact of some elements of the project will take time to evaluate.

For the two colleges, there were real benefits from working in partnership with each other and with HE institutions. The experience has helped teams in both colleges to be more outward-looking in their approach to developing new strategies. The colleges also recognised the impact that links with HE institutions can have on VCE courses, adding another dimension to them.

Developing electronic vocational learning materials to support vocational business provision

Laisterdyke High School and Challenge College, Bradford

Context

Laisterdyke High School and Challenge College are both 11–18, mixed-ability comprehensive schools with new sixth forms, situated in Bradford. They have just completed their first year of a joint post-16 provision.

Approximately 50 VCE Business students from across both schools were involved in the project.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

Laisterdyke High School and Challenge College worked together for the purposes of producing innovative and interactive teaching and learning materials for a VCE Business unit. The unit chosen was Unit 3, which was focused on marketing, because it was known from previous years that students, if left to their own devices, tended to study similar products – usually a chocolate bar! This meant that although the students ended up with a well-designed product, they had no real knowledge and company facts to support it and so were guided towards the Cadbury's Fuse case study, which in the long run led to a very unoriginal piece of work.

One of the project aims was to develop the learning materials in conjunction with a local company; this would add relevance to the delivery and learning of the unit. It was also hoped that this would foster and promote a closer relationship with the company concerned.

If successful in terms of developing links and producing materials, the colleges also anticipated that the project would provide a methodology for working with other companies in the future.

Actions and activities

The joint collaboration presented communication issues and initial difficulties when deciding on the relative contributions each centre would make.

Defining clear roles and responsibilities for each centre was a crucial process. A business teacher at Laisterdyke High School was given the task of contacting the local company – Bradford Bulls rugby team – and producing the materials that were to be based on it, transferring them onto specially designed web pages. The ICT aspect of the project was allocated to specialist staff at Challenge College. E-mail, regular telephone conversations and a website that both schools could access assisted communication between the two parties. Most matters were dealt with urgently.

However, during the life of the project it was noted that having the ICT developments separate from the author was on occasions difficult; ideas for improving the site weren't easily and quickly explored because of the difficulties in arranging face-to-face meetings between the staff working on the project in the two different schools.

The website was used and evaluated by two groups of VCE students in the two different schools. The materials used were very well received and there appeared to be differences in the interim results of the students who had used them and the students who had not.

As part of the project, an overall evaluation event was held at which business teachers from local schools, staff from the Education Business Partnership and college students were invited to review and evaluate the final website and all the materials contained within it.

Outcomes

The learning materials generated by Laisterdyke High School and Challenge College, in association with Bradford Bulls, can be accessed at **www.challengelhs.co.uk**

Both institutions regarded the project as valuable and collaborative working has helped to plan the joint post-16 provision. Running the project in each school meant that teaching and learning on the VCE Business programme happened in parallel within each school, which allowed effective discussions between the teaching staff and the sharing of good practice to take place.

The link with Bradford Bulls was extremely useful for work at Key stages 4 and 5. It is hoped that the positive relationship that has been developed will lead to further collaborative projects.

In terms of improvements, both schools felt that the time between starting the project and having to use the materials with the students needed to be better planned. The project staff ended up with only two weeks in which to write the materials and to upload them onto the server for access, which proved impossible in terms of authoring and ICT support. As a result, some of the materials were only accessed later in the VCE Business course, and this lowered the amount of usage made of the website by students.

Both schools are planning to develop more case studies following the methodology developed through this project. They intend to investigate how further materials can be developed and updated using this approach, especially considering the imminent changes to the VCE Business as it transforms into an A-level in Applied Business.

Supporting learning

Designing and developing a website for VCE students

Acland Burghley School, London

Context

Acland Burghley School is a successful mixed comprehensive school for 11–18 year olds in the London Borough of Camden. Vocational courses have always featured heavily in the school's curriculum. As well as the advanced courses, the school also offers General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) at foundation and intermediate levels. At the time of writing, Acland Burghley School delivered the following advanced-level vocational courses to the numbers of students indicated:

- Vocational A-level Business (double award) – 18 students
- Vocational A-level Business (single award) – 15 students
- Vocational A-level Performing Arts (single award) – 14 students
- Vocational A-level Art and Design (double award) – 17 students.

Business studies is the most established vocational area within the school, which has delivered BTEC Nationals, Advanced GNVQ and VCE.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

At Acland Burghley School, staff used the funding from LSDA to achieve two aims. First, it planned to design a website to promote VCE courses and to increase participation in the courses by tracking the progress of former vocational students. Previous students of the school were to be contacted through a questionnaire, which sought information about their views and experiences since leaving school. Information they provided would then be used to create student profiles.

Second, Acland Burghley School intended to improve progression from the VCE into higher education or employment. Its students had always viewed the VCE in a positive light, however, the school recognised that for 'outsiders' the issue of parity of esteem remained. The aim was to celebrate the success of the VCE in the words of the most important stakeholders – the students.

Actions and activities

The first task involved identifying the needs and opinions of different stakeholders with regard to the VCE. Local key stakeholders were contacted such as vocational managers and teachers, students taking VCEs and students taking other courses. The opinions of other parties located further afield were gained following an e-mail sent to other schools and colleges that delivered vocational courses. Consultation with these groups helped to decide the content for the website that was to promote VCEs.

As the project leader had no previous experience of website design, developing the required skills was the next step in the process. The starting point was an excellent book, *Macromedia Dreamweaver MX: hands-on training* (Green and Rudner 2002). Unlike most ICT books, it was actually written by teachers.

It was decided that the use of a pre-designed template would be the easiest and quickest way to develop the website. The template could be changed once decisions had been made on the structure of the site. The initial work of structuring the site was completed on A4 paper and, after numerous drafts, it was then possible to design the navigation.

With the site design completed, project participants contacted ex-students and asked them about their experiences of VCE. A questionnaire was designed with 10 key questions.

- Why did you choose the course ?
- What did you do on the course ?
- What skills did you develop on the course ?
- What did you do straight after the course ?
- What are you doing now ?
- What are your favourite memories of the course ?
- What were / are your favourite websites ?
- What do you hope to do in the future ?
- Do you have any ace learning tips ?
- Why was the course a wise choice ?

Producing a questionnaire was a relatively simple task. Making contact with former students was not as straightforward. It was a time-consuming task ; 60 letters were sent and 36 replies were received. As the information was collected, the site was updated.

Outcomes

The final outcome was a website called val-ue.co.uk. Why val-ue.co.uk? It's an acronym of Vocational A-Level – Understanding Excellence! The site includes: subject area briefs; presentations on the benefits of the different VCE courses; and individual profiles of ex-vocational students, with their thoughts on the benefits of the courses, their chosen progression routes and their experiences since leaving the school. All the content is grouped under the following headings:

- Home page
- Subject information
- Student profiles
- News
- Links
- FAQs.

In terms of promoting VCEs, the site was evaluated by current VCE students, whose feedback was very positive. Students praised the quality of the information and the ease of navigating the site. Although simple in terms of design, the website achieved its goal of disseminating experiences. The unanimous verdict was that the website would have been a great asset to students when making choices at Key stage 4. The main strength of the website was that it was based on the experiences of former Acland Burghley students, making it easier for current students to relate to them.

Raising post-16 achievement through coherence and support

Wolsingham School and Community College, County Durham

Context

Wolsingham is an 11–18 school and community college set in rural Weardale in County Durham. Less than half of the school's Year 12 cohort opt to study a VCE: 28 students out of 65 split across ICT (17), business (17), health and social care (4), travel and tourism (4) – with 14 students studying two VCEs.

For its project, Wolsingham School and Community College wished to give its vocational students more contact with vocational 'professionals', who would provide assistance with:

- the transition from Key stage 4 to post-16 options
- VCE portfolio work
- progression from the VCE into higher education or employment with training.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

The project had five aims :

1. To investigate the possibility of giving all students the opportunity to access or work with an external vocational mentor on at least three occasions during Year 12
2. To investigate the feasibility of developing for Year 12 students an integrated vocational assignment relevant to more than one subject, to reduce the workload associated with generating evidence
3. To further develop school-wide standards and procedures for conducting investigations, report writing and project management and to promote their use by all students
4. To adapt the teaching and learning environment to support the development of students' independent learning and project management skills
5. To further develop the student support programme, with the aim of assisting students as they move from Key stage 4 into further education or employment with training.

Actions and activities

The actions and activities undertaken during the life of the project are numbered from one to five and correspond with each of the aims and anticipated outcomes outlined above.

1. A one-day 'Vocational vision' conference was organised, giving Year 12 VCE students from Wolsingham School and Community College the opportunity to find out more about their chosen vocational area through work with vocational 'professionals'. Eleven professionals representing each of the four vocational areas attended the conference, which was very well received by the students.

Other actions and activities relating to the first objective included the production of an integrated vocationally based assignment (see below) and an end-of-year review at which students were invited to present their personal development file (PDF) to an external panel.

2. The project team examined the VCE unit specifications for ICT, business, travel and tourism, and health and social care in order to identify common ground. Assignment briefs that met the evidence requirements for ICT/business and business/travel and tourism were developed and trialled. Students were briefed on them and provided with a checklist to help them prepare for their workplace visits, which were a necessary component of the assignment. The students visited various organisations in groups of two or three but were expected to produce individual work and to organise their own transport to and from the organisation.

3. The existing school-wide standards and procedures were compiled into a school standards manual that was issued to all Year 12 students. In future years it will be distributed to all Key stage 4 and post-16 students.
4. To support students and to encourage them to compile a high-quality PDF, a mentor was employed for one day a week for 10 weeks. A series of student briefings and a 'script' for the meetings were developed.

The mentor met with 45 of the 65 Year 12 students for a formal 15-minute interview, once a fortnight, from late January to April 2004. Each student had 5 x 15 minutes of contact with the mentor.

Informal feedback suggested that the students valued the interviews and thought that they had helped them to prepare for their careers and professional development presentations that took place in February 2004.

According to the mentor, the students benefited from the interviews in the following ways :

- through one-to-one attention and assistance with the compilation of their PDF
- through the checking of a student's work individually to ensure that it was relevant and complete
- through the opportunities given to them to discuss and plan for their careers presentation.

Feedback from the careers panel suggested that the students who had attended the interviews had planned and delivered a higher-quality presentation than those who could not attend the interviews. This was particularly apparent with the one-year students who were often nervous, reticent and had a tendency to steer clear of taking a 'high profile' during their presentation.

Feedback from the end-of-year review panels confirmed that the students were better prepared than last year and that during the interviews, students had recognised the value of the mentoring.

5. Wolsingham School and Community College requires all Year 12 students to compile a PDF that includes a portfolio of work. A basic structure for an electronic PDF (E-PDF) that followed the school's paper-based version with the addition of digital video evidence was developed.

The E-PDF allowed students to combine details of their achievements and learning in a structured, customisable, digital format. Students used text, audio recordings, digital images and digital video to create an E-Me that could be used both as a formative and summative assessment support mechanism.

The basic template for the E-PDF included a CV, a personal statement, a portfolio of work, details and commentaries on learning targets, career plans, extra-curricular experiences, key skills achievements, employability skills and vocational skills. Students used a multimedia-authoring package to put their chosen contents into the template prepared by the school. They could then choose to either keep the basic structure and format defined by the template or to create their own customised version. When they were ready to present their portfolio, or needed to send a copy to support an application for employment etc, the students 'burned' a standalone executable version that was platform independent onto a CD or a DVD.

Through the project the template was trialled with a small group of Year 12 students. The school is looking to extend the trial to include a wider range of students working in a variety of different contexts over an extended timescale.

Outcomes

Wolsingham School and Community College's participation in LSDA's 2003/04 round of development projects :

- gave its students three opportunities to work with vocational professionals
- offered its students a 'checking service' so that they could ensure that their portfolio work satisfied the evidence requirements and was complete
- supported the development of a school standards manual
- refined the Year 11/12 and Year 12/13 induction programmes
- developed a structure for an E-PDF.

Developing effective progression pathways

Promoting VCEs and increasing participation

Ashton Sixth Form College, Ashton-under-Lyne

Context

In May 2003, Ashton Sixth Form College in Greater Manchester had 1315 16–18-year-old learners following full-time courses. The majority of its students (79%) were recruited from 18 local high schools; the remaining 21% had progressed onto a higher-level course within the college.

The college offers a range of provision. 86% of students follow advanced-level courses, 11% follow intermediate courses and 3% follow entry-level or foundation courses.

The range of provision for students who wish to follow a vocational course has increased steadily over the last 10 years. However, some courses are more popular than others. The vocational team leaders are committed to ensuring that students choose their courses for all the right reasons and that they are fully informed about the courses before they enrol. The team leaders believe that such dedication enhances the student experience and consequently produces excellent retention and success rates. The uptake of VCEs may not follow national trends, but it is the local picture that is important for the college.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

Through its involvement in an LSDA-funded development project, Ashton Sixth Form College intended to promote VCEs and increase participation by:

- implementing a mentor scheme and an associate student scheme in three or four local 11–16 high schools in Tameside
- organising orientation days for Year 11 leavers who had applied for a place at the college.

For this project centre, the main outcomes revolved around the fact that the high-school pupils who chose to apply for a place at Ashton Sixth Form College would be better informed about the college as a whole through their involvement in the mentoring and / or the associate student scheme. If the schemes helped pupils to decide that Ashton was not the place for them, then this too was important; the pupils would be more informed about the types of vocational courses and the possible progression routes available, which in turn would increase participation in the selected area. Using present students from the college was seen as a key strategy for the two schemes, for Ashton's students would be viewed as role models and have more credibility with pupils in Years 10 and 11 than college tutors.

The orientation days would finally confirm to the Year 11 pupils that their choice of vocational area was the right one.

Actions and activities

Using previous enrolment data and through discussions with staff, four local schools were chosen to take part in the project.

The selection criteria were based on :

- low numbers of pupils progressing to Ashton from a particular school
- low numbers of pupils from a particular school choosing to follow VCE
- existing links with the school
- whether a school had previously requested support from the college
- the schools' provision of GCSEs in vocational subjects.

However, in some cases the opposite criteria could apply.

The following VCE areas were chosen :

Business

The number of students that enrolled was lower than anticipated but the dip did follow national trends. Could the project be one way to reverse the trend?

Health and social care

The number of starters had doubled and this needed to be maintained for 2004. Health and social care had a good track record of attracting students and this experience could be shared across other areas.

Leisure and recreation

The number of students enrolling had dipped by 50% and although it would be difficult to turn this around for 2004, the target group would be the present Year 10 who would leave school in 2005 and hopefully enrol in VCE Leisure and Recreation the following September.

Travel and tourism

The number of starters was almost static and it was thought that this could be reversed, especially as one of the large feeder schools had introduced the GCSE in September 2003.

Developing the student mentor scheme

Ashton Sixth Form College decided to contact the local Education Business Partnership (EBP) for advice with regard to mentoring as some staff had already had contact with the organisation. The EBP volunteered to work with potential mentors and to use its training pack as a starting point.

Vocational team leaders from the identified VCE areas asked for student volunteers. In total 42 students volunteered including several ICT students who had heard about the mentoring.

Two training sessions were arranged with the EBP; another two would be carried out in-house. The training followed the following topics :

- What is a mentor?
- The guidelines and boundaries
- The benefits of mentoring
- The role of a mentor.

Developing the associate student scheme

This scheme gave associate student status to some pupils in the identified high schools. They were given certain privileges and a pack that outlined what they could expect to receive as an associate student of Ashton Sixth Form College. The contents of the pack included a welcome letter from the principal, a diary, the aims of the scheme and a list of the entitlements.

The four chosen schools were contacted and the mentoring and associate student scheme initiated in each. Different groups of pupils were targeted in each of the four high schools. The initial plan was to introduce exactly the same scheme to each school, however, as the contacts were made and as discussions developed it became obvious that the project should be flexible. Each school was different and each school had different needs. Therefore, the focus in each school was still based on the original aim of the project but the method was slightly different.

Staff from the sixth form college and the four participating schools evaluated the project. Feedback was received from the pupils too, for example :

You will know who you will be taught by and the level of work at the college.

It makes you feel special.

It makes you decide you don't want to do something.

Outcomes

Feedback from the evaluation confirms that the project was successful and that it met the specified aims. Final confirmation of this will be through the enrolment and subsequent retention data for the academic year 2004/05.

Improving awareness of VCEs at Key stage 4 and developing progression routes into higher education

Bury College

Context

Bury College is a large tertiary college in Greater Manchester. It has approximately 3000 16–18-year-old students following VCEs, National Diplomas, A-levels and courses at Levels 1 and 2 and at foundation level. Approximately 100 students are enrolled on VCE courses, representing 18% of the total Level 3 cohort.

Through its involvement in an LSDA-funded development project, Bury College wanted to enable Key stage 4 students to make an informed choice in terms of their preferred VCE course. The college also wished to identify progression routes from VCE courses.

Aims and anticipated outcomes

The project had two strands. Strand one intended to raise awareness of VCEs among Key stage 4 students in high schools. In order to achieve this, emphasis was placed on making high-school students, staff and parents aware of the career and progression routes available from GCSE to Level 3 and, ultimately, higher education. Strand two of the project focused on existing VCE students at Bury College and raising their awareness of possible HE progression routes.

The anticipated outcomes of this project included the development of learning materials that would enable students to gain a greater understanding of the purpose and demands of VCEs. The learning materials were to feature skills such as creative and critical thinking, mind mapping, constructing a case and debating it.

Initially, the project involved an analysis of the enrolments to Bury College from each high school in terms of entry to A-level and vocational Level 3 courses over the past three years. This analysis enabled the project manager to identify those schools that had a particularly strong vocational profile and those that had a predominately A-level focus with a small but growing vocational enrolment trend. With the analysis completed, vocational coordinators were contacted in each of the high schools to plan a range of VCE awareness-raising activities for students in Years 10 and 11. These included the development of learning materials alongside presentations, creative thinking in business workshops and career-specific activities related to media, health and social care, and engineering.

The remit for the second strand was to identify students on existing VCE courses who had the potential to be successful in higher education but did not have the aspirations to progress due to a lack of awareness and understanding of the various options open to them. The funding from LSDA would be used to allow an academic member of staff to target these non-traditional HE students and develop their interests in higher education throughout the academic year. This would be achieved by:

- identifying, through VCE focus groups, the major factors influencing students' progression into higher education, their choice of subject area and university. From this analysis, strategies were to be developed to enable VCE students to make a more informed choice about higher education as their perceptions of opportunities expanded and their attitudes evolved
- developing VCE-related material that would promote the different courses available in higher education
- brokering curriculum links between HE institutions and Bury College academic staff in vocational areas to facilitate progression routes
- working with regional HE institutions to deliver taster sessions and summer schools in a range of vocational areas.

Actions and activities

The most effective strategies deployed to raise awareness of VCEs among Key stage 4 students involved the development of learning materials and presentations highlighting the opportunities available. The creative thinking in business workshops, held over several weeks, enabled students interested in VCE Business to explore different problem-solving techniques and raised their awareness of the VCE specifications. The most cost-effective method for raising awareness was the large-scale presentations to whole year groups followed by a series of vocational activities related to health and social care, and engineering.

Focus groups identified barriers to higher education and were particularly effective in raising students' awareness of HE progression opportunities. They were set up to allow students to express their views in a non-threatening environment. The development of materials geared to the needs and interests of VCE students generated interest, but more work needs to be done to track former VCE students who have progressed into higher education and are willing to talk about their experiences. While HE institutions were involved in this project, progress was slow and more work needs to continue in this area to gain more benefit for students.

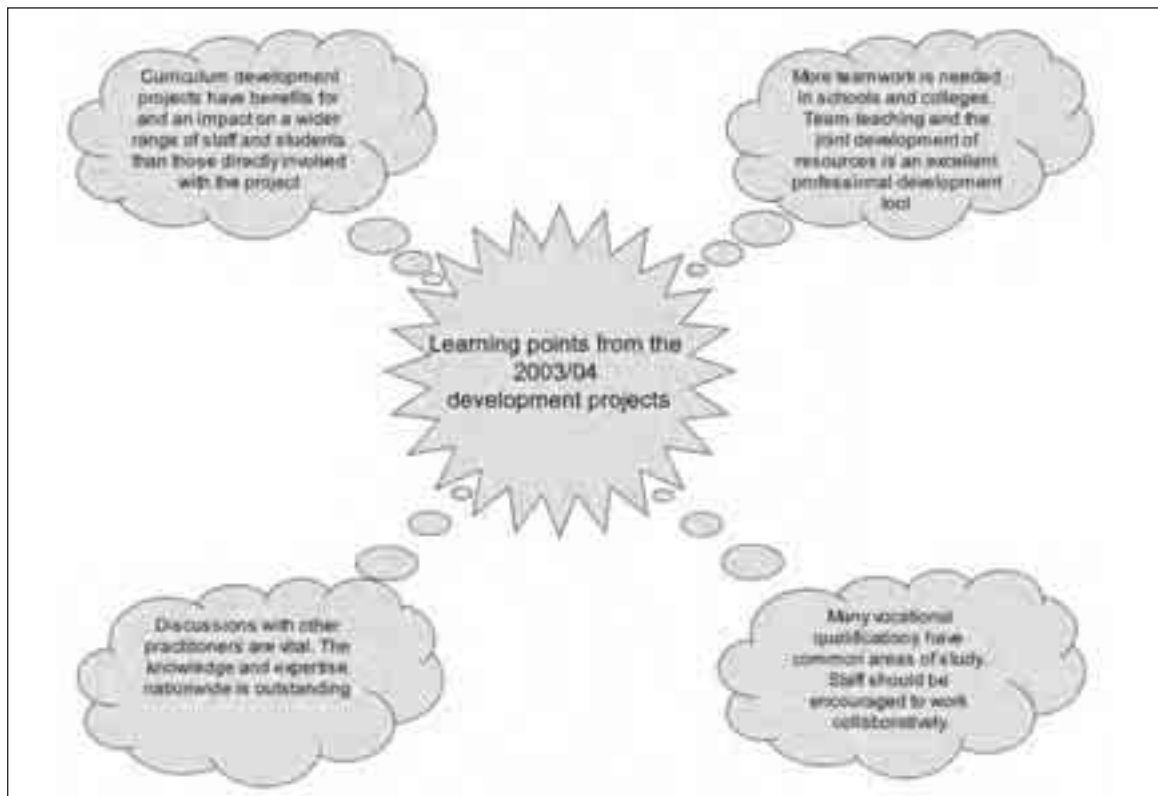
Outcomes

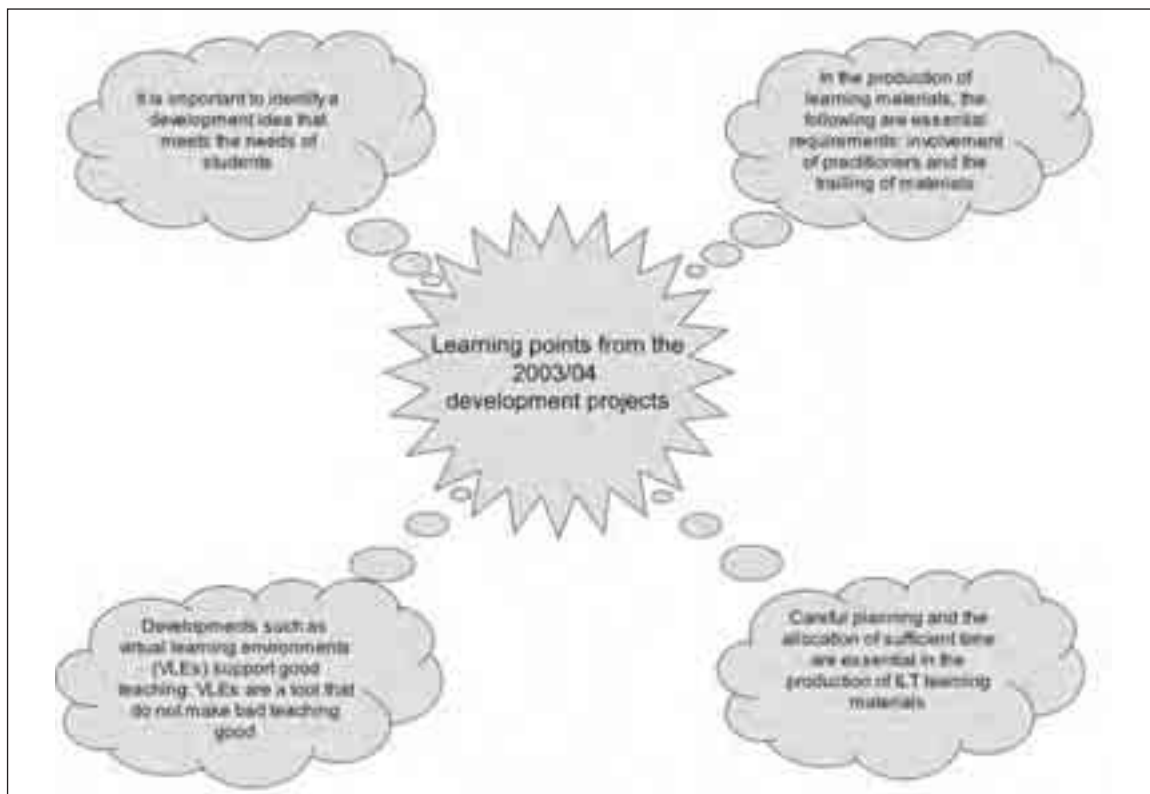
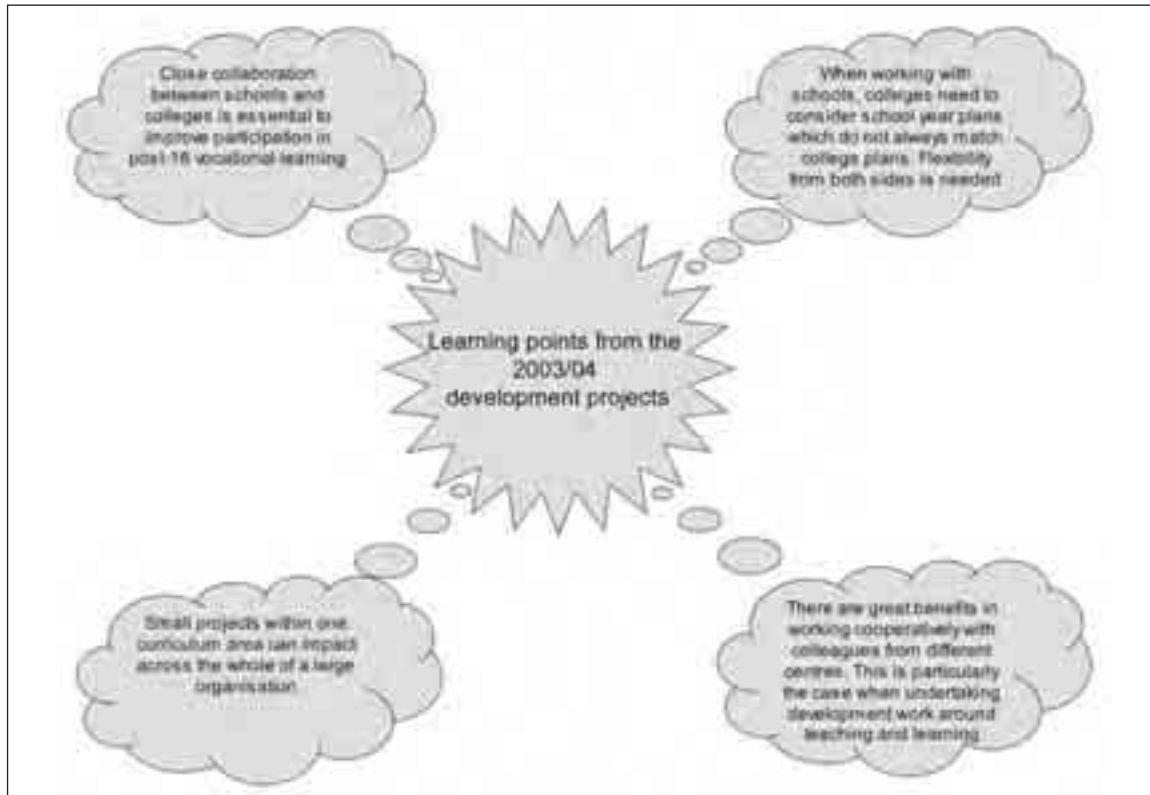
The main outcome from this project was the creation of a bank of materials suitable for promoting VCEs in high schools. This resource is seen as an essential part of Bury College's high-school liaison strategy.

While all the project outcomes were achieved, an increase in enrolments onto VCE courses will not be evidenced until September 2004. Similarly, the materials developed for promoting HE progression have raised interest among Year 12 students, but any increase in UCAS applications will not be seen until October 2004.

Learning points

These learning points, which have been drawn from all 15 projects, will act as useful guidance and possible starting points for teachers and managers who plan to carry out similar project-based activities. Presented in this diagrammatic format, they could be used as part of a staff development activity.






Resources for teachers and managers

Observing vocational A-levels : the perspectives of an HMI and an LSDA development adviser

This presentation is based on those that have been delivered by Dr Cheryl A Jones HMI and Ian Duckett, Development Adviser, at several LSDA events and briefings held in the past year. It highlights the issues for all teachers and managers to consider when planning and delivering the post-16 vocational curriculum. The observations are just as relevant for the move to the new A-level specifications as they are for the current qualifications. In this way, the presentation is intended to provide a useful staff development tool.


**Chief examiners' report:
2001–02**



- 73 general FE colleges
- 27 tertiary, specialist and sixth form colleges
- How well does teaching and training meet individuals' needs and course/programme requirements?
- Excellent 17%
- Good 42%
- Satisfactory 34%
- Unsatisfactory/Poor 7%
- 83% of provision above the quality threshold

Vocational Learning Support Programme

**Chief examiners' report:
2001–02**



> 'Inspectors judged that in about 90% of lessons, learners had *achieved* the standard expected by that point in their studies, with adult learners performing generally better than 16–18 year olds.'

Vocational Learning Support Programme

Good features...



➤ Good features identified by inspectors during observations of teaching and learning of vocational A-level sessions have resulted in:

- improved levels of *learning and attainment*
- them being judged to be excellent or very good.

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

Good features...



The following *good features* are illustrated by quotes from published inspection reports and reflect in the grade profile:

➤ 'The quality of teaching is very good. Effective lessons were carefully planned.'

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

Good features...



➤ 'Increasingly complex tasks enabled learners to build on and extend their vocational skills. Learners related theory to current work practices.'

➤ 'Key skills are successfully integrated into vocational lessons and assessed through vocational assignments.'

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

Good features...



- 'Teachers use the results of initial assessment to plan lessons and support for individual learners. Study support is available to learners of all ability levels and it is highly valued by them.'
- 'There is effective liaison between course teams and learning support tutors.'

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

Good features...



- 'Assignments are internally verified before learners receive them.'
- 'Assignment briefs are detailed and clearly identify tasks and assessment criteria.'

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

Good features...



- 'Learners receive constructive feedback on the *quality of their work*, which helps them to make improvements.'
- 'Good displays of learners' work celebrate their achievements and provide a *lively learning environment*.'

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

Good features...



- 'The progress learners make as a result of support is carefully monitored.'
- 'Their [learners'] confidence increased when weaknesses overlooked at school were identified and addressed through support sessions.'

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- Teaching and learning begin on time with all learners present at the start of the session – the session is delivered in a professional setting with high expectations in evidence.

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- The aims and objectives are clearly explained.
- The teacher checks to ensure all learners understand the learning objectives. Linkage to previous learning is established.

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- The teachers possess up-to-date vocational knowledge and participate in appropriate teacher placement schemes as part of their continuous professional development.

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- *As a result:*
 - The session is appropriate in terms of accuracy, relevance, pace and level.
 - The teacher displays in-depth knowledge appropriate and consistent with effective teaching, training and assessment of the course.

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- The teaching team develops good local links with appropriate employers that effectively support programme delivery.

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Varied exercises and activities are used which are appropriate to the subject, the course and the group.➤ Methods and styles of teaching are appropriate to the aims and objectives of the session/course. <p style="text-align: right;">Vocational Learning Support Programme</p>	
In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Learners are provided with individual assessment plans that are informed by initial assessment and reviewed and updated regularly. <p style="text-align: right;">Vocational Learning Support Programme</p>	
In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Work is set at an appropriate level.➤ Questioning technique is effective and question distribution appropriate.➤ Effective assessment and monitoring of learning takes place throughout the session. <p style="text-align: right;">Vocational Learning Support Programme</p>	

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- **Appropriate oral and written feedback are provided in a supportive and constructive manner.**
- **Feedback was detailed and evaluative and contributed to learning. There was a good balance of encouragement and correction.**

Vocational Learning
Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- **The session meets the needs and interests of learners.**
- **Learners are well supported to ensure they achieve the aims and objectives of the session.**

Vocational Learning
Support Programme


In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- **Able learners are challenged and weaker learners are supported.**

Vocational Learning
Support Programme


In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- Learning support assistants (LSAs) are appropriately briefed by the teacher and efficiently deployed to promote effective learning for all learners.

Vocational Learning Support Programme


In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- Professional relationships between the teacher and the LSA are maintained to create an effective working environment for all.
- Learners are appropriately supported, motivated and kept on task to promote achievement of the learning aims and objectives.

Vocational Learning Support Programme

In effective vocational A-level teaching and learning sessions...



- The regular and thorough checking of learning by appropriate methods takes place.
- Learning takes place.

Vocational Learning Support Programme

Developing the post-16 vocational curriculum : moving forward with the new A-levels

Some of the centres that participated in LSDA's 2003/04 development projects were concerned about the effect that the new A-levels, available for teaching from September 2005, would have on staff in terms of teaching and learning, vocational links and assessment practices. The major questions raised by staff in the project centres are answered below. It is hoped that the information provided here will reassure staff in any centre currently delivering VCEs that is considering whether to adopt the new A-level qualifications from September 2005.

These Q&As, compiled by LSDA and checked by the Department for Education and Skills and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, are part of an ongoing service from the Vocational Learning Support Programme. They will feature in future, relevant publications and be distributed in leaflet form at events. For the latest update, please visit www.vocationallearning.org.uk/teachers

Is the structure of the new courses the same as for other A-levels ?

Basically, yes. The new A-levels have the same structure as other GCE qualifications. This means they have Advanced Subsidiary (AS) units (normally taken in the first year of study) followed by A2 units (normally taken in the second year of study). The AS units are therefore assessed at a lower standard than the A2 units. The only major difference with the academic A-levels is that in some subjects the new vocational A-level allows students to take a six-unit AS qualification.

What qualifications are available and what will they be called ?

There are up to four qualifications available to students :

Advanced Subsidiary General Certificate of Education (single award) :
comprising three AS units – also known as **AS level (single award)**

Advanced Subsidiary General Certificate of Education (double award) :
comprising six AS units – also known as **AS level (double award)**

Advanced General Certificate of Education (single award) : comprising
six units (three AS units and three A2 units) – also known as **A-level**

Advanced General Certificate of Education (double award) : comprising
12 units (six AS units and six A2 units) – also known as **A-level (double award)**.

The qualifications available depend on the vocational sector chosen, the number of units taken and the awarding body that a school or college is registered with. Not all awarding bodies offer all qualifications (see the next Q&A).

Who provides the new A-level qualifications ?

The new qualifications are run by the same awarding bodies that offer the existing A-level qualifications – AQA, Edexcel and OCR. Each awarding body offers its own range of units and qualifications. The awarding bodies also organise training courses for teachers and lecturers who are new to the A-level. For further information about what each awarding body is offering, visit their respective websites :

www.aqa.org.uk

www.edexcel.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

Are all the AS and A-level qualifications and subjects being offered by all three awarding bodies ?

No. Each awarding body has its own list of the subjects and qualifications that will be available. Staff need to look carefully at what each awarding body is offering. In some subjects there is only a single award AS qualification (three AS units) and a single award A-level (three AS units plus three A2 units). Other subjects will have these plus the double award AS qualification (six AS units) and the double award A-level (12 units in total).

Vocational area	Awarding body
Applied Art and Design*	AQA, Edexcel, OCR
Applied Business*	AQA, Edexcel, OCR
Applied ICT*	AQA, Edexcel, OCR
Applied Science*	AQA, OCR
Engineering*	Edexcel (<i>available only as AS single and A-level awards</i>)
Health and Social Care*	AQA, Edexcel, OCR
Leisure Studies**	AQA, Edexcel, OCR (<i>available only as AS single and A-level awards</i>)
Media: Communication and Production	Edexcel (<i>available only as AS single and A-level awards</i>)
Performing Arts	Edexcel, OCR (<i>available only as AS single and A-level awards</i>)
Travel and Tourism**	AQA, Edexcel, OCR

* A GCSE is available in these subjects

** Leisure and tourism is available at GCSE

Will there still be one assessment for each unit ?

Yes, there will be one assessment for each unit in each of the new A-level courses. That assessment will be either by portfolio work (coursework) or by external assessment. Students' portfolio work is marked by their teachers and moderated by the awarding body. The nature of the external assessment will vary according to the vocational area and the skills being assessed. It might be a written examination, a case study or preparing a response to a set brief.

Will the lack of option units make this a less attractive qualification ?

Clearly, if there are fewer units in some subjects, it might become less attractive to students than the current VCE course. The units available in each qualification vary according to the awarding body. The key issue for staff will be to look carefully at the unit specifications to see exactly what is required. In many cases, the specifications are written to allow the content to be contextualised, which should provide opportunities for teachers and lecturers to tailor the course to meet local circumstances and students' interests.

Will the new courses emphasise work-related learning as much as the VCE did ?

Yes. The new A-levels are designed to provide students with courses that link classroom activities with the chosen vocational sector in the same way as for VCE. Each course has been designed to give students :

- a broad introduction to the vocational sector
- knowledge and understanding of the sector and the opportunity to research key issues affecting it
- experience of active learning methods to practise and develop skills required by those working in the sector
- the opportunity to appreciate how organisations in the vocational sector operate
- an insight into what it means to work in the sector
- a sound basis for progression to further training, higher education or suitable employment in the sector.

We have heard that the ‘core’ or ‘mandatory’ units across subject areas are not going to be identical between awarding bodies – what does this mean for us ?

It is true that there is not the same degree of commonality in the new A-levels as existed under VCE. It means that staff will need to look at the specifications from all three awarding bodies (AQA, Edexcel, OCR) and see what best matches their current course and what would best suit the needs of students and staff alike. All of the specifications are on the awarding bodies’ websites (see page 41).

We have always had some units taught jointly to combined groups of Year 12 and Year 13 students – will that be possible in future ?

Students need to take AS units first, before progressing onto the more demanding A2 units. In some subjects where there is a ‘double award’ AS qualification, it may be possible for some joint teaching across year groups.

Will the decrease in the number of new A-levels compared to VCEs have a detrimental effect on progression at post-16?

That will obviously depend on what subjects a particular school or college chooses to offer students. In the few cases where a VCE subject is not being replaced by a new A-level, it is because there were very few students taking the courses. In these areas, other vocational qualifications are available and have proved to be more attractive to students – usually because they are clear about what progression routes they intend to follow at 18/19. As there are suitable alternative qualifications available, the impact of the change should be marginal.

Will the changes help to raise the parity of esteem between vocational and academic courses ?

Yes. The AS /A2 has greater rigour than its predecessor (the Advanced GNVQ) and is at the same standard as all other A-levels. Consequently it will gain the respect of students, parents and employers etc. The fact that there is now an AS qualification means that there is a greater chance that a wider range of Year 12 students will want to take a vocational course as part of their sixth form programme. This should help raise the profile of the courses at school and college level.

Can students and parents be confident that higher education will accept the new A-level ?

UCAS has made it quite clear that the new A-levels will carry the same ‘tariff’ as other A-levels. As happens now, the ‘currency value’ of a particular A-level depends entirely on what course a student is applying for.

Can schools and colleges teach this A-level at Key stage 4?

Yes, assuming that they decide it meets a need and can be fitted into the students’ curriculum. The crucial issue will be for teachers to look carefully at the requirements of the AS unit specifications in terms of teaching and learning activities and the assessment involved. Students will need to have access to opportunities for the work-related aspects of the course, which often require extended time out of the classroom. Managing such activities alongside other commitments in Key stage 4 will need to be carefully considered.

Will specifications be ready in time for staff to plan and prepare new courses ?

Yes, the awarding body specifications are already available on their websites for staff to look at.

Will the vocational focus of the VCEs remain ?

Yes, the new specifications have been written to ensure that opportunities are provided for students to gain vital exposure to the vocational sector. That was a fundamental requirement when the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority asked the awarding bodies to prepare the new specifications. As with VCE, the portfolio (coursework) assessments will require students to demonstrate the application of knowledge, understanding and skills to real-life situations.

We have a shortage of teachers with specialist vocational knowledge. Can we access funding to support training ?

Yes, funding is available to support teachers and lecturers who need to update their vocational experience. Information on schemes that offer financial support is available from the local Learning and Skills Council or local Education Business Partnership.

We still want our students to do the key skills. Are these still 'signposted'?

Yes. Key skills are not mandatory but they are still an integral part of the new courses. The awarding body specifications include 'signposts' that show teachers and lecturers where their students might be given opportunities to develop and demonstrate the key skills as part of the new A-level courses.

How much are the units changing and will our current resources be adequate?

The awarding bodies have all tried to ensure that as far as possible the new specifications relate closely to the current VCEs. In most areas, there is considerable continuity between the VCE and new A-level specifications. In some cases, new subject content areas have been introduced, reflecting the changing nature of the vocational sector, to ensure that the course is up to date.

For which cohort of students do we use the current VCE specifications?

The final teaching dates for the current VCE specifications are:

- last teaching of two-year courses – started September 2004
- last resit opportunity – January 2007
- last teaching of one-year courses – starts September 2005
- last resit opportunity – January 2007.

How soon will support and new information be available to centres?

The awarding bodies have already published specifications (available on their websites, see page 41). Further support materials and in-service training will be available in the academic year leading up to the start of teaching (September 2005).

Other support is available from LSDA, which offers a range of support materials to help teachers provide interesting, up-to-date and relevant A-level courses. LSDA also offers an in-house consultancy service through which schools and colleges receive support from a visiting specialist consultant to work with staff on particular subject areas or issues. All of the information about LSDA support is available on the LSDA website: **www.LSDA.org.uk**

Appendix : Themes addressed in the development projects

Project centre	Strategies to improve learning	Developing vocational learning resources	Supporting learning	Developing effective progression pathways
Acland Burghley School, London			●	
Ashton Sixth Form College, Ashton-under-Lyne				●
Bradford College and Huddersfield New College		●		
Bury College				●
Dixons City Technology College, Bradford	●			
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology (GLOSCAT)		●		
Hayesfield School Technology College, Bath		●		
Kingsthorpe Community College, Northampton		●		
Laisterdyke High School and Challenge College, Bradford		●		
St Paul's School for Girls, Birmingham	●			
St Peter's Collegiate C of E School, Wolverhampton	●			
St Wilfrid's C of E High School and Technology College, Blackburn				●
South Maidstone Federation			●	
Wolsingham School and Community College, County Durham			●	
York College	●			

Vocational Learning Support Programme

This publication showcases the outcomes achieved by centres that received funding from the Learning and Skills Development Agency in 2003/04 to examine and develop practice in the delivery of the post-16 vocational curriculum. Focusing on four main areas – strategies to improve learning, developing vocational learning resources, supporting learning, and developing effective progression – the project reports contain much good practice that can be adopted and taken forward by other centres.

