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An investigation of vocational progression pathways for young people and adults in building crafts and hospitality CoVEs:

a London case study

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An investigation of vocational progression pathways for young people and adults in building crafts and hospitality CoVEs: a London case study

In theory, vocational progression routes exist in most occupational areas from pre-NVQ Level 1 to foundation degree and beyond. The London CoVE network provides the key to driving up vocational progression. This project aims to explore the changes brought about by London-based CoVEs in two occupational areas and the practical reality for the city's vocational learners in these two sectors – building crafts and hospitality.

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Hughes M and Smeaton B (2001). *Searching for excellence in FE colleges*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In theory, vocational progression routes exist in most occupational areas from pre-NVQ Level 1 to foundation degree and beyond. Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) deliver specialist vocational provision with a focus on Level 3 growth, and are characterised by close links between colleges, other providers, business partners, employers and communities. They aim to produce skilled and appropriately qualified workers with excellent employment and career prospects, which meet the needs of the economy. CoVEs also focus on enhancing the skills and careers of those already in work, the employability of new entrants to the labour market and the employment prospects of those seeking work (including self-employment). CoVEs work closely with business and industry to deliver industry-relevant, economically important provision of a high standard.
- 1.2 There are around 60 CoVEs, or prospective CoVEs, in London. The London CoVE network provides the key to driving up vocational progression. This project aims to explore the changes brought about by London-based CoVEs in two occupational areas – building crafts and hospitality – and the practical reality for the city's vocational learners in these two sectors.

2. Project aim and objectives

- 2.1 The principal aim of this project is to explore how vocational pathways have been developed and enhanced in these two occupational areas among 14–19 year olds and employed adults in London. The project identifies how well the selected CoVEs have performed against various factors. It:
 - evaluates the vocational progression ladder within the relevant sectors
 - assesses the impact of the CoVE programme on learners and participation
 - measures the extent of external, vocational relationships.
- 2.2 In addition to the above, the project explores the likely impact of the London 2012 Olympic Games on employment and skills needs.

3. Research methods

- 3.1 The research was undertaken between October 2005 and April 2006 and involved:
 - a review of literature
 - an analysis of college data on participation and achievement
 - semi-structured, in-depth interviews with providers, employers, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and partner organisations
 - focus groups with learners.

4. Findings from the literature review¹

- 4.1 London has a population of 7.4m. It is home to 12% of the UK population, 29% of which is from minority ethnic groups. London suffers from inner-city poverty, congestion, pollution and a high cost of living. Two of the five local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas in London (Central and West) have the second and fourth worst unemployment rates in England, respectively. Four of the five local LSC areas are in the top 10 for the number of working population with qualifications at NVQ Level 4 or above. One (East) has the highest number of working population with no qualifications, out of all London areas.
- 4.2 London is a major centre of higher and further education; it has 15% of the UK's further education and 16% of its HE students. Minority ethnic groups are well represented among the FE population; disabled learners are under-represented. Travel costs and time are significant factors for FE learners. There are 60 CoVEs in London, and 21 of these have interim status. While London's CoVEs are leading the way in meeting skills needs, the proportion of employers training their staff at FE colleges is the lowest of any LSC region.
- 4.3 Construction is one of the largest industries in Greater London, but women and minority ethnic workers are under-represented in the sector. The industry has a high proportion of workers with low-level or no qualifications, and few workers are qualified to Level 4. Both in London and nationally, small businesses or sole traders dominate the industry.
- 4.4 The hospitality industry, in London, is another large employment sector, with nearly 0.25m people working in the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism industry. Over a third of these work in restaurants. Most vacancies tend to be in the hospitality industry, which has a poorly qualified workforce, and lacks people with appropriate skills.
- 4.5 Since 2003, four White Papers have been published that are transforming the vocational education and training sector. These have outlined the government's skills strategy (DfES 2003), the reform of 14–19 education and training (DfES 2005a), the establishment of the national skills academies (DfES 2005a&b) and the programme of reform of the FE system (DfES 2006).
- 4.6 Since the establishment of CoVEs, studies have shown that they are effective in engaging with employers and other stakeholders, collaborating with other providers, meeting employers' needs and providing flexible learning. However, there are areas where improvements can continue to be made. CoVEs are an important part of the reform of the FE sector – nationally as part of the skills academies and Agenda for Change; regionally in supporting the LSC's 'London Plan'; and institutionally in helping to define mission and purpose, and in driving up improvement.

5. Findings from the data analysis

- 5.1 The data upon which the analysis is based has a number of caveats. The conclusions that have been drawn, therefore, must be considered in this light.
- 5.2 Since 2002/03, London enrolments on to Level 2 courses in building crafts CoVEs have increased more than threefold; those at Level 3 have increased by 51%. All

¹ For sources, see the full research report at www.LSNeducation.org.uk

three CoVEs have experienced increased numbers at Level 3 over the three-year period (2002/03 to 2004/05).

- 5.3 Since 2002/03, enrolments on to Level 2 courses have increased in two London-based hospitality CoVEs but have decreased in the other two. At Level 3, two CoVEs have seen an increase in enrolments, and fluctuations have occurred in the other two. Over the three-year period (2002/03 to 2004/05), enrolments at Level 3 have increased by 18%.
- 5.4 In 2004/05, 60% of learners enrolling on to construction courses were white. In hospitality, 64% were white.
- 5.5 The number of women on construction courses has more than doubled since 2002/03, although the proportion decreased by 1% to 17% in 2004/05. The number of women on hospitality courses has decreased from 56% in 2002/03 to 48% in 2004/05.

6. Findings from the interviews

Building crafts

- 6.1 For most London CoVEs demand is high for Level 2 courses, less so for Level 3. Level 2 qualifications have currency in the construction industry, and there is lack of employer support for training after Level 2. Demand for courses tends to be a mixture of employer and learner demand.
- 6.2 For some CoVEs, CoVE status has not made a difference, although for others it has helped to brand courses, get the college known and attract better-qualified staff.
- 6.3 The main barriers to progression for learners include the currency of Level 2 qualifications, and unwillingness on the part of employers to release trainees beyond Level 2 qualifications.
- 6.4 The majority of CoVEs are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers.
- 6.5 CoVEs have developed extensive networks for disseminating good practice and knowledge externally – within the CoVE network, with non-CoVE providers and through teaching staff networks, employers’ forums and specialist development groups. Dissemination within the host colleges (from CoVE-awarded department to non-CoVE department) appears to be less well established. The LSC’s new Agenda for Change quality standard should be used to provide best practice guidelines to address this problem.
- 6.6 CoVE employers and partner organisations offered a range of views about current provision and progression opportunities for learners. These included the currency of Level 2 qualifications within the industry, lack of funding opportunities, the relevance of some provision to the industry or availability of provision, and difficulties in placing employed apprentices on courses. This final point appears to be a London-specific problem.
- 6.7 There is some support for higher-level skills training for better-qualified managerial staff and project managers, and in relation to new building materials and technologies.

- 6.8 CoVEs are working hard to improve the representation of women on CoVE courses and in the construction industry. Much outreach work is being done to encourage a more diverse learner population. However, funding is seen as a barrier, especially for older workers, women returners and the unemployed. Learners with disabilities are encouraged, but there are health and safety concerns regarding working on a construction site.
- 6.9 CoVE engagement with employers is extensive, and relationships with the SSC are good. However, employers do not appear to be involved in setting the curriculum and in teaching and assessment; many would not welcome such involvement, although some would.
- 6.10 Views about the impact of the London 2012 Olympic Games on employment and skills needs are tentative. There is a lack of clarity regarding the architecture and building materials that will be used; if modern methods and materials are to be used, CoVEs are unlikely to be able to respond. As for labour and skills shortages, the general view among interviewees is that much will be filled by foreign workers, and the pressure created by the need to build the Olympic Games' infrastructure within a set timescale will exacerbate labour and skills shortages elsewhere in the industry.

Hospitality

- 6.11 In London, two CoVEs have high levels of demand for all their courses, while the other two are oversubscribed at Level 2. Demand for courses tends to be a mixture of employer and learner demand.
- 6.12 There is a lack of demand from the industry for Level 3 qualifications; Level 2 qualifications have currency, and this is the main barrier to progression. This view was endorsed by CoVE employers and partner organisations, but other barriers also include the lack of funding opportunities, employers' reluctance to release staff beyond Level 2 and scepticism about the relevance of NVQs.
- 6.13 CoVE employers and partner organisations commented on the need for higher-level skills training, specifically to develop management, supervisory and communications skills.
- 6.14 Most CoVEs are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers.
- 6.15 External dissemination of knowledge and good practice is well established, and undertaken in a number of ways: through CoVE partnerships, regional and national CoVE networks, employers' forums and professional associations, and by working with non-CoVE providers. Dissemination within the host colleges (from CoVE-awarded department to non-CoVE department) appears to be less well established.
- 6.16 In general, CoVEs are seen as important factors in helping to address the needs of the industry.
- 6.17 In terms of widening participation to learning, some CoVEs have difficulty recruiting young, white males. Learners with disabilities are encouraged, but there are health and safety concerns with regard to working in a kitchen environment. Much outreach work is being done with schools and parents to encourage a more diverse learner population.

- 6.18 Employer involvement with CoVEs is extensive. Most employers and partner organisations are satisfied with their CoVE involvement.
- 6.19 Involvement between the majority of CoVEs and the SSC is limited. Opportunities to develop relationships between the SSC and CoVEs need to be explored further.
- 6.20 Views about the likely impact of the 2012 Olympic Games are mixed, and wide-ranging: labour and skills shortages will be exacerbated, shortages will be covered by foreign labour and most training requirements will be at Level 2, although there may be demand for Level 3 qualifications due to the shortage of workers with supervisory skills.

7. Findings from the focus groups

- 7.1 The learners who were interviewed were mixed in terms of the level and types of qualifications being taken, the mode in which they were training and studying, and their social characteristics, experiences and expectations. The views expressed were varied and wide-ranging, both within and between the groups.
- 7.2 Learners mentioned few barriers to getting on to courses. Of the difficulties experienced and mentioned were managing time, juggling assignments with work and difficulties with and/or the frequency of assignments. The support received from tutors was found to be helpful.
- 7.3 Many learners on building crafts courses saw the relevance of the qualifications they hoped to gain as a way of continuing and progressing in the industry in which they worked; others mentioned their wish to progress further with their education and training. Of the hospitality learners, most were doing their courses so that they could gain entry to the industry or set up their own businesses. A qualification was felt necessary to achieve these goals.

8. Conclusions

The nature of the occupational areas

- 8.1 As the literature review has shown, the construction and hospitality industries are two of the largest employment sectors in Greater London. However, both suffer constraints. Among these are the under-representation of women and ethnic minority workers in the construction industry. In hospitality, the majority of workers are women, and minority ethnic groups are well represented, but most occupy basic-level jobs. Both industries are characterised by workforces with low-level or no qualifications, and Level 2 qualifications have currency.² In the construction industry, this latter fact is compounded by the dominance of small businesses or sole traders that are reluctant to release staff for training beyond Level 2, which helps militate against a training culture. These characteristics present challenges to London's CoVEs operating in these occupational areas.

The nature of learner and employer demand

- 8.2 Our data analysis and interviews have shown that in the majority of **building crafts** and **hospitality** CoVEs, demand is high at Level 2, but less so at Level 3. Level 2 qualifications have currency in both industries. Demand for courses tends to be a mixture of employer and learner demand.

² In London, 29% of construction workers have low-level or no qualifications. Of the London hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism workforce, 29% have qualifications at Entry level or Level 1; 14% have no qualifications.

- 8.3 The challenge to CoVEs of increasing enrolment and achievement at Level 3 is complex. On the one hand, Level 2 qualifications have currency in both the building crafts and hospitality industries, and many employers fail to recognise the relevance of Level 3 qualifications to their businesses and/or are reluctant to pay for the cost of training. On the other hand, CoVEs may operate in a catchment area with a potential learner population that lacks the interest, capability or financial resources to undertake Level 3 qualifications in these occupational areas; or the work experience opportunities have yet to be cultivated or are not available to allow learners to train in these areas and at this level.³ These are some of the areas where further investigation is needed.

Barriers to progression

- 8.4 In our interviews, the lack of currency of Level 3 qualifications in the industries was seen as the main barrier to progression for learners. Reasons included those outlined in 8.1 to 8.3 above. There is also some scepticism among employers and partner organisations about the relevance of NVQs, especially in the **hospitality** area. In **building crafts**, the difficulties of placing employed apprentices on building crafts courses were noted. This appears to be a London-specific problem.

Engagement with employers and SSCs

- 8.5 CoVE engagement with employers is extensive in both occupational areas; the majority of CoVEs are involved in providing industry-focused, bespoke courses for employers. All the **building crafts** CoVEs have good relationships with CITB-ConstructionSkills – the SSC. Opportunities to develop relationships between the **hospitality** CoVEs and People 1st (the SSC for hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism) should be explored further as SSC capacity is developed.

Higher-level skills training

- 8.6 In **building crafts**, there was some support for higher-level skills training for better-qualified managerial staff, project managers, and in relation to new building materials and technologies. In **hospitality**, the need for higher-level skills training was identified to develop management, supervisory and communications skills.

Widening participation

- 8.7 All CoVEs were working hard to widen participation to learning through outreach activities. In **building crafts** CoVEs, an important focus was on improving the representation of women on CoVE courses and in the industry. Funding was identified as a major barrier to widening participation, especially for older workers, women returners and the unemployed. In **hospitality**, a challenge for some of the CoVEs was recruiting young, white males. While learners with disabilities are encouraged by both building crafts and hospitality CoVEs, there are health and safety concerns about working on a building site and in a kitchen environment.

Dissemination of good practice and knowledge

- 8.8 All CoVEs have developed well-established and extensive networks for disseminating good practice and knowledge externally – within the regional and national CoVE network, with non-CoVE providers and through teaching staff networks, professional associations, employers' forums and specialist development groups. However, in the majority of CoVEs, dissemination to other colleagues *within* the host college (from CoVE-awarded department to non-CoVE department) appears to be less well established.

³ The Further Education White Paper (DfES 2006) introduced a new entitlement to free tuition for 19–25 year olds who are studying their first Level 3 qualification, which will help to overcome some of these problems.

The likely impact of the 2012 Olympic Games

- 8.9 Views expressed by many interviewees about the impact of the 2012 Olympic Games were tentative. In the **building crafts** area, there is a lack of clarity regarding the architecture and building materials that will be used; until this is known it is impossible to say whether CoVEs will be able to respond to the demand for qualified and skilled workers. In building crafts, CoVEs are responding to the influx of foreign workers and learners by providing ESOL courses, and are looking at ways of converting foreign qualifications into UK-recognised ones.
- 8.10 In both occupational areas, the general view was that labour and skills shortages will be exacerbated, although much demand will be filled by foreign workers. In the **hospitality** area, it is likely that most training requirements will be at Level 2, although there may be demand for Level 3 qualifications due to the shortage of workers with supervisory skills.

Learner experiences

- 8.11 Learner groups were mixed in terms of what they were studying, their social characteristics, and their experiences and expectations – thus, the views expressed were mixed. Few barriers to getting on to the course were mentioned. Some difficulties ‘on course’ were noted (eg managing time and juggling work with study) but support from tutors was welcomed and helpful. Many saw the relevance of the qualifications they hoped to gain, either as a way of entering the industry or of continuing and progressing in the industry in which they already worked.

9 Recommendations

For CoVEs

- 9.1 Review and investigate ways of further developing the outreach work with schools, potential learners and their parents, to promote vocational education and training opportunities in the context of the new diplomas and the expansion of the 14–19 vocational route. Opportunities for developing outreach work with the newly formed and emerging lifelong learning networks should also be explored.
- 9.2 Review and investigate ways of further developing the work with employers to promote the relevance and benefits of training and opportunities for full-cost, bespoke provision in the context of Train to Gain.
- 9.3 Review existing employer networks and investigate ways of further developing networks to include those employers who may not have previously accessed training in the context of Train to Gain target-setting.
- 9.4 Review communications with employers about work-based learners and agree what each partner can expect (eg from the CoVE, the employer should expect regular reports regarding work-based learners’ progress in college; from the employer, the CoVE should identify the expectations of work-based learners in the workplace).
- 9.5 Continue to develop the well-established relationships with the SSC; where these do not exist, explore ways of working with the SSC.
- 9.6 Integrate specification for accurate completion of the individual learner record into the provider planning process and the New Measures of Success through the self-assessment process.
- 9.7 Consider ways of improving the marketing of the CoVE brand to schools’ careers advisers, Connexions advisers, employers, potential learners and existing learners.

- 9.8 Ensure that teaching staff have recent and regular experience of the industry, and that it is reflected in curriculum design and development, and in teaching and assessment practices.
- 9.9 Continue to develop the outreach work with community groups, schools and other organisations to encourage diversity in the learner population.
- 9.10 Continue to raise awareness and explore issues in discussions with employers regarding widening participation to learning and diversity in the workplace.
- 9.11 Review (or explore where they do not already exist) relationships with higher education institutions to extend progression opportunities for learners.
- 9.12 Explore with the relevant senior management of the college, ways in which CoVE experiences, knowledge and practices can be disseminated to benefit the practice of others in the college.

For SSCs

- 9.13 Continue to market and promote the full range of vocational education, training and employment opportunities to schools, and education and training provision to employers – including the benefits of the CoVE programme.
- 9.14 Continue to review current vocational education and training opportunities with CoVEs, other providers and the LSC to ensure that the industry's qualifications and skills needs are being met.
- 9.15 Continue to develop existing relationships with CoVEs; where they do not exist, priority should be given to establishing relationships and ways of working.
- 9.16 Continue (or prioritise where they have not been established) efforts to raise awareness among employers about issues regarding widening participation and diversity.
- 9.17 Continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure clear mechanisms for bringing the national skills academies and CoVEs together to form effective networks and to identify gaps in the existing CoVE network.

For the LSC and other stakeholders

- 9.18 Continue to review current vocational education and training opportunities with SSCs and other key stakeholders to ensure that qualifications and skills needs are being met.
- 9.19 Fully promote and develop the Train to Gain initiative to ensure that employers are encouraged to make the most of the brokerage service available.
- 9.20 Ensure that the reaccreditation process is guided by key regional partners, such as the London Development Agency and relevant SSCs, to meet regional and local skills needs by providing high-quality and cost-effective provision that meets Agenda for Change priorities.
- 9.21 Review regional individual learner record (ILR) input and quality review systems, and prioritise the development of common unique learner identifiers within ILRs. Establish clear data-completion standards for all providers. Publicise these performance levels and timelines for achievement, along with warnings that failure

to attain these could jeopardise reaccreditation and have a negative impact on future LSC funding.

- 9.22 Encourage schools to raise the profile of the vocational route among learners and their parents, and to promote the full range of opportunities through the 14–19 curriculum pathways in the borough learning prospectus.
- 9.23 Ensure that local area agreements (LAAs) encourage schools to promote the full range of opportunities provided by building crafts and hospitality qualifications to all learners, not just to low achievers, and ensure that through the Children and Young People's Partnership Boards vocational provision is identified as of equal importance as the academic route. Set local first Level 2 qualifications as part of LAA targets.
- 9.24 For building crafts provision for adults, on-site assessment and training can be highly effective, and the Train to Gain initiative should be used to develop delivery here. For young people, emphasis should be on the delivery of apprenticeships for the under 19s.

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