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Wolf Review of 14 – 19 Vocational Education – Call for Evidence

1. How can we improve the organisation of vocational education for 14-19 year olds? This would include funding mechanisms; institutional suitability, accountability and incentives; and the role of the third sector, private training providers, employers and awarding bodies. It would also include arrangements for developing qualifications, including who bears the cost, and whether there is a need for an official quality benchmark for vocational education and awards.

Our comments:

- It is our view that broad institutions of a tertiary nature are best at 16+ enabling young people (and adults) to take a variety of routes which do not close doors too early. The most successful FE institutions are those which provide a strong AS/A level provision and well-equipped vocational training opportunities in areas such as construction, engineering and catering.
 - The last government's funding set up, which divided between YPLA and SFA, was not helpful and although this is beginning to change under the new coalition government it would be very helpful if the artificial division between 16-18 and 19+ funding and planning was removed as soon as possible if life chances are not to be wasted and the skills of our population developed to the full. The abolition of QCDA as well will make oversight of the curriculum more difficult in the future.
 - The subject associations still have an interest and welcome being part of the discussion. We tried very hard to be involved with the Diplomas but are looking for a more positive role this time.
2. What is the appropriate target audience for a vocational education offer, and in particular from what age is it appropriate for young people to be engaging in vocational education?

Our comments:

- The concept of vocational education needs unpicking. Is this really a reference to vocational training? Most students taking GCSEs, AS and A levels will end up in 'vocations' although they may go on to study further in HE first. In this sense, vocational education is indistinguishable from a broad general education. This is appropriate at any age as skills developed in the nursery and in primary school are usually relevant in vocations e.g. dexterity, co-ordination, artistic, etc. However vocational training, which has a narrower more specialised and focussed connotation, is best undertaken on top of a broad education: in our view, not before 14 years and in most cases not until 18. Indeed many HE institutions offer very vocational courses run in association with employers.

President 2010-11: Dr John Hopkin

Honorary Vice Presidents: Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB, Professor Doreen Massey, Hetan Shah, Professor Iain Stewart

Strategic Partners:



- Evidence from GCSEs show that it depends on what school you go to as to which subjects are on offer. Vocational qualifications are perceived to be of less currency. Some schools choose to band students, restricting what is available to them. The aspiration that students could mix and match GCSEs with diplomas would have kept options open to students. The reality appears to be that some schools only allow vocational qualifications to be offered to certain students: this can restrict future pathways. E.g. Business Studies is not an acceptable A2 subject for some highly respected universities.

3. What principles should underpin content, structure and teaching methods?

Our comments:

- Vocational education should contribute to a broad and balanced education meeting the needs of all students, and therefore the community as well as the economy. The balance between practical and theoretical assessment needs to be kept under constant review, including the perceived benefits of short term goals. Whether vocational courses necessarily have more practical work than more traditional subject course can be questionable. Practical, applied elements in a range of subjects can be enhanced – as was becoming evident in work for the Humanities diploma.

4. Specifically, how can vocational education best respond to the current and expected future labour market? And how can it provide a positive incentive to participation by young people, in particular those who are at risk of disengaging from learning?

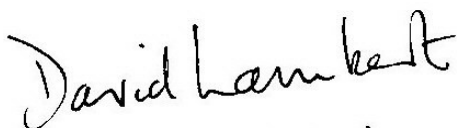
Our comments:

- How genuinely vocational are many of these courses? Do they really prepare youngsters for careers in those areas? E.g. how many following travel and tourism end up working in this area? Those capabilities could be built up in other qualifications, including so-called traditional subject areas.
- It is far from proven that schools are best suited to prepare young people for specific work place skills (which are often unique to that work place). Again the distinction can be made between vocational education and training.

5. How can we improve progression from vocational education to positive destinations (work, Apprenticeships, FE, HE)?

Our comments:

- The value of a vocational qualification must be accepted by everyone including elite universities. This is not to say that vocational qualifications need to be given *equal* value by all. The differences between vocational education, vocational training and academic education should be more openly acknowledged



Professor David Lambert
Chief Executive