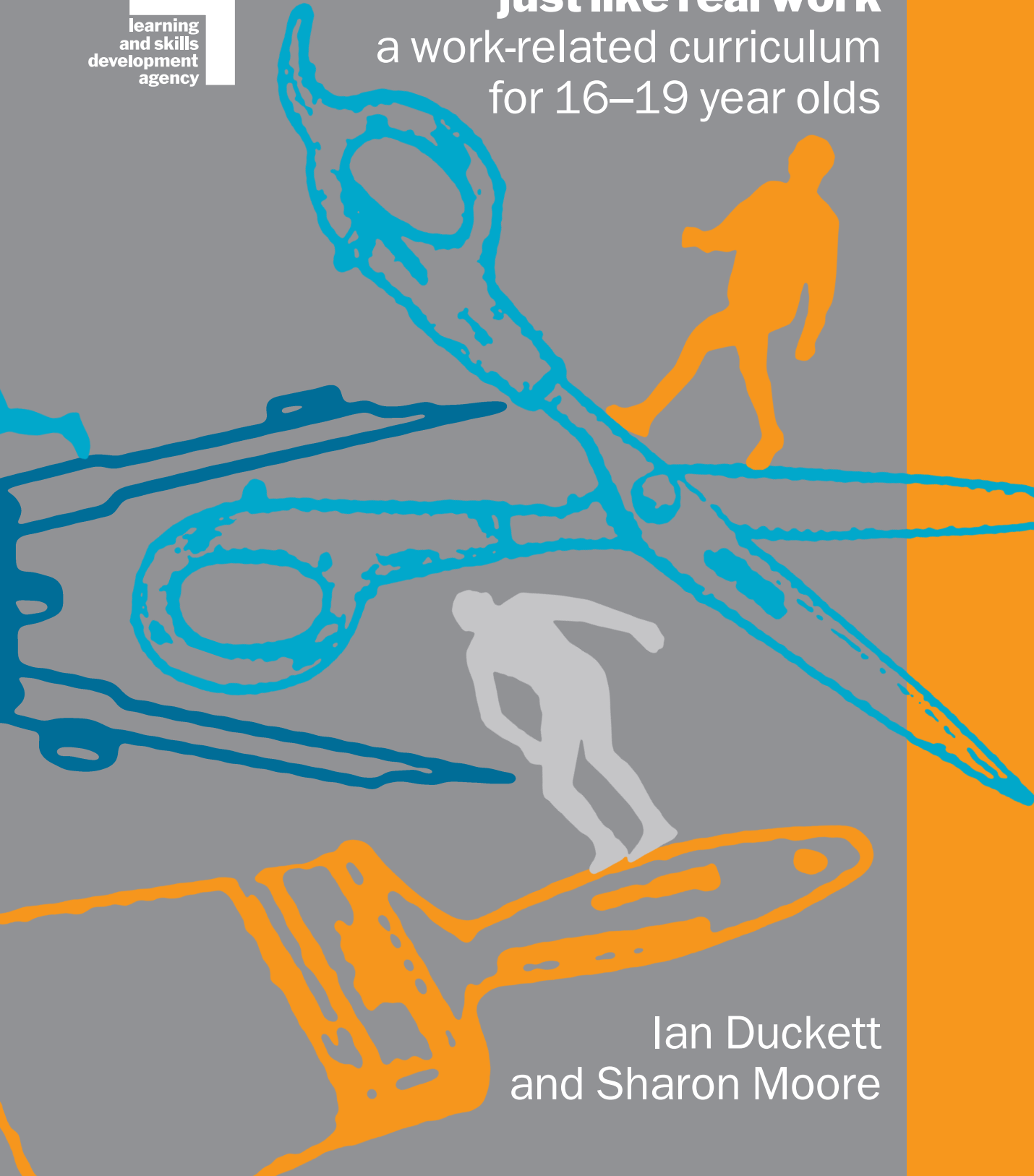


**Vocational Learning
Support Programme: 16–19**



just like real work
a work-related curriculum
for 16–19 year olds



Ian Duckett
and Sharon Moore

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Published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency

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Foreword

This publication has been produced by the DfES-funded Vocational Learning Support Programme: 16–19 (VLSP: 16–19) as part of its remit to support teachers and managers delivering the new General Certificate of Education (GCE) A-levels, successors to the Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE).

Just like real work explains innovative ways to enhance the vocational element of these qualifications and provides advice on innovative delivery methods, setting up business links and teacher placements. Staff development managers will find that many of the sections provide material suitable for training events.

‘Developing an approach to vocational learning’ offers guidance to schools and colleges so that any contact made with businesses for support is professional and coordinated. It discusses the merits of appointing a vocational coordinator and the benefits of education–business links for both parties.

In the section ‘Effective work experience’ readers can learn good practice associated with managing work experience and discover the role that small and medium-sized enterprises play in providing students with a quality learning and training experience.

‘Vocational teaching and learning strategies’ is the next section. It highlights some of the activities and materials that can be used to develop the vocational context and features case studies that illustrate some of the strategies adopted by schools and colleges across the country. Details of organisations that promote collaborative working between education and industry are also provided.

‘Developing links with employers’ showcases four development projects funded by VLSP: 16–19. Each contributor worked with a local business to bring the vocational element of its courses to the fore. Outcomes included the formation of a business advisory board, development of online learning materials, a manufacturing-themed event with employer input and a DVD to support health and social care courses.

Finally, there is a question and answer section that addresses some of the queries practitioners have regarding the introduction of the new A-levels in September 2005.

The authors are well placed to offer practical guidance to staff on a work-related curriculum for 16–19 year olds. Ian Duckett is a development adviser for LSDA's VLSP: 16–19, 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. He was also seconded to a local education authority to develop partnership working. Ian has written many books and articles on educational topics. His most recent titles for LSDA include *Tutorials and target-setting in the effective delivery of vocational A-levels* (with Dr Cheryl A Jones; LSDA 2004) and *Raising achievement through vocational A-levels* (with Gillian Frankland; LSDA 2004).

Sharon Moore is an experienced practitioner, trainer and consultant in vocational and work-related learning. Starting with initial development work and the General National Vocational Qualification (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 local education authorities 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. She recently collaborated with Ian Duckett to write *Developing the post-16 vocational curriculum* (LSDA 2005).

The authors would like to thank the contributors to this publication. The Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) at the University of Warwick contributed to the section 'Effective work experience'. Thanks are also extended to Michael Liggins.

Alan Goulbourne
Programme Leader
Vocational Learning Support Programme : 16–19

Introduction

When employed as a lecturer in a further education (FE) college, I was often struck by the positive impact that the 'world of work' had on learners. On one occasion, a student who had been underachieving on her vocational programme returned from a work placement a changed person, saying that the experience had been 'just like real work'. The student went on to successfully complete her Level 3 qualification, achieved good enough grades to progress to university and graduated three years later with a BA in media.

Many of us will be able to recount similar examples of the positive effect of the 'world of work' on student motivation and achievement. For some time, many FE colleges have offered a range of 'alternative' and 'school links' programmes to support the work-related learning curriculum for 14–19 year olds. These programmes have provided an interesting and motivating learning experience for this age group, giving them an opportunity to study relevant vocational qualifications.

The statutory requirement for all Key stage 4 learners to be involved in work-related learning demonstrates recognition of this positive effect. Other initiatives such as the increased flexibility partnerships between schools, colleges, learning providers and employers have provided a stepping stone towards embedding work-related learning in the 14–19 curriculum.

From a careers guidance perspective, the impact of work-related learning is enormous. Young people are making choices about what they want to study from a wider range of options. The more experience and direct relationship they have with the world of work, the better prepared they will be to make decisions about their future.

Ian Duckett

Development Adviser

Vocational Learning Support Programme : 16–19

Background and context

In seeking to serve social needs because it makes good business sense to do so, a corporation is doing what it knows how to do best.

Henry Ford (1863–1947)

Development projects and case studies run by VLSP: 16–19 suggest that linking the curriculum to the world beyond school and college increases student motivation and leads to improvements in achievement.

The curriculum offer, if it is to be meaningful in this context, will need to include new vocational options at 14 plus, a variety of A-levels in vocational subjects at 16 plus and more opportunities for distance learning and use of the internet. A broader, flexible curriculum will increase the pressure on all institutions (schools, higher education institutions and FE colleges) to develop local progression packages and compacts.

Proposals outlined in the report *14–19 curriculum and qualifications reform* (Working Group on 14–19 Reform, 2004) aim to:

- put learning first
- provide coherent routes and fulfill vocational aspirations
- place vocational and academic qualifications on equal and common footing
- emphasise employer engagement
- promote rigorous assessment that is learner-led and includes self-assessment.

The report also places vocational learning and the work-related curriculum in a long-term context:

vocational learning is not just a matter of contributing skills to the economy, nor of providing opportunities to young people who find difficulty with academic subjects – though it can do both of these things. Soundly-based vocational education is an absolutely key feature in the education project itself as it is capable of attracting large numbers of young people to participate in, and attain at, advanced level study.

Working Group on 14–19 Reform (2004).
14–19 curriculum and qualifications reform, para 195

Vocational education clearly benefits students, but it also has advantages for employers who face looming skills shortages. Increasing the work-related element of teaching and learning means that students are more likely to be prepared and have the skills needed to succeed in the workplace – the basis of the introduction of A-levels in vocational subjects.

This publication suggests ways to enhance the vocational content of teaching in terms of delivery strategies and the use of teacher placements in industry. It will help teachers and curriculum managers to :

- develop a whole-centre approach to vocational learning
- devise appropriate teaching and learning strategies for vocational programmes
- build up appropriate resources
- consider the value of teacher placements
- consider the value of work experience and part-time work for students.

Developing an approach to vocational learning

Young people do not learn only in school. Their surroundings and the times in which they live have as much, if not more, influence on them than teachers.

Paul Valéry (1871–1945)

Improving the vocational content of the curriculum often requires a whole-centre approach to ensure maximum benefit for students. Consideration should be given to areas such as timetabling, staffing and resourcing. Those responsible for timetabling need to be aware that activities such as research, practicals, input from guest speakers and visits need blocks of time if they are to be completed successfully.

Having a three-hour block on a Wednesday afternoon has enabled us to plan focused visits to local industry. We would not have been able to do this if the two one-and-a-half-hour sessions were spread across the week.

To develop links with the business community and local industry, teachers need to be aware of existing contacts and build on them. The best links are those formed through personal contacts: governors, parents, former students or current students who may be working part time with a local company.

Many local and national organisations can also help schools and colleges to develop and improve the vocational aspect of the curriculum. Such organisations locally would include Education Business Link Organisations (EBLOs), Education Business Partnerships (EBPs), Connexions, careers services and Chambers of Commerce. Nationally, organisations such as Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), the Department of Trade and Industry, and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) can provide support and resources. More detailed information on these organisations can be found on pages 18–20.

Some schools and colleges find it useful to appoint one person with responsibility for fostering links with local and national organisations and local employers – a vocational coordinator. A vocational coordinator is a named person for businesses and support organisations to contact. He or she is able to keep a record of all known contacts for use throughout the institution and to inform staff of all ongoing work with local employers in different curriculum areas. The vocational coordinator can also set up a resource bank of vocationally relevant material that all staff can access and contribute to.

A college's rationale for appointing a vocational coordinator

The need for a cross-college database of employer contacts and possible work placements became apparent. There was a continuing problem in that businesses were being contacted repeatedly by representatives from different departments. This poor organisation and lack of internal communication was undermining our credibility with local employers and preventing us from developing future, positive outcomes, either in terms of useful employer input or in offers for work placements. With central coordination and a professional approach we feel we are much better placed to ask local businesses to support the college.

Isle of Wight 'vocational champions'

Schools and colleges on the Isle of Wight have appointed vocational coordinators to help them plan and deliver vocational courses across the island. They received support from their local EBP through VLSP: 16–19. The vocational coordinators have :

- enabled greater sharing of resources between the schools and colleges
- created a forum to allow busy practitioners to receive updates on a range of developments in vocational education
- participated in LSDA development projects, which have allowed staff to be released to develop assignments and other teaching and learning resources
- developed an all-island Curriculum 2000 offer, which is promoted through a website
- developed a coordinated approach to creating work experience programmes for both students and teachers.

Making the link

Links with businesses should benefit students, teachers and the businesses themselves. It is important to remember that businesses have to manage their day-to-day operations, so cannot always respond as quickly as you may want them to. In contacting businesses, planning is crucial. Think about what you actually want out of your contact with industry, perhaps writing it down in the form of a brief. Target specific organisations and consider how an education–business link might benefit them, too.

Setting up and maintaining education–business links

In attempting to develop education–business links, schools and colleges might like to consider the following points :

- Make use of existing links.
- Identify key sources and organisations that can provide addresses and phone numbers.
- Avoid inundating the same businesses with too many requests.
- Be clear about exactly what you need from the business.
- Don't expect too much too soon – businesses have a business to run.
- Try to think of some mutual benefit that could be provided by the link.

Benefits for businesses

An employer who links up with a school or college can :

- supplement its training and development programmes
- enhance its employees' professional development
- develop relationships with students who may become future employees
- gain an insight into vocational qualifications
- participate in the development of the vocational curriculum by writing learning materials or devising assignments
- raise its profile.

Engaging with employers

Having decided to contact a particular business to set up a link, teachers need to consider how to approach it. Writing a letter can be an opportunity for teachers to put across their reasons for wishing to set up a business link, but the letter may end up in the wrong hands and a response may never be received.

Direct telephone contact tends to be most effective in the first instance. Some larger firms have education officers whose role will involve forging links with schools and colleges. Ask to speak to them or to be put through to the human resources manager or training manager. Depending on the information required, it might be better to contact a particular manager, for example the marketing manager or the quality assurance manager.

Points to consider when engaging with employers

- Have a list of objectives and outcomes in mind, but be open-minded to other possibilities that arise.
- Be prepared to explain the nature of vocational education, but avoid using educational jargon.
- Find out what the person on the other end of the phone already knows about vocational learning before launching into your sales speech.
- Be clear about exactly what you are asking the business for.
- Links need to be developed over time (don't ask for too much too soon).
- Try to think of some mutual benefit and include this early on in the conversation.
- Take the opportunity to promote your work, your students and your plans – be enthusiastic about the project.
- Make clear plans about what will happen and when before you conclude your discussions.
- Arrange a preliminary meeting to discuss your needs.
- Don't give up if the business can't provide what you need; still try to establish some useful contact.
- Always follow a telephone conversation with a letter confirming any discussions, outlining any arrangements and thanking the business for its support.
- Don't expect every call to be successful!

Developing the partnership

Education–business partnerships can be one of the most effective mechanisms to improve and develop the vocational content of teaching programmes. If such partnerships are to be effective, it is important that both parties know what they are bringing to the partnership.

Evidence shows that if partnerships are planned, there are many positive outcomes to be had. For example :

- education–business partnerships are able to make joint bids for external funding
- colleges can become involved in the development of company-based training schemes
- funding can be obtained for independent or distance learning materials.

Working in partnership

With the help of VLSP: 16–19, Merton College in Surrey and local schools have worked together to develop creative assessment methods for leisure, travel and recreation courses. They have devised a student activity based on a local tourist trail. Students are invited to add their own insight into the trail and to highlight attractions along it. This activity can be accessed at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Led by the local EBP, the project developed a framework for sharing resources and pooling vocational expertise and links with teachers throughout the borough.

Careers guidance

In developing a coherent strategy for vocational education, it is important that schools and colleges include careers guidance information. There is a need to take into account the wide variety of possible future employment opportunities within a vocational sector and to make students aware of these. There has been much effective practice in schools and colleges in delivering careers support, and there are many instances of close links between careers services and schools and colleges.

Linking careers guidance directly with vocational studies brings courses alive and develops awareness of job roles. Input from employers on job roles and responsibilities is a valuable source of information here. Teachers on placement often have the opportunity to view job roles first hand – these can provide useful case studies for use in teaching.

Healthcare placements for the teacher and students

A teacher on placement at a local nursing home met the manager and deputy manager who talked through their own career paths and their current roles and responsibilities. Their career paths were very different from the teacher's own experience and provided valuable information to pass on to students. Having established contact with the home through the placement, the teacher was able to use it as a source of student placements and also involve the manager and deputy manager in a careers presentation for Year 11 students.

Effective work experience

When it works well, work experience can deliver significant benefits for both employers and young people.

Working Group on 14–19 Reform (2004). *14–19 curriculum and qualifications reform*, para 211

Work experience is now a normal expectation for full-time students in schools and colleges. In general, the pre-16 school-based process is well established and relatively straightforward to provide, with ample support given through the careers services, EBPs or other organisations employed to provide a management or monitoring service for schools.

Post-16 work experience is less structured. Most full-time FE students will find a period of work experience embedded in their programme, but the actual needs of those students vary. Some students will be studying for general qualifications such as A- or AS levels, where the aim is to provide a 'broad preparation for occupational selection'. Other students will be committed to achieving specific vocational outcomes through other qualifications such as VCEs and A-levels in vocational subjects.

Work experience management

The management of post-16 work experience can be complicated by the wider age range of students, vastly different student needs and levels of motivation and the sheer size and management structure of the organisation. Nonetheless, key points of good practice can be highlighted:

- A clear college policy can define the systems and processes of the organisation.
- Clear briefings should be provided for students who have an entitlement to work experience.
- Placement providers should receive clear operational guidelines on their rights and responsibilities, as well as the level of support to be provided by the school or college.
- Associated paperwork should be easy to understand and use.
- Ideally, work-experience planning should be coordinated across an institution.
- Easily accessible internal contact points should be established at an early stage for placement providers, to allow easy and rapid contact.

- Good support systems should exist for both the student and the placement provider while work placements are in progress.
- Links with other placement organisations will help to reduce competition and minimise confusion for providers.
- Close links also need to be maintained with the local careers services offices.
- It is important that effective monitoring is embedded in the whole process and that systems are reviewed regularly.

The role of small and medium-sized enterprises in providing placements

Over 70% of work experience opportunities are offered by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) rather than large companies. This provides both advantages and disadvantages, but educational organisations have faced particular problems in giving SMEs the support they need to provide students with a quality learning and training experience. Small companies freely take on a substantial responsibility for non-employees who are likely to put some strain on their systems. They must balance the ideal of ensuring that the student is a supernumerary within their small team against the need to give a valuable experience that motivates and tests the young person.

The role of the placement provider is a challenging one, particularly for SMEs.

- SMEs often have to contend with competing requests for placements from different organisations that may be unaware of the others' requests and probably operate differently.
- They are tasked with reviewing their health and safety and insurance needs.
- There is often no training manager or specialist to deal with the placement, although good supervision must be provided.
- SMEs must be prepared to allow regular access to visitors from external bodies.
- They must face an inevitable element of bureaucracy.
- The smaller the enterprise, the more limited the scope of the placement may be.

SMEs are often very busy, with little spare capacity or time for intensive tuition. Added to this is the uncertainty they face about the abilities of the student they receive, despite any initial interview processes. Nonetheless, year after year, SMEs continue to support the large-scale national work experience system. This reflects their ongoing commitment to training young people who potentially form their workforce, and the SME view that they need to contribute to work-related training in the community.

Finally, recognition should be given to the special contribution made by many small firms that regularly provide placements for disaffected young people or students and trainees with learning or physical disabilities.

Portfolios and part-time working

Best practice would suggest that greatest success occurs when :

- the value of and need for work experience are clearly highlighted in the curriculum
- work experience is integrated into classwork with adequate preparation, subsequent feedback and analysis by students
- there is use of this insight into the world of work to underline the theoretical training or education being provided.

Many young people are required to collect evidence of their achievements as part of their programmes. Work experience is clearly a part of this. However, it is also evident that increasing numbers of young people are involved in part-time employment once they have reached the age of 16. It is arguable that schools and colleges have not adequately explored the achievements gained through this 'real' work experience, which could serve as a further source of curriculum enrichment.

Outside the educational context, students are developing the more general work skills alongside more specific job skills. Work skills and job tasks are further supplemented by the development of key skills. This is likely to occur in the use of number or information and communication technology (ICT), the betterment of communication through the world of work or as a result of working with others and being given or taking responsibility and addressing problems that inevitably face young workers in the real world. It has, after all, long been recognised that the curriculum vitae of a young person should contain all types of previous work as a demonstration of potential employability. The value of this part-time work towards building a portfolio, whether for A-levels in vocational subjects, key skills or general records of achievement, should not be ignored.

Participation in part-time employment is often a sensitive issue for some post-16 students, seeming to suggest a lack of complete commitment to their studies. Research from a range of sources suggests that the involvement of students in part-time employment is often on a more significant scale than it has been in the past, with students working on average 14–17 hours a week. The data also show that for at least some students a part-time job is essential if they are to continue in further education. Family circumstances can mean that students have to support not only themselves but also, in some cases, contribute to the upkeep of other family members. Research also suggests that there can be both positive and negative aspects of combining study and employment, not least because there may be opportunities for the student to develop a greater understanding of the work environment, which may in turn improve their success with their academic studies.

Schools and colleges need to have a clear policy on part-time employment that recognises that many students will want, and indeed may need, to maintain paid employment. During induction sessions, post-16 students can be asked if they want to discuss the extent of their existing or planned part-time employment. While recognising that students may wish to keep the information confidential, clear statements should be made as to the institution's policy and the expectations of students in terms of commitment to their studies. This open discussion of the issue should mean that students are more likely to consider the potential for their experiences of work to fit with their academic courses and be more willing to discuss their plans or concerns with their personal and academic tutors. An ongoing programme of guidance and support is required if students are not to find themselves pressured by balancing the demands of their employment and their academic commitments.

General employer benefits

To summarise, employers can provide a number of benefits or services to schools or colleges to help them make their courses more work related.

Curriculum advice – where employers will offer practical support or advice on the delivery of courses, their content and the latest industrial or commercial advances, often through joining a subject or departmental advisory group

Curriculum materials – these are sometimes sponsored or produced by a company or consortium of industrial organisations, with the aim of advising or attracting potential entrants to industry

Mentoring – an adult with industrial or commercial experience gives one-to-one support to a student or trainee who is looking to enter the employment market

Mock interviews – simulated interviews conducted by people who interview candidates as part of their actual job roles

Talks or lectures – an employer may visit the classroom and provide a ‘reality check’ on vocational theory and student perceptions

Work-based projects – where one or more students may undertake a problem-solving or analytical task on the company’s premises

Work experience – a full engagement in the workplace, which has become a staple element of work-related education

Work shadowing – allows students to observe the working environment, undertake tasks and talk to staff

Workplace visits – structured visits to companies can help understanding but require a deal of planning on the part of the firm involved.

Vocational teaching and learning strategies

Education has a pivotal role in learning for life, work and a sustainable society. Making the connection between education and jobs is essential.

Linda Cracknell, Education Officer at WWF Scotland
www.wwf.org.uk/news/scotland/n_000000624.asp
accessed 3 February 2005

Delivery methods

Teaching strategies to develop the vocational context require careful planning and often a revision of traditional teaching styles. They need to focus on active learning, where learners are involved in activities such as investigating, discussing, planning and presenting.

Examples of such strategies could include using :

- business-based materials
- case study material from local companies
- role play and discussion groups
- web-based activities
- industry data
- presentations from employers and employees
- materials from trade magazines
- problem-solving activities
- focused visits to industry
- work experience placements
- work shadowing
- taster sessions with input from industry.

Developing case study material

Kingsthorpe Community College in Northampton collaborated with 78 Derngate, a local heritage attraction, to develop case study material on marketing and customer services for learners following a variety of vocational programmes, but particularly leisure, tourism and business. See page 23 for further information.

Challenge College and Laisterdyke High School in Bradford worked with a local rugby team – Bradford Bulls – to produce case study material for VCE Business. Relating business operations to an organisation that students already had some knowledge of made the resultant online learning material more meaningful to them.

Running taster sessions with input from industry

St Wilfrid's C of E High School and Technology College in Blackburn ran a very successful taster session that gave Year 11 students insight into the world of manufacturing. Through the event, organised in association with East Lancashire EBP, students met manufacturing employers and participated in three activity-based workshops that highlighted the diverse nature of the industry. Find out more about this project on page 24.

Problem-solving activities

A company was keen to find out how the local community viewed it. Students designed a questionnaire, which the company approved. In small teams and using the questionnaire, the students carried out market research at local shopping centres, leisure centres and train stations. Each team wrote a report of their findings and gave a presentation to the management team of the company. The company was very pleased with the professional manner in which the students completed the task and the information they provided was extremely useful in future planning.

Business games and role play

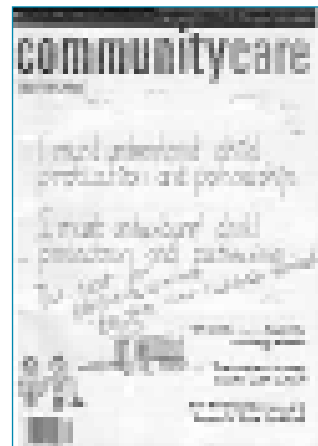
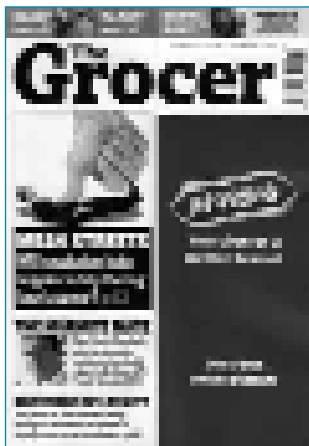
In one area, the local EBP funded an annual business game. Each year, teams of students from local schools and colleges competed to resolve complex business-related problems in simulation format. This required:

- role playing
- teamwork
- decision-making
- problem-solving.

Each game took a full day and was usually hosted by a local company, college or local authority. Outcomes were widely reported in the local press, with awards for the winning teams. The number of entries increased each year.

Trade magazines

Trade magazines are available for just about every vocational area. Many libraries subscribe to them and some publishers are willing to distribute free copies to schools or colleges if they explain their connection with the industry. Internet search engines are a good way to find an appropriate magazine for a particular vocational area. Using 'Yahoo!' for example – (www.yahoo.co.uk), click on 'News', on 'Magazines', then on 'Trade magazines' – you can obtain a full list of vocational topic areas ranging from engineering through hospitality to marketing. Clicking on any of the links will lead you to a full list of trade magazines, many of which are available online.



Visits

Often, a link with a business can provide the opportunity for students to visit its premises. It is vital that this visit is planned with the employer well in advance and that students are able to use the information and experience gained from it in their studies.

Example of a focused visit

Before visiting a local pharmaceutical company, the science teacher arranged to meet the personnel manager. At this meeting the teacher explained the requirements of the unit she was teaching and what students needed to know about various job roles in the company. The personnel manager was able to provide job descriptions for the relevant personnel, which the teacher duplicated for students. The students were able to prepare questions from these job descriptions and on the day were assigned to a particular employee for whom they had a job description. Following the visit, each group of students gave a presentation on 'their' particular employee and how their job description compared with their actual duties.

Alternatives to visits

Sometimes, depending on the particular industry or sector, it is difficult to organise visits or opportunities for students to interview key personnel. This may be because busy business people are unable to commit the time to talk to students, but also because some areas within a business or organisation may be restricted to students under 18 years of age due to health and safety legislation.

To overcome such difficulties, schools and colleges are working with local businesses to develop materials that support learners and provide alternatives to a visit.

Hayesfield School Technology College in Bath has enhanced the vocational focus of the VCE in health and social care by developing an electronic package of learning material. The DVD contains video clips of students interviewing healthcare professionals about their jobs. Find out more on page 26.

Developing a vocational resource base

There are a number of national organisations that can help teachers to improve the vocational aspect of teaching and learning. Many of these organisations are able to provide teaching and learning materials and some are able to facilitate teacher placements.

Learning and Skills Development Agency (Vocational Learning Support Programme)

The Vocational Learning Support Programme is managed by LSDA and funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to support teachers in the teaching and delivery of vocational courses. It organises subject-specific events and in-house training, funds development projects and disseminates good practice through publications (such as this one!). The Support Programme's website contains a wealth of material that teachers of all subject areas will find useful:

www.vocationallearning.org.uk

Education Business Link Organisations

Every one of the 47 local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) has an Education Business Link Organisation (EBLO) – in some regions these organisations might be called Education Business Partnerships (EBPs). The umbrella organisation, the National Education Business Partnership Network, provides details of the partnership operating in every region. For more details, visit its website at **www.nebpn.org**

EBLOs or EBPs have a remit to facilitate communication and activities between business and education. Many of these organisations will be involved in curriculum projects, teacher placements, the production of resources and a host of other initiatives. Contact your nearest EBLO or EBP to find out how it could help with the vocational course you are delivering.

At **www.ebplus.org.uk** you can get some idea of what one local organisation is doing in this field. This is the website for Education Business Plus, which is a business link consortium in Cheshire and Warrington, run by Connexions.

University of Warwick (Centre for Education and Industry)

The Centre for Education and Industry (CEI) at the University of Warwick was established in 1987 to support the study and dissemination of information and experience related to education–business collaboration. It offers research, teaching, and consultancy and evaluation services. Areas of expertise are noted as :

- the work-related curriculum
- vocational education, training and qualifications
- the role of education in economic development
- key skills.

Included on the Centre's website is an excellent resource directory, a list of publications and a links page. Visit **www.warwick.ac.uk/cei**

Sector Skills Councils

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) bring together employers, trade unions and professional bodies working with government to develop the skills that UK business needs. They are licensed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, in consultation with ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to tackle the skills and productivity needs of their sector throughout the UK.

SSCs give responsibility to employers to put into action strategies that meet their sector's skills and business needs. In return they receive substantial public investment and benefit from greater dialogue with government departments throughout the UK. This enables sector employers to have a far greater impact on policies affecting skills and productivity, and increased influence with education and training partners.

Each SSC agrees sector priorities and targets with its employers and partners to address four key goals :

- reducing skills gaps and shortages
- improving productivity, business and public service performance
- increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce, including action on equal opportunities
- improving learning supply, including apprenticeships, higher education and national occupational standards.

For more information visit the website of the Sector Skills Development Agency, the organisation that underpins the SSC network and promotes effective working between sectors : **www.ssda.org.uk**

Chambers of Commerce

The British Chambers of Commerce comprise a national network of quality accredited Chambers of Commerce, all uniquely positioned at the heart of every business community in the UK and representing more than 135,000 businesses of all sizes in all sectors of the economy. Chambers of Commerce can be a useful source of information and support. Their members are local business people who meet regularly to exchange ideas and information that relate to local trading conditions. Many Chambers of Commerce publish their own newspapers or newsletters and have a directory of members. These publications will contain up-to-date information about the local business environment. The first point of contact is usually the secretary. To find the nearest Chamber to you visit **www.chamberonline.co.uk/chamber_network/chamberlist**

Trading Standards Departments

Trading Standards Departments play a vital role in providing consumer protection within current legislation. They supply information to consumers and businesses, but can also provide this to schools and colleges. You may find that your local Trading Standards Department has produced information sheets specifically for students that cover different aspects of consumer protection legislation. The national Trading Standards Department's website (**www.tradingstandards.gov.uk**) has a search facility to locate your local department.

Health and Safety Executive

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has a mission to ensure that risks to people's health and safety from work activities are properly controlled. It produces a wide range of support materials for employers and employees to make sure that the workplace is as safe as possible. The HSE website (**www.hse.gov.uk**) contains a list of all the organisation's resources.

Developing links with employers

it is important that businesses work alongside teachers ... to ensure that young people gain access to up-to-date business information as well as having the opportunity to meet a variety of people from different work environments.

Mary Barry, Manager, Community Relations, British Airways
www.hounslow.gov.uk/home/news/july_2003/news-10-07-2003.htm
 27 Jan 2005, accessed 3 February 2005

In 2003/04, VLSP: 16–19 commissioned 15 organisations to examine and develop their practice in the delivery of the post-16 curriculum.

Four projects that focused on developing links with employers are summarised here. Information on the themes addressed by the other 11 organisations can be found in *Developing the post-16 vocational curriculum: development projects from LSDA 2003/04* (LSDA, 2005).

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

South Maidstone Federation

Background

The South Maidstone Federation comprises three secondary schools in this area of Kent, all located within three miles of each other, and educates around 2500 pupils. Two schools have approximately 450 11–16 year olds on roll. The third school is an 11–18 school with 1600 pupils on roll, of which 330 are in post-16 education. A wide variety of Level 2 and Level 3 courses are offered at post-16 and pupils can follow vocational courses in business studies, leisure and tourism, travel and tourism, leisure and recreation, performing arts, ICT and science, and CACHE awards.

Project aims

Through its involvement in an LSDA-funded development project, the South Maidstone Federation hoped to :

- increase the vocational department's links with the business community
- provide post-16 students with the opportunity to practise their interview technique
- organise focus days to help students across the three schools make informed choices regarding work-related training at post-16
- provide staff with the opportunity to update their industry skills and awareness by undertaking a series of work-based placements focused on their particular area or specialism.

Project methodology and outcomes

The vocational department decided to set up a business advisory board made up of local business organisations to support the development of the vocational curriculum. A number of local businesses were contacted through existing relationships, links provided by the local EBP and by writing to organisations inviting them to join the board. The aim was to have representation from about 30 local businesses (presently 10 organisations participate). Initially, business representatives were invited to attend a working lunch, where the purpose of the board was outlined and discussion on suitable activities to support teaching staff and students took place.

Now established, the board meets termly. Its members have supported the vocational department through the year in a variety of ways : by providing staff with work placements, holding interview days for Year 13 students and organising visits for students to workplaces. The intention is to expand the number of business representatives who sit on the advisory board, to cover as many different subject areas as possible.

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

Kingsthorpe Community College, Northampton

Background

During the life of the development project, Kingsthorpe Community College was a 13–18 upper school in Northampton. In September 2004, it became a split-site secondary school. The sixth form provides a range of vocational and academic courses to approximately 200 full-time learners. Its vocational offer includes VCEs in travel and tourism, leisure and recreation, health and social care, business and ICT. Over half of the sixth-form cohort participates in these qualifications.

Project aims

Kingsthorpe Community College intended to produce high-quality, easily accessible case study material relating to marketing and customer service that could support the teaching and learning of VCEs. To do this, it planned to link up with 78 Derngate, a nearby heritage attraction that was undergoing renovation. At the same time, the college hoped to assist 78 Derngate to maximise the educational potential of the renovation project beyond the obvious links with art and design.

Project methodology and outcomes

Practitioners from Kingsthorpe Community College worked closely with staff from 78 Derngate, particularly the marketing manager, the house curator and the web team, to produce online learning materials focused on customer service. The materials, which include a virtual tour of the house, are designed for students following business courses, but they could easily be adapted to suit other subjects. Initially trialled with students, the materials have had a positive impact on student learning and achievement. The development project itself concluded with a conference themed on customer service at which students had the opportunity to meet with employers from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

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

Background

St Wilfrid's is an 11–18, mixed, Church of England high school with Technology College status situated close to the centre of Blackburn in an area of high deprivation. Vocational education has been a part of its post-16 provision since the mid-1990s, with health and social care, leisure and recreation, and business being the core subjects. VCE Manufacturing was introduced as an option for Year 11 students in response to the Curriculum 2000 reforms, the availability of General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) in vocational subjects and the school gaining Technology College status.

Project aims

The development project at St Wilfrid's aimed to :

- raise the profile of manufacturing as a subject area within the school
- encourage students to opt for VCE Manufacturing
- integrate work-related learning into schemes of work for VCE Manufacturing and use case studies to enhance student attainment in internally and externally assessed units
- establish a mode of delivery for the VCE Manufacturing single and double awards that would enable students to achieve to their full potential but also value individual learning
- provide opportunities for staff to develop schemes of work in association with local manufacturing companies.

Project methodology and outcomes

St Wilfrid's commissioned East Lancashire EBP to design an event called 'The world of manufacturing'. The intention was to raise the profile of manufacturing through an after-school event to be held in the sixth form centre with refreshments provided. The event would comprise interactive workshops organised by four different manufacturing companies around which students would rotate. Planning meetings and close liaison were needed to put the plans into action.

The EBP found it difficult to obtain firm commitment from the companies invited to run the interactive workshops. However, its development officer was very skillful in managing this situation and sought alternative companies through her network of contacts.

Approximately 16 students, one parent, five members of school staff, five invited company representatives and two staff from the EBP attended the event. School caterers provided an excellent buffet tea, which helped to relax some nervous students and gave all present an opportunity to network with each other before the event started. However, at least two weeks before the event, we reminded students about their invitations and at least 20 expressed an interest in attending. In hindsight we should have sent formal invitations to parents, too.

Three workshops were held; we were let down at the last minute by a major aerospace company. However, the workshops that did run all provided valuable interactive activities that were well thought out, delivered professionally and tailored to the target audience.

The workshops

Holland's Pies, as well as organising some user-friendly, interactive activities in the form of lots of pies to sample and take away, had an excellent activity based on critical-path analysis of pie production. The two female members of staff, one a sales assistant and the other a manager, interacted and enthused their audience, using humour and typical industrial friendliness.

Pertex ran a workshop based on the materials used for making parachutes and high-specification outdoor clothing. It gave us all the opportunity to try and tear some extremely flimsy, shiny fabric. Again, the two female presenters broke the stereotypical mould of manufacturing being a male-dominated industry.

Printoff – Graphic Arts turned what could be deemed a 'dry' topic into an interesting and stimulating one through the use of keywords, photographic evidence and a very knowledgeable presenter who was extremely enthusiastic about his work.

Feedback from the participants indicated a high degree of satisfaction. The staff who attended were all paid at a standard hourly rate, which we had not indicated beforehand as we only wanted people who were committed to and interested in promoting manufacturing. Following the event, staff were invited to bid to develop schemes of work for selected VCE Manufacturing units and to prepare lesson plans. The companies that participated in the 'The world of manufacturing' event all expressed an interest in allowing small groups of students to visit their premises and volunteered to help teachers create schemes of work.

Increasing the vocational focus : virtual interviews

Hayesfield School Technology College, Bath

Background

Hayesfield School Technology College in Bath is an 11–18, girls' comprehensive school with a mixed sixth form. It offers health and social care at both VCE and GCSE level. In 2003/04, 135 students were following these courses.

Project aims

The LSDA-funded development project at this institution focused on improving the delivery of health and social care courses. Finding it increasingly difficult to organise visits to the workplace due to health and safety legislation and issues associated with patient confidentiality, staff decided to enhance the vocational focus of the VCE in health and social care by videoing healthcare professionals at work. This would enable the students to :

- view different care settings without having to leave the classroom
- obtain a visual and audio presentation of the work of carers
- access interesting and relevant materials at a time to suit them
- repeatedly access the information in their own time.

The school set a plan of action. It:

- contacted key personnel from the NHS in Bath and the surrounding areas
- made video recordings of carers in their work settings and edited the film appropriately
- presented the work as a DVD for use by teachers in whole-class situations
- put the work on the school network
- put the learning package onto a website for other schools to use.

Project methodology and outcomes

With the NHS being a major employer in Bath, the project coordinators decided that it would be a good organisation to involve from the start. Furthermore, Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire NHS Workforce Development Confederation planned to work with Swindon Education Business Plus to produce a science toolkit to encourage more young people to enter the NHS and it had provided funding for an NHS employee to make direct links with schools.

Students interviewed professionals already known to the school and the short video clips were put onto DVD. Each interview focused on the work of the healthcare professionals and took place at their workplace. The DVD and accompanying activities and worksheets formed a complete up-to-date learning package for individual students or whole classes to use.

Just like real work : moving forward with the new A-levels

With the introduction of the new A-levels, available for teaching from September 2005, many staff are concerned about the impact that the qualifications might have on teaching and learning, vocational links and assessment practices. The major questions raised by staff 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**

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 an 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 (available only as AS single and A-level awards)
Health and Social Care ⁺	AQA, Edexcel, OCR
Leisure Studies ⁺⁺	AQA, Edexcel, OCR (available only as AS single and A-level awards)
Media: Communication and Production	Edexcel (available only as AS single and A-level awards)
Performing Arts	Edexcel, OCR (available only as AS single and A-level awards)
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 reduced number of optional units make this a less attractive qualification ?

The optional units available vary according to the qualification, the subject and the awarding body. Generally, the awarding bodies have not redeveloped those VCE optional units that had low candidate take-up or where students had previously been unsuccessful. 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 29).

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. Joint delivery will be difficult for the academic year 2005/06, as for the first year of the new qualifications only AS units will be assessed. However, joint delivery will be possible in the academic year 2006/07 onwards as both AS and A2 units will be available for assessment. Centres must recognise the different demands of the AS and A2 units when considering teaching combined groups of Year 12 and Year 13 learners and should check a unit's suitability for joint teaching with their awarding body.

Will the decrease in the number of new A-levels compared with 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 VCE) 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 that they have applied 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 LSC or EBP.

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 29). 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

References and further reading

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Vocational Learning Support Programme: 16–19

Following the statutory requirement for all Key stage 4 learners to experience some form of work-related learning, the need for schools and colleges to forge links with businesses, organise placements and develop innovative teaching methods has never been so great. There is much evidence to suggest that linking the curriculum to the world of work increases student motivation and leads to improvements in achievement. *Just like real work: a work-related curriculum for 16–19 year olds* offers useful hints and tips on enhancing the work-related element of vocational learning for the benefit of students, teachers and industry.

