

Exploring leaders' views on the influence of applied A levels and vocational education on preparation for students' progression to higher education and employment, in the context of an inner city London school

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Abstract

In London particularly there is increasing competitiveness for jobs and a need for transferable tertiary industry skills. There has been decades of change in vocational education and training; but there is evidence that little has changed to improve the chances of students progression to higher education and employment. With the age that students can leave formal education and training in England set at 18 from 2015 it is now critical that vocational education and training prepares students for progression. This study explores leaders' views on the influence of applied A levels and vocational courses at key stage five in preparation for progression in an inner city London school. The study uses qualitative interviews and a focus group. The findings suggest of primary importance to the leadership of vocational education is creating and maintaining employer relationships to enhance learning; having strong leadership views on educational priorities to overcome pressure to focus on results, and ensuring correct student recruitment for the courses. This requires a clear vision, correct allocation of resources and a suitable curriculum structure. Implications for school leaders include ensuring that more inexperienced teachers value including opportunities for students to practise transferable skills in lessons, and to allocate staff who can build and maintain stakeholder relationships. Nationally a move from results focus to learning quality is suggested. Further research into stakeholder involvement in schools is recommended.

Keywords: applied A levels; Bangladeshi; employment; higher education; key stage five; leadership; London; progression; secondary; school; vocational.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Context	1
1.2	Purpose of the study	2
1.3	Significance of the study	2
2	Literature Review	4
2.1	Introduction	4
2.2	Defining VET	4
2.3	History of VET in the UK	5
2.4	Concerns over progression	7
2.4.1	Progression to HE	7
2.4.2	Progression to employment	8
2.5	Factors influencing progression	8
2.5.1	Social factors	8
2.5.2	Demand for skills by employers	9
2.5.3	Policy failure	10
2.5.4	Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	11
2.5.5	Leadership	12
2.6	Conclusion	15
3	Conceptual framework	17

4 Methodology	21
4.1 Introduction	21
4.2 Research Design	22
4.2.1 Research question	22
4.2.2 Population and sample group	22
4.3 Methods	23
4.3.1 Interview method	23
4.3.2 Focus group discussion method	24
4.3.3 Focus group card sort exercise method	24
4.4 Analysis	25
4.4.1 Analysis of interview and focus group transcriptions	25
4.4.2 Analysis of focus group card sort exercises	26
4.5 Ethics	26
5 Findings and Interpretation	28
5.1 Vocational context of the school	28
5.2 Leaders' views on government policy	29
5.3 Leaders' views on employers	30
5.4 Leaders' views on teaching, learning and assessment	32
5.5 Revised conceptual framework	35
5.6 Limitations	35
6 Conclusion and Implications for Leaders	37
7 Further Research	40
8 Discussion	41
References	44
Appendices	60
A Structure of education in England	61

B Literature review search strategy log	64
C A history of VET in the UK from 1980-2010	66
D Email study invitation	68
E Participant information sheet	69
F Interview questions	71
G Focus group instrument	73
H Interview and focus group analysis tool	75
I Chain of evidence record	80
J Focus group card exercise analysis	82
K Participant consent form	86

List of Figures

3.1	Conceptual Framework	18
5.1	Revised conceptual framework	35

List of Tables

3.1	Research areas and associated authors	19
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Abbreviations

A levels	Advanced (A2) Levels
AVCE	Advanced Vocational Certificates in Education
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council Qualifications
CPVE	Certificates of Pre-Vocational Education
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
FE	Further Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualifications
HE	Higher Education
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSEB	London Skills and Employment Board
MA	Master of Arts Degree
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
UK	United Kingdom
VCE	Vocational Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Chapter 1

Introduction

This study aims to investigate leaders' views on the influence of applied A level and vocational courses (at key stage five) on preparation for students to progress to higher education (HE) and employment. This study defines progression as the ability for students to gain entry to, and have the skills to effectively study at HE or have the skills and knowledge required to gain an employment position in a industry related to their subject area.

In this report I will outline the aims of the study, the context and research question before making clear the terms of reference used in the report. The purpose and significance of the study will be outlined before the literature review and conceptual framework is presented. This section will be followed by the methodology and methods section; the findings, the recommendations before a conclusion to the study is drawn.

1.1 Context

Since the 1980s there have been a number of enquires focusing on improving vocational education (The Kennedy Report (Kennedy, 1997), the Dearing Report (Dearing, 1997), Fryer Report (Fryer, 1997) and the Green Paper 'The Learning Age' (DFEE, 1998). These have led to an almost continued conveyor belt of changes in

courses (see Appendix A).

Policy aims have been, and remain, to increase Britain's competitiveness, by improving the supply of educated and skilled workers (DfEE, 1998; OECD, 2001; Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004; DfES, 2005; Grainger *et al.*, 2007; Kehoe, 2007; Crowley and Rolfe, 2008). This has been in response to growing concern over increasing competition due to globalised markets (Brighouse, 2007; Pring *et al.*, 2009).

In London this is important because sixty percent of employment positions entail using post-sixteen education knowledge and skills, which is higher than the remainder of England (*ibid*) because London trades in globalised, competitive markets (Lupton and Sullivan, 2007). Thus it is important that students can progress to higher levels of education from VET so they have a chance at competing in this market, especially as many lower skilled jobs are disappearing (Brighouse, 2007).

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study aims to develop a case study that adds to the academic evidence concerning leadership of vocational education and progression. It will broaden our knowledge of leaders' views and perceptions of vocational education and students' progression to education and employment. Due to the school's location in a Bangladeshi community the evidence will increase our understanding of VET and progression in the Bangladeshi community. It will also allow leaders in the school to reflect on their VET system to improve progression to higher education and employment for their students. Finally the study will highlight areas of further research.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study is important because it will illuminate leaders' views on improving progression from VET courses to HE and employment, this is at a time where the number of students are likely to increase on VET courses; from 2015 the compul-

sory leaving age in England will be set at eighteen (DCSF, 2008). This will mean that the number of students entering vocational routes is likely to increase; hence it is even more important that VET is effective. This view is consistent with the new coalition government which published figures to show that the number of students on vocational and applied courses rose from 15,000 by 3,800 per cent to 575,000 in 2010 and questions are raised by the white paper as to the effectiveness of the courses for students progression to HE and employment (DfE, 2010).

In 2005 only forty percent of students holding vocational qualifications went onto higher education (Connor *et al.*, 2006). The remaining were unemployed or entered the job market where the National Employers Skills Survey stated that hard to fill job vacancies existed because employers could not find competently skilled candidates (DfEE, 2000). Even more concerning is that London's workforce is increasingly needing to be skilled at level 4 or higher. It is predicted that fifty percent of London's workforce is expected to require skills at level 4, or above by 2020 and at the same time a shrinking of the middle spectrum of skills will occur (LSEB, 2007). This is due to commuting and immigration, thus skills gaps do not exist and therefore there is more competition for young people (Brighouse, 2007; LSEB, 2007), this requires higher skills to enable students to compete (Castells, 1988; Castells and Hall, 1994; Westhead, 1997; Coates, 2010). VET is seen as the key to achieving this aim and thereby restoring Britain's international competitiveness (OECD, 2001; Kelly, 2009).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

To create the literature review and conceptual framework I carried out the following as suggested by Creswell (2003). I listed the keywords surrounding the subject of VET (see appendix B), these were chosen as they allow for the literature to show a chronology of VET in the UK and the published accounts of problems with the VET system. I then used the online search databases (listed in appendix B) to perform an advanced search, not restricted by country or date but to English and peer reviewed journals only. I then read fifty journals and re-listed the main categories which are presented in the conceptual framework. I followed author citations to other articles where there were gaps in understanding from my initial literature search. I stopped when the main themes were being repeated and when the same authors were being cited. The highlighted main ideas from each article were then put into the relevant categories in the conceptual framework and presented as follows.

2.2 Defining VET

In VET literature there appears to be no one commonly held definition in the literature that I have reviewed, however, most authors agree that vocational education

should be based on students gaining broad competencies, developing skills and knowledge for the use in related industries (Carter, 2009) such as art and design, business, health and social care, leisure and tourism and manufacturing (Abbott 1997). The fundamental assumption of these definitions is that skills acquisition can be determined and providing knowledge will improve the skills of individuals and improve economic performance (Jordan, 1998; Bottery, 1999; Ashton and Sung, 2006). This follows the belief of successive governments that a 'high road' strategy involving highly skilled labour will achieve competitive advantages over the UK's international competitors (Mason, 2004; Ashton and Sung, 2006).

Carter argues that there is often confusion between vocational and applied qualifications, such as the new Diplomas and Applied A levels which both are designed as academic with applied aspects (2009). It is concerning that only Carter highlights this as it is fundamental to understanding the literature on progression and may go some way to explain why there is limited published research that specifically separates vocational subjects and Applied A levels (I found two, only one was peer reviewed), as Applied A levels are often bundled in with vocational qualifications or A levels and thus this may mislead the research understanding of the qualifications (Carter, 2009).

2.3 History of VET in the UK

The UK has had a history of education being used by government's policy makers as an economic problem solver (OECD, 2001; Kelly, 2009). Huddleston and Oh (2004, p.83) cite 1884 and the Samuelson Committee as the earliest evidence of government expressing concerns over Britain's lack of competitiveness in Europe due to training and industrial culture. However, Keep and Mayhew (1988) note how, earlier, in 1852 Lyon Playfair remarks that he is worried about technical education and that it needs to improve in order to allow Britain to remain competitive over foreign competitors. This corroborates with the definitions used in published academic literature and official reports that make up defining VET in section 2.3.

In the famous 1976 Ruskin speech at Oxford, James Callaghan blamed the education system for economic recession and unemployment (Hayward and Fernandez, 2004). This view is outlined as the economic problems faced in Britain are due to a workforce that is not competitive in the post-Ford economy where the dominant service sector requires flexibility and softer interpersonal and communication skills (Hayward and Fernandez, 2004) requiring a highly skilled workforce to remain competitive (Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995; Aynsley and Crossouard, 2010).

Successive government policies have continued with the view that high skill levels are associated with economic gains brought from the economy having a high value-added product/service strategy (Mason, 2004). Wilson and Briscoe (2002) associate a one to three percent increase in gross domestic product per one percent increase in school enrolment. Thus, significantly arguing that the UK can gain economically from an increased number of students leaving schools with higher level skills to compete with international competitors such as Canada, Korea, Russia, Ireland, Australia and the United States of America all of which have higher levels of level 3 completion rates than the UK (OCED, 2009). An international study from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development concludes that VET provides a positive return on investment to individuals, employers and society (Field, *et al.*, 2009). Thus education has, and is increasingly seen in policy as a servant of the economy.

In 1992 a tripartite system consisting of academic A levels, general vocational qualifications and work based vocational NVQs were created (Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995; West and Steedman, 2003) this created an alternative to academic qualifications for students not suitable for A levels (Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995; Hodkinson, 1998; Williams, 1999; Conlon, 2005; Ecclestone, 2006).

From 2008 schools and colleges have been trailing the new diplomas which at the time of writing were still being rolled out. These qualifications are focused on classroom learning with an applied element of work experience, mirroring existing vocational qualifications (Allen, 2007). They were taken from the Tomlinson report's recommendations to build on current qualifications to develop core learning

alongside specialist learning for a specific industry channel (Hodgson and Spours, 2007) crossing between academic and vocational qualifications aiming for progression to higher education (HE) and an employment (Hodgson and Spours, 2004). (See appendix C for a timeline of vocational qualifications).

2.4 Concerns over progression

There is a large amount of peer reviewed evidence that suggests that vocational routes do not prepare students well for university; the main authors argue that the structure of, and assessment of many VET courses do not give students the skills and knowledge required for progression and that the socio-economic status of students constrains their progression (Bathmaker, 2005; Bailey and Bekhradnia, 2008; Hayward, 2008; Hayward *et al.*, 2008; Pring *et al.*, 2009). It has also been argued that vocational students cannot progress to suitable employment due to lack of skills, experience and demand by employers (Abbott, 1997; Brown and Keep, 1999; Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004; Keep, 2005a). It may be that the routes to HE are not understood by employers or admissions tutors so they may not be able to assess correctly a young persons suitability for education or employment (Young, 1993; West and Steedman, 2003; Little and Connor, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2007).

2.4.1 Progression to HE

The situation presented in a small scale empirical study (covering fourteen higher education institutions) by Connor *et al.*, (2006) and Bailey and Bekhradnia (2008) looks bleakest with only forty one percent of vocational students progressing to higher education. However, in 1992 the Advanced GNVQ started to become an entry route into Polytechnic Universities (Allen, 1997; Hodgson and Spours, 2003), this has been maintained with the diplomas (Hodgson and Spours, 2010) so the number of routes for vocational students to progress to HE has increased since 1992. In an in depth study comparing progression to HE in terms of mode and level

of study, accommodation and institution plus drop-out rates, degree outcomes and post HE progression Bailey and Bekhradnia used a weighted approach to cancel out contextual differences between students such as social background to argue that students with vocational qualifications had significant differences to academically qualified students in HE (2008). They were more likely to drop-out, are more likely to achieve a lower degree classification (Bailey and Bekhradnia, 2008; Hayward *et al.*, 2008) or gain a degree from FE colleges with HE provision or post 1992 universities (Hayward, 2008).

2.4.2 Progression to employment

Progression from education to employment may be constrained because students may not have the necessary skills or knowledge (Abbott, 1997; Brown and Keep, 1999; Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004; Keep, 2005a) or employers do not understand the qualification system (Maguire, 2002). Vocational students are more likely not to be employed full time or have non 'graduate' jobs and have lower earnings (Conlon, 2005). The study by Conlon was quantitative and compared a great deal of factors to determine the factors that influenced highest qualification gained and is one of only a few quantitative studies carried out on VET. Atkins (2005) notes in her short review of GNVQs without primary empirical evidence, that Foundational vocational courses creates a supply of casual, semi-skilled workforce (*ibid*).

2.5 Factors influencing progression

2.5.1 Social factors

Progression is however a very complex issue and contains a number of factors for example there is a wide evidence base supporting the notion that lower socio-economic status may constrain a young person's ability to progress to higher levels in education (Newburn, 1999; Foskett *et al.*, 2007; Otero, 2007; Byrom, 2009; Almquist

et al., 2010; Aynsley and Crossouard, 2010). Twice the number of young people from low socio-economic groups are on vocational courses compared to academic courses (Carter, 2009). The number was three times as likely in a study by Foskett *et al.*, (2007).

Factors that may constrain progression include what Bloomer (1999) and Ball and Vincent (1998) explain as a lack of access, or lack of trust of 'official' information from school/careers services. They argue that the trusting of information from their peer group is bounded by cultural capital which leads to knowledge/information that constrains progression. Ball *et al.*, confirm this in a longitudinal in-depth qualitative study (1999; Byrom, 2009). There may be constrained information from schools with a sixth form where in competition with other providers in-house progression meant a low variation in other progression options which may have been more suitable for the students (Foskett *et al.*, 2007).

2.5.2 Demand for skills by employers

Demand for labour also can be used to explain why the link between education and progression is complex. Demand influences include structural changes which include loss of traditional secondary manufacturing industries due to globalisation reducing the number of jobs available (Coffield, 1998), recruitment policies, engagement problems with educators and changes in skill requirements.

Maguire (1998) argues that in recruitment employers focus on skills and aptitude more than qualifications and when employers have vacancies requiring qualifications they find them hard to fill. Therefore the role of qualifications seems limited in recruitment and selection (Maguire, 2002). Maguire and Maguire's review of youth employment (1997) and (Keep, 2005a) provide evidence to support this theory, from an in-depth analysis of labour market policy he notes, that employers rank vocational qualifications second bottom out of their list of desirable attributes for employable school leavers (Keep, 2005a). Thus, this evidence does indicate a direct link between education and progression to employment.

In 1983 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development built

on the above arguments to present international evidence that stated that the development of vocational education is complex because the education and training requirements at a local level are contingent on local labour markets, forces and employers which may contradict national industrial and sector forces (OECD, 1983; Bradley and Taylor, 1996) thus it is not always clear what skills employers demand (Keep, 2005a). Hence a national strategy towards VET would need to be able to be responsive at local levels more effectively. Hence, Leitch (2006) notes how a system needs not only to be demand led of individuals and employers but be able to adapt as predicting future demand or skills is problematic (Lloyd, 2008). Therefore a comparable VET system may be a quest for an illusive holy grail due to the complexities of education and labour supply and demand (Keep, 2005b).

Employer engagement was researched in the development of the diplomas and supports the above findings; employers at an industry level contradicted with the local level due to resource constraints, especially for SMEs (Laczik and White, 2009). The needs of employers are diverse requiring local solutions (even between different employers in the same industry, Lloyd, 2008), however the evidence here is limited to Humanities and Language diplomas which have not been rolled out yet (Laczik and White, 2009) and as such may not reflect the reality of current diplomas which have been rolled out, thus more research into employer engagement is required.

2.5.3 Policy failure

Policy seems to reflect the early writing of Peters (1966) and Scheffler (1973) which was not based on empirical evidence, and has focused on employability since the 1960s and 1970s (Huddleston, 2000). Policy has failed to address the low numbers of students remaining in education post sixteen years old, in reducing the gap between socio-economic groups and in improving the workforce's skills (Johnson, 2004). Thus, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is seen as ineffective (Bradley and Taylor, 1996).

Finlay *et al.*, (2007), in their review of a decade of policy, criticise the govern-

ment for blaming the economic performance of the UK on the individual and away from the government's policy, since Callaghan's speech in 1976 (Coffield, 1998). Hodgson and Spours (2004) and Eccleston (2006) write about the need to break the cycle of recycled policies, policy amnesia (Eccleston, 2006, p. 3) under new names that fail to motivate disaffected young people, to teach and assess generic skills and impacting on educational priorities. Lumby and Wilson (2003) and Finlay *et al.* (2007) discuss how there is no feedback loop from those in direct education to influence centralised policy makers and so policy can be driven in reaction to the media and not local needs to challenge the status quo. Keep (1999) agrees stating that policy had no structural change from the supply system. Hyland's extensive review of thirty years of policy change concludes that more substantial change than re-labelling will be needed in order to change the system (2002). This evidence is corroborated by Hodgson and Spours who in 2010 presented evidence from multi agency seminars including HE, FE, and national agencies to conclude that the latest VET diploma strategy will suffer from low uptake, low understanding, low recognition and high complexity syndrome (p. 95). This is a good summary of the policy critiques outlined above. Evans *et al.*, (1997); Coffield (1998) and Leitch (2006) thus argue strongly that improvements in VET requires a partnership response from individuals, government, employers, trade unions, and voluntary organisations.

2.5.4 Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Participation in VET has been rising (Maguire, 2002), from 2004 to 2010 there was an increase of 3,800 per cent to 575,000 vocational students (DfE, 2010). At the same time VET seems to have failed to meet the needs of employers, society and students in terms of progression opportunities especially for general vocational qualifications such as applied A levels. Teaching, learning and assessment needs to be improved before a mass VET system can be effective (Wolf, 2004). Pring *et al.*, found a wide variety of poor quality vocational courses that were not recommended to students (2009) as did the Adult Learning Inspectorate (2002). The research by Pring *et al.*, was based on the comprehensive independent Nuffield review into

14-19 education in England and Wales over six years.

Evidence from Knight *et al.*, (1998) show that GNVQs provided the opportunity to develop courses beyond prescription but the pressures on teachers had not allowed for this (see for example Ozga, 2000). This was due to what Bottery (1999) describes as a reductionist policy, focusing on myopic targets; such as level two pass rate which may constrain inspiring teaching. Such teaching could motivate students to develop a passion for their subject and go on to develop innovations and new industries. Thus there may be too much focus on qualifications instead of learning (Smith *et al.*, 2001). Focusing on qualification passes does not allow for the development of broad knowledge and lifelong learning skills (Bloomer, 1998) which is required for flexible, competitive employment (Brown and Keep, 1999; Mulford, 2005).

Grainger *et al.*, (2007) argue that assessment should be made more vocational, to focus on workplace understanding and relevant workplace skills. Gulikers *et al.*, (2006; 2008) argue that assessments can be used to develop skills relevant for future employment by bridging the gap between work and education, however such tests need to be seen as authentic by students and teachers. This small scale study showed how students did not see the contexts in the same way as teachers which has implications for designing meaningful assessments (to resemble practice, Gulikers *et al.*, 2006; 2008) for this to occur. However I do not believe that the article is critical enough on how difficult this is to achieve in a school setting, the authors appear to simplify the extent to which this may occur.

2.5.5 Leadership

For this study leadership relates to school leaders making decisions about the provision of VET; providing an appropriate curriculum, relevant resources and teaching and assessment to support the development of work related skills and understanding.

With the search criteria used (see appendix B) the literature search failed to find any peer reviewed articles on leadership and vocational education beyond macro social and political aspects, the literature on teaching and assessment is not leadership

specific (see appendix B). However themes from reviewing literature on vocational education have emerged involving power relationships, learning centred leadership and stakeholder involvement by employers and thus progression to higher education and employment.

Leaders face an unequal relationship between their power in schools (for leaders to have decision making freedom to be able to provide VET courses that lead to progression to higher education and employment) and centralised government policy power (Flynn, 2007; Humphreys and Hoque, 2007) and this may conflict with leaders' views on educational priorities (Southworth, 2004). Therefore leaders may not be able to take decisions in line with their views on educational priorities due to external pressure, for example from the government (Goffee and Jones, 2000; Robinson, 2006) thus this study will need to explore how school leaders can improve vocational education within the wider policy constraints.

The greater the leaders have focus on learning and development the larger the impact on student outcomes (Robinson *et al.*, 2008) and progression to higher education and employment. Matthews (2009) noted how leading good quality learning and teaching is key to improving student progression to higher education and employment. He presents statistical empirical evidence stating that good quality learning comes from promoting teacher development and coordinating and evaluating teaching. The impact on learning and student outcomes is also mediated by classroom interaction noted as being critical by Leithwood *et al.*, (2006) in a large review of evidence and again in Leithwood and Jantzi (2008).

Leaders need to ensure that key management structures are in place to achieve improving student outcomes (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Lewis and Murphy, 2008). This is complex as it requires leaders to be able to read the context and make relevant decisions (*ibid*, p. 2; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Leithwood *et al.*, 2006) taking into account their beliefs and views on educational priorities (Lewis and Murphy, 2008) in the context of ever changing policy agendas for schools and employers to maintain the UKs international competitiveness, both require organisational and leadership changes (*ibid*).

Leaders have to continually use their views on educational priorities to respond to local issues and national policies and employer demands for a skilled workforce, this includes leaders' decisions on designing a curriculum that is also engaging to students at a local level to raise achievement by moving away from traditional subjects where required (Day *et al.*, 2007). Responding in this way is becoming increasingly challenging as agenda changes require new skill sets (PwC, 2007). This is important due to the flux of policy and curriculum changes in post compulsory education.

In a comprehensive review of empirical quantitative evidence from 1980 to 1995 Hallinger and Heck (1998) review the link between leadership and student achievement. They conclude that leadership does have an effect on student achievement but that although measurable, it is often indirect but statistically significant (for example, indirect influence includes defining a vision). However in this review they note how evidence is not always supportive of this claim and that particularly in the United States of America and UK consistent empirical studies have been hampered by definition and methodological differences in study approaches making comparisons between study findings difficult (*ibid*; Hallinger and Leithwood, 1994).

Evidence from an independent study by PwC (2007) noted how secondary heads have not implemented the learning provider partnerships between schools and stakeholders such as businesses; this evidence agrees with the literature review on vocational education and competition between providers. Lewis and Murphy (2008) pick up on this point to argue that leadership of this form would go beyond traditional school leadership. Leaders require complex negotiation, networking, strategy and public representation skills; in order to grasp the local economic context and regional employment market before they decide how to best meet the needs of students', society and employers.

Evidence from Chapman *et al.*, (2009a) using qualitative empirical evidence from a range of stakeholders from each school and comparative document analysis across multiple types of school agrees with the above indicating that leadership outside of their traditional boundary now has to be sought with stakeholders outside of

schools. This changes organisational conditions, to build structures and cultures for collaboration and development (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008). However they dispute that these partnerships have not been implemented, they argue that schools are collaborating with partners to enhance education. Chapman *et al.*, go on to emphasise that collaboration and a clear vision for this improves outcomes for students and that developing skills in this area is necessary. The differences of findings by Chapman *et al.*, may be due to a small sample of twelve revisited schools or the short time between the first and follow up study which is not very longitudinal or that Chapman *et al.*, aimed for validity through triangulation of data but PwC (2007) was a much larger study of 50 schools and a mixed methods approach and Lewis and Murphy (2008) is a review study without any new empirical data. The best collaborations for improving student outcomes focuses on collaboration for departmental and classroom level (*ibid*).

2.6 Conclusion

In the literature review I have outlined how the aims of education have been linked with economic success from very early in government policy. A definition of VET was presented and this showed a continuum between training for industry and academic courses with work experience components. The history of VET in the UK was presented detailing how a range of courses have been introduced over the past two decades but that there is an overwhelming negative value stance towards the success of VET. Issues of students' progression to HE and employment were then outlined. Criticisms in the literature were then presented to challenge the relationship between VET and economic success due to social supply causes, including low understanding, low motivation, socio-economic and differences within cultural capital. Demand causes of problems with VET were presented as a complex demand for skills requiring local partnerships, no structural changes to policy. I highlighted where the literature was contradictory concerning changes in firms' strategies and the extent to which high skills were demanded of students by employers on entry to the workplace.

Although some positives surrounding motivation and relationships were mentioned in the literature, the overwhelming evidence was negative towards the effectiveness of VET teaching, learning and assessment. Final reasons limiting the effectiveness of VET concerned constraints on teaching, problems with assessment application to the real world due to academic dominance in some courses and weak curriculum relevance to the economy.

The review of leadership literature highlighted how policy implementations decisions can be constrained by government policy and leaders' own views on educational priorities. How leadership can have a positive influence on learning outcomes when leaders are responsive to local contexts, have a strong vision for effective VET relevant to progression to higher education and employment, focus on development and have structures and an environment to support teaching, learning and assessment. Increasingly this is involving internal and external stakeholders and this may require leaders gaining new leadership skills.

Many of the articles that I have reviewed include a small sample and some were not longitudinal, however, overall this is mitigated by the number of case studies reviewed which include all vocational level courses, a wide range of student and institution types, from a wide range of backgrounds, over a large time frame, with some longitudinal studies and from different parts of the UK and internationally over two decades. The findings together broadly corroborate with each other (and where they do not this has been explained and evaluated) this supports a strong case for each of the areas presented in the conceptual framework, and of the literature review being valid.

Chapter 3

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework below details how the main areas in my literature relate to each other (see figure 3.1). The associated authors are presented in the numbered tables below (see table 3.1 and 3.2).

This figure demonstrates how this study can highlight how students' progression to employment and HE depends on leaders' views on government policy, leaders' decisions in school surrounding teaching, learning and assessment alongside employer needs which are guided by international competitive forces for a competitive workforce. Thus the research question is exploring leaders' views on the influence of applied A levels and vocational education on preparation for progression to higher education and employment, in the context of an inner city London school. This will take into account leaders' views regarding VET teaching, learning and assessment; government policy, employer demands and international competitiveness.



Figure 3.1: Vocational Education and Training Conceptual Framework

Table 3.1: Research areas and associated authors

1 Teaching, Learning & Assessment	2 Policy	3 International Competitiveness
Abbott, 1997	Abbott, 1997	Allen, 2007
Allen, 2007	Allen, 2007	Atkins, 2005
Atkins, 2005	Ashton and Sung, 2006	Bathmaker, 2005
Bathmaker, 2005	Aynsley and Crossouard, 2010	Bradley and Taylor, 1996
Bloomer, 1998	Bathmaker, 2005	Brown and Keep, 1999
Bottery, 1999	Bottery, 1999	Castells and Hall, 1994
Brown and Keep, 1999	Carter, 2009	Castells, 1988
Carter, 2009	Coffield, 1998	Coates, 2010
Ecclestone, 2006	DCSF, 2008	DfEE, 2000
Field <i>et al.</i> , 2009	Ecclestone, 2006	Ecclestone, 2006
Flynn, 2007	Field <i>et al.</i> , 2009	Hayward and Fernandez, 2004
	Finlay <i>et al.</i> , 2007	Huddleston and Oh, 2004
	Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995	Keep and Mayhew, 1998
	Hayward and Fernandez, 2004	Keep, 1999
	Hodgson and Spours, 2004; 2007	Keep, 2005a; b
	Hyland, 2002	Leitch, 2006
	Johnson, 2004	Lumby and Wilson, 2003
	Jordan, 1998	Westhead, 1997
	Keep, 1999	Young, 1993
	Kelly, 2009	
	Leitch, 2006	
	Lumby and Wilson, 2003	
	Maguire, 2002	
	Mason, 2004	
	OECD, 2001	
	West and Steedman, 2003	
	Wilson and Briscoe, 2002	

Table 3.2: Research areas and associated authors

4 & 6 Employer Demands	5 Progression to HE	7 Leadership
Abbott, 1997	Allen, 1997	Chapman <i>et al.</i> , 2009a; b
Atkins, 2005	Aynsley and Crossouard, 2010	Day <i>et al.</i> , 2007
Bathmaker, 2005	Bailey and Bekhradnia, 2008	Flynn, 2007
Brown and Keep, 1999	Ball and Vincent, 1998	Goffee and Jones, 2000
Conlon, 2005	Ball <i>et al.</i> , 1999	Hallinger and Heck, 1998
Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995	Bathmaker, 2005	Hallinger and Leithwood, 1994
Huddleston and Oh, 2004	Bloomer, 1999	Humphreys and Hoque, 2007
Keep 2005a; b	Byrom, 2009	Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008
Keep and Mayhew, 1998	Descy and Tessaring, 2005	Leithwood <i>et al.</i> , 2006
Leitch, 2008	Ecclestone, 2006	Lewis and Murphy, 2008
Lloyd, 1999	Finlay <i>et al.</i> , 2007	Matthews, 2009
LSEB, 2007	Foskett <i>et al.</i> , 2007	McKinsey and Company, 2007
Maguire, 1998; 2002	Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995	PwC, 2007
Maguire and Maguire, 1997	Hayward, 2008	Robinson, 2006
OECD, 1983	Hayward <i>et al.</i> , 2008	Robinson <i>et al.</i> , 2008
Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004	Hodgson and Spours, 2007; 2010	Southworth, 2004
	Keep, 2005a; b	
	Keep and Mayhew, 1988	
	Otero, 2007	
	Pring <i>et al.</i> , 2009	
	West and Steedman, 2003	
	Williams, 1999	

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This research is based on an a social constructivist viewpoint of reality, as outlined by Sikes (2004) assuming that reality is pluralist and created using social interaction between individuals (Giddens, 1984); qualitative data can be used to interpret the subjective meaning of social interactions (Foskett *et al.*, 2005). This study is an instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) which Bassey describes as “an empirical enquiry within a boundary of space and time in order to inform” (1999, p. 22). The case study provides detailed data (Yin, 2003) that allows for exploration of the complex issues of leaders' views on creating VET that allows for students to progress to higher education and employment. This study is not designed to allow for generalisation from the case study to other organisations.

Applied A levels and key stage five vocational courses are taken at sixth form/further education colleges and are for students who have completed level two GCSEs or equivalent. See appendix A for an overview of the structure of England's education.

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Research question

The research question has been constructed from the literature review and conceptual framework (see page 24). The research question is, exploring leaders' views on the influence of VET, such as applied A levels and key stage five vocational courses on preparation for students' progression to higher education and employment in the context of an inner city London school.

4.2.2 Population and sample group

In this study the population of leaders are all of the leaders listed on the school's staff list, who as leaders have responsibility, as listed in the staff list for part of the school's vocational education department, in this case it includes the subjects: Business Studies; Health and Social Care; Hospitality and Catering and Travel and Tourism. Thus, the sample group is the whole population of seven leaders.

Reliability is difficult to achieve in qualitative studies (Merriam, 2002) thus I outline in detail how the study was carried out. The methods used in this research were qualitative interviews and a focus group. There are seven vocational education leaders in the school and as such I interviewed the whole population without the need for sampling for the interviews. However, whilst in school carrying out the study the sample became an opportunity sample based on the leaders who were available at the time to become involved in the focus group. Thus the sample may be unrepresentative of the population due to representation only from business leaders. However the leaders involved in the focus group contained a mix of new leaders and experienced leaders with many years teaching and industrial experience. Bias may also be due to possible self-selection to please the researcher or because they are interested in the research (Yin, 2003; Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

I had previously worked at the school for two years, full time, and as such the leaders were overtly aware of my research interest in VET. The leaders were initially contacted by electronic mail (see appendix D) because this was the most efficient

method to contact the busy leaders. Initially seven leaders showed an interest in taking part in the study. I then telephoned the leaders to discuss practicalities and reiterate the study details (see appendix E).

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Interview method

The interviews were all standardised and open ended (Cohen *et al.*, 2007) with pre-determined question sequence and wording (see appendix F) to help in analysis comparisons between the participants (*ibid*). Open ended responses allowed for in-depth and unexpected learning to take place (Stake, 1994). The interviews all had a duration of fifty minutes and were held in a private location of the participants choosing and recorded using a laptop computer with the participant's permission to enable for accurate transcription. One leader had examples of assessments used in their subject which has enabled document analysis to validate their interview transcription (Leader 6).

All of the vocational leaders in the school were interviewed over one week. The leaders included five heads of department (leaders 1; 2; 5; 6 and 7), and two directors of curriculum areas (Leaders 3 and 4). The leaders school experience ranged from one year to over thirty years. The more experienced leaders had a range of experience from teaching various different academic and vocational courses through their careers (Leaders 3 and 4). Even the less experienced leaders had taught a number of courses due to the introduction of new courses into the school (Leader 1). Three leaders had business experience (Leaders 3; 4 and 7), one leader (7) had considerable industry experience outside of education before they started their leadership career in teaching, this has allowed for an interesting insight into business recruitment practices relating to vocational assessment. There was no gender bias in the participants interviewed.

4.3.2 Focus group discussion method

With the participants permission the group's conversations were recorded with table top recorders to enable transcription (Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Silverman, 2008).

The aim of using a focus group as well as interviews is to allow for discussion and understanding to develop between the leaders that may not exist in isolation (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). However, I need to be cautious of groupthink where participants may agree to please the researcher and not air their actual views. Internal validity is strengthened using triangulation of the interview transcripts, focus group card sort activities and focus group transcripts in order for similarities and differences in the data to be noticed (see appendix H). Similarities indicate strength (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2003; Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

4.3.3 Focus group card sort exercise method

The focus group was held with three groups of leaders (from the business department which included experienced leaders, one of which had extensive industrial experience (Leader 7), and one leader's first year (Leader 1), thus a range of experience was included in the focus group) in a private room that none of the leaders taught in for impartiality. The focus group brought the leaders together to discuss relevant issues to them using stimulus material provided by the researcher (see appendix G) in order to stimulate dialogue (Hart, 2008, Silverman, 2008).

During the focus group the leaders were split up into groups which would have ideally contained members from each subject in the vocational faculty. In reality an opportunity sample including leaders only from the business department were available, this means that the focus group data is biased towards this.

Leaders took part in three ten minute activities involving cards that contained the skills identified by CIHE in a survey of 233 employers as important for employment but where skill gaps existed (CIHE, 2008). The leaders were randomly assigned to 3 groups. Random allocation was carried out by placing drawing names from a hat. During the first activity the leaders were asked to write on the cards how each of the

listed skills were taught, secondly, they were asked to repeat the exercise but this time in terms of assessment. Finally, the leaders were asked to rank the skills that the leaders considered to be most important to students progression to employment or HE and to note down why (for reasoning to be captured, Sikes, 2004).

4.4 Analysis

An interpretive strategy for data analysis was undertaken. This enabled theory to be built from the data, making sense of the social situation investigated. This enabled meaning to be constructed through description, interpretation and explanation (Hatch, 2002). The data interpretation can then be compared to the conceptual framework.

4.4.1 Analysis of interview and focus group transcriptions

The method of analysis followed that of Cohen *et al.*, (2007) and Silverman (2008) (see appendix H). The analysis of the data was complex because there is no single way to analyse the data (Yin, 2003). For both the interview recordings and focus group discussion recordings the audio tapes were transcribed by the researcher with the aid of Express Scribe transcription software. Transcription summaries were emailed to participants to check that they agreed with the data as an internal validity check (Yin, 2003). No leaders responded requesting any changes.

To analyse the interview transcripts first key messages were highlighted in the transcripts. Secondly key themes were noted for each highlighted passage. The highlighted passages were then categorised (see appendix H) into the coded meaning groups (Watling and James, 2007) and the frequency of each group noted (producing quantitative data from content analysis, see appendix H). These groups were then linked back to the conceptual framework and literature review (Yin, 2003), see appendix I for the links between the conceptual framework, methods, analysis and data source, this has been included so that readers can trace conclusions (Bassey, 1998; 2001; Yin, 2003).

4.4.2 Analysis of focus group card sort exercises

The analysis of the focus groups was complex due to the nature of the unstructured focus group activities making comparison between groups within the focus group difficult (Sikes, 2004; Hart, 2008). Analysis of the first activity (see appendix J for the grid) compared the number of teaching and assessment opportunities per group for the first and second activity. Secondly, the types of teaching and assessment were compiled and compared across groups.

The third skill ranking exercise used place order analysis, comparing each group and the qualitative reasons for these decisions. The skills that were identified as being most important for progression were compared to the results of the first and second activity to see if the data was consistent (see appendix I); for example that the skill noted as most important was included in lessons and assessed.

In appendix H, the frequency of the highlighted codes was summed for the interviews and focus group transcripts. This triangulation showed that the interview and focus group evidence matched, as the order of codes importance did not change significantly, strengthening the internal validity of this study. This suggests that group think did not influence the leaders' responses during the focus group. The coding for curriculum structure rose a of places but this reflects how leaders emphasised its importance rather presenting conflicting evidence.

4.5 Ethics

This study followed the British Educational Research Association's Revised Guidelines (2004) as not to harm researchers or participants; and I conducted the study as I would like it to be done to me (Sikes, 2004).

All participants gave informed opt-in written consent prior to the study commencing (see appendix K), which was copied and returned to the participant. The aims of the study were clearly explained to participants verbally prior to their interview and focus groups and in written form (see appendices D and E) so that the aims were clear (Sikes, 2004).

Participants could withdraw and remove their data at any stage. They were not captive because I do not work for the school anymore (Sikes, 2004). Data was kept anonymous and not linked with their identity but a reference number and was locked in a filing cabinet or password and firewall protected computer to whom only the research had access. Electronic data was backed up and encrypted. After the research has been submitted all the data files will be deleted or shredded.

Participants were debriefed on an individual basis after each interview and focus group and the results are to be disseminated as a summary emailed to the participants for wide, low cost distribution and all participants will be invited to a presentation of findings with the aim of improving research use by practitioners as an opportunity for professional development and further reflection (Tripp, 1985; Levin, 2004; Mulford, 2005).

Chapter 5

Findings and Interpretation

The findings of the research present the current, snapshot findings of leaders' views on vocational education in preparing students for progression to HE and employment; in the case study school.

5.1 Vocational context of the school

A theme from the interview transcripts was that traditionally at the school the vocational education faculty has provided access for weaker students (who have not done well in high stakes academic exams) to access applied learning and further their practical skills. This was indicated best by an experienced leader at the school who said that VET “provides access to weaker students, although VET shouldn't be perceived as a course for weaker students in this school over the years it has attracted students such students” (Leader 4, 2011, lines 9-10).

The school has a large number of Bangladeshi students due to its location and this creates problems for the female students on hospitality courses. In two interviews leaders states that the students' families are not supportive of females following a hospitality career.

“The parents of our students don't see it [catering] as an important subject. We

have some really talented students but... we have got a big battle as they are not allowed to further it [their talents." (Leader 3, 2011, lines 114-116).

"In the local community it [catering] does not have a brilliant name because of the restaurants that some families run, it is male orientated business, and it is not something that they want their daughters to be doing" (Leader 6, 2011, lines 178-179).

The issue is further complicated as a leader of hospitality stated that because a restaurant in the local community, which was ran by a female role model, was closed down due to pressure from local male business owners, so there is pressure on students to follow alternative career routes even though the school is a specialist in this area according to two of the leader's interviews.

How closely traditional vocational education (practical skill preparation courses) prepare students for employment was questioned, especially in the context of London. A leader with industry experience spoke, during their interview, of how the economy has matured and as such jobs are becoming increasingly service based skills. The leader said "there are many students that [sic] I have taught who I would have been happy to employ in my business roles because they have the application, attitude, organisational skills and motivation to get on" (Leader 7, 2011, lines 90-93).

There has also been an increasing number of entry options into traditional careers, such as accounting through apprenticeships which could help to raise the status and motivation of students on vocational courses. This is in a time of high fees for university study where many students face annual degree fees increases and thus an employment based route which offers training, income and experience to achieve the same employment positions may become more popular.

5.2 Leaders' views on government policy

The most experienced leaders claimed during their interviews that there has been no fundamental change in the courses since the 1970's and this supports the prediction

by Hodgson and Spours in 2010. One leader summed it up saying "there have been changes in the qualifications in terms of bureaucracy but the content has not changed... from the 1970's... just the qualifications have different names" (Leader 6, 2011, lines 467-469).

Within the confines of this political landscape learning centred leadership (Hallinger and Heck, 1998) was evident in leaders' decisions surrounding the VET curriculum, student recruitment, resource allocation and relationships with employers. Such as the use of CPD to improve learning, highlighted as important by Hallinger and Heck (1998) and Matthews (2009). The leaders spoke of how CPD was an important part of coping with the introduction of the diploma qualification. However, in all but one of the interview discussions about CPD the conversations led towards the use of CPD to improve exam performance; allowing students to meet exam criteria and allowing staff to focus on teaching for one exam board. This reflects the focus on exam performance and performance management, not learning, mentioned above by Bottery (1999).

5.3 Leaders' views on employers

The findings from the interviews strongly support the literature on learning provider partnerships (PwC, 2007). The work of Champan *et al.*, (2009a; 2009b) is supported in that the study found evidence of effective learning partnerships which could directly improve students learning of real world industry through the collaborations made and reducing the misunderstanding between admissions tutors and employers that can constrain progression. The literature is clear in this case; that leadership of this type requires stakeholder management beyond the normal school boundaries verifying the work of Lewis and Murphy (2008) and Chapman *et al.*, (2009a; 2009b) who emphasised how importance this would be, but also how complex it is.

There were many examples from leaders' responses of when students have been able to work with employers, many local and some international retail companies were included in interview and focus group discussions. This was especially the case

for the subjects where there is a requirement to allow for employer engagement, these experiences allow for students to gain a sense of practical reality.

A key message from the interview data was that departments whose leaders had set-up new courses, such as the diploma, in the first year expected that provision for the course would improve in future years as relationships grew. However the optimism of the leaders beginning to set-up the new stakeholders relationships who believed they would be maintained for future cohorts of students, was not shared by the more experience leaders. They emphasised in their interviews how difficult it was to maintain relationships. The reasons given for this were that within schools staff change jobs, get promoted and change schools; this is also reflected in industry. Secondly, that it takes a large amount of time to develop these links which creates time pressures, as highlighted below:

“It is extremely time consuming to set-up relationships with employers, every time individuals move you are back to square one, it is time consuming and you’ll do that if having spent the time links can be used in subsequent years. If this amount of time is required every year you just don’t have time” (Leader 7, 2011, lines 192-194).

Leaders felt, that there is a general lack of understanding by employers of the courses and skills that students develop on particular courses. This corroborates the extensive evidence on this by Young (1993); West and Steedman (2003); Little and Connor (2005) and Hodgson and Spours (2007) who state that employers do not understand the qualifications offered by schools.

Finally the issue of ideal verses the reality was highlighted, that employers often express a wish to be involved with the school at working parties and are in favour of the education cause but this motivation is not turned into a practical reality. A leader of the diploma qualifications exclaimed that “it’s back to the ideal verses the practical. Employers are all enthusiastic. . . then when it gets to them [the employers] actually doing things it becomes more problematic” (Leader 5, 2011, lines 176-178). A national department store chain expressed an interest in working with the school

but the school had to travel 100 miles to access one of its stores when the nearest store was four miles away!

Having key relationships with employers for learning was key in the school because the school did not have the commercial resources available to support commercially aware learning, guest speakers and visits to employers were used to fill this gap where possible. Relationships could be key in making the assessment and courses more realistic for students which Gulikers *et al.*, (2006; 2008) and Grainger *et al.*, (2007) state authenticity this as a key requirement of effective VET in the literature, currently this is not widespread and embedded across all the VET courses.

The evidence from the interviews agree with Hallinger and Heck (1998) and Lewis and Murphy (2008) who argue for the importance of decisions reflecting local context, it was clear that leaders were taking the local context into consideration in making decisions. For example, a leader was keen to improve the progression of hospitality students, but in the context of the Bangladeshi area, as we have seen, the parents were not supportive of this; however because A levels and University were the aspirational goals of the students, the introduction of a Level 3 course met the contextual needs of the situation by providing an A level, level course and demonstrating the value of the students skills to the local community to enhance progression. The leaders explained in the focus group discussion that if students' skills and qualities get known by employers who can then appreciate the value of the vocational and applied courses that they are doing so that they are more likely to employ them if this understanding exists.

5.4 Leaders' views on teaching, learning and assessment

All leaders spoke (during their interviews) of concern over the recruitment of students onto their courses, which only more senior leaders had any meaningful input into this process. One department spoke of how the students attainment was weaker this year than ever before and that students were placed on the course because they

had no other option and they did not choose the course; creating motivation and behaviour difficulties that were difficult to deal with which was compounded by some students finding the level of course difficult to cope with, as the head of catering alluded to:

“We don’t really get any say on who we get on the course. . . Unfortunately it is the weaker or badly behaved students who tend to get pushed towards us. . . A lot of them are not bright enough to do the written work” (Leader 3, 2011, Lines 46-49).

This evidence reflects the theory presented by Foskett *et al.*, (2007) who argues that students are not being offered correct progression routes of advice by schools who require student numbers for funding. The interview evidence supports this, advice given to students may not be explicit and students may be encouraged to enter a course at the school which is less suitable for them than one at a local colleges, but that this is not made clear because the college is in competition with the school; this is clearly at the expense of students learning and progression.

Leaders place students who have not achieved highly in academic qualifications onto vocational courses to raise value added scores and this devalues the vocational or applied qualifications which could provide real insight both applied and practical learning for employment progression. Leaders have removed the parts of the qualifications which are more practical and more closely linked to the real world because they were not required to be understood or demonstrated in assessments; which gave the teachers time to focus on boosting examination grades of students who were struggling to pass the course.

A leader with regional responsibility for diplomas, expressed their concern during their interview that some colleges recruitment processes meant that the curriculum was no different and that students also missed out on specialist learning in these institutions. They said “some colleges are taking the easy option, they only recruit students who already have the specialist [vocational] learning and so not offering diplomas in the way that they could most benefit students” (Leader 6, 2011, lines 170-172).

Here VET history can be seen to be reoccurring, Knight *et al.*, (1998) evidenced how the GNVQ had potential to provide valuable industry learning but, like the diploma here it was removed due to pressures on teachers (Ozga, 2000) such as those created by targets (Bottery, 1999).

The interview evidence was also mixed regarding course content and progression. Some leaders, particularly the ones with the least number of years of experience, believed that the diploma course was too specific for further academic study compared to broad academic subject. However the more experience leaders who also had more teaching experience pointed out the transferable skills in the diploma which are useful for employment. They highlighted in the focus group card sort task that the report writing and independent research skills; time management and working under pressure/to deadlines; the interest in subjects that case studies engender which can be used to decide if employment in a specific industry is suited to a student or for demonstrating passion for a subject at a university interview. One experienced leader who also had considerable industrial experience said at their interview that they would have been happy to employ the students because in their course they demonstrate application, attitude, motivation, reliability and initiative. The evidence highlights the important of transferable skills which is backed up by evidence provided by one leader which is a mark scheme which shows how thirty eight per cent of the marks are given for demonstrating transferable skills.

Despite their emphasised importance evidence from the focus group card sort activity one and two shows that transferable skills are not taught explicitly but activities are included to build informal skills as a by product to learning knowledge for written assessments. Analysis of the focus group data (see appendix I) showed that leaders try to ensure that there were a mix of transferable skills being practised over a scheme of work, balancing academic and transferable skills using teaching methods such as group tasks and presentations to develop communication skills which were deemed the most important skill for progression.

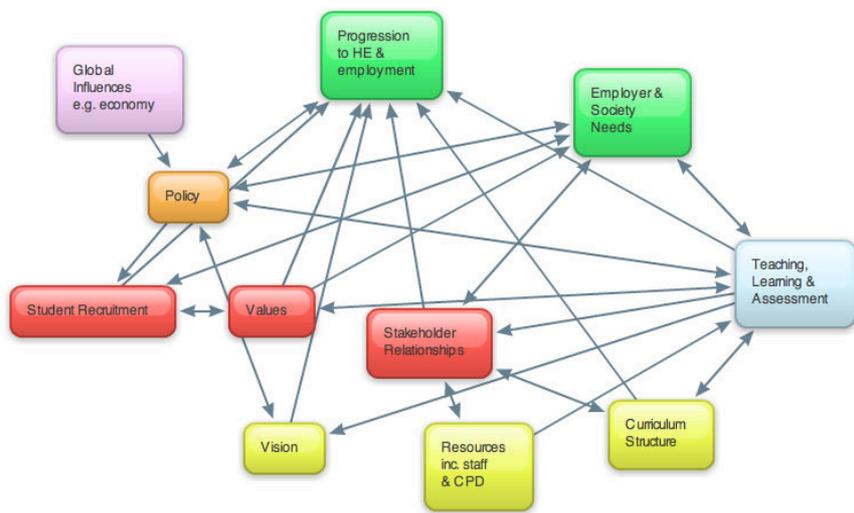


Figure 5.1: Revised Vocational Education and Leadership Framework

5.5 Revised conceptual framework

A revised conceptual framework (see figure 5.1) has been created taking into consideration the study's findings. It shows in more detail how leadership can impact on vocational education and progression for students, by demonstrating where the study data showed links between leadership and vocational education. The red boxes highlight the key aspects of leadership in vocational education, and the yellow boxes the aspects with secondary importance (as highlighted by the quantitative research coding, see appendix H).

5.6 Limitations

Sikes (2004) notes how qualitative studies can only present an interpretation of reality because the research decisions are constrained by biased value judgements of the researcher (Teddle, 2005), distorted memories, and relying on participants representing what they think truthfully (Yin, 2003). Thus, fuzzy generalisations contained in the findings highlight this point, that there is no objective certainty (Basse, 1981; 1998; 2001). As a practising vocational teacher and a previous

teacher of the case study school it may be that even though I have chosen the methods to try and avoid bias as much as possible, bias may still be prevalent in the results and the respondents may aim to please me in the evidence that they present (Yin, 2003; Cohen *et al.*, 2007), but not in a way that reflects their reality on VET or leadership. Context and narratives to give contextual detail for a data rich report (Tripp, 1985; Brooker and MacPherson, 1999; Cohen *et al.*, 2007) so readers can make their own interpretations of my findings and thus highlights any bias by me.

Due to time constraints it has not been possible to pilot the methods in this study before they were used. In future research this would be advisable.

Having time and resources to use a mixed methods approach, conducting both qualitative and quantitative research would have strengthened internal validity (Teddlie, 2005), for example, observing VET in practise could be compared to the data that the leaders present to assess if the data corroborates.

This study is an instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) and it is not designed to give external validity for generalisation beyond the chosen population (Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2003).

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Implications for Leaders

The findings suggest how important developing confidence and building transferable skills such as communication skills are important for progression to both HE and employment. The research showed that more inexperienced leaders did not value the transferable skills that students may develop in lessons as highly as more experienced teachers, especially the ones with industrial experience. As such leaders need to make explicit to leaders and teachers, during CPD, that these skills are important for students progression, alongside the examined content.

The findings highlighted that leaders focus on assessed performance at the expense of vocational and applied learning that would offer real world experience to students that may enhance their progression because they may have more awareness of the world of work and the transferable skills to compete in the employment market, which in London is increasingly service based. In order to ensure that students have possibilities to have vocational and applied experiences leaders need to have more curriculum flexibility, in the timetable. If senior leaders provided this it may allow for more external links with stakeholders to improve the vocational and applied aspects that are currently cut from some courses because of the constraints

on time and resources in managing relationships.

It is thus important for government to secure the policy on vocational education which the study found leaders to believe it to be unclear so that leaders can be clear about what they should be aiming towards in making decisions surrounding VET and allocate resources and create a clear vision within the school for staff to follow as appropriate. The uncertainty affects leaders and teachers motivation and long term development plans.

In order to help support stakeholder relationships senior leaders should allocate staff in order to maximise the effectiveness of stakeholder relationships. A permanent member of staff with the responsibility and time to create and manage stakeholder relationships would help to mitigate some of the issues created in managing these links. This would be most effective if they had commercial experience and knowledge of the curriculum students followed. They would have the time to manage the links without having to focus on the normal day-to-day teaching responsibilities. This could prove most effective in improving the learning and chances of progression for vocational and applied students in the school because it would enhance student learning and improve employers and admission tutors knowledge of the students' capabilities.

The findings demonstrated that progression advice was not always in the best interests of students and that their future progression routes were not always made explicit and this may negatively effect students' life chances by not being explicit about realistic course progression routes. This is especially important in the context of the school where research has shown that students from lower socio-economic groups, are often less likely to have access to quality advice about progression at home (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Bloomer, 1999) and they are more likely to be over represented at universities lower down the league tables (Hayward, 2008), and thus it is more important that the school is explicit and objective in giving this advice when students are choosing there GCSE/Level 2 choices and post sixteen choices to mitigate the lack of information that may add to the reasons as to why this is the case.

Wider stakeholder relationships would benefit students' progression. Universities, employers and schools should work together to realise the benefit of the courses that students are learning, for example to appreciate the transferable skills relevant to all, this may help to change employers and top universities perceptions of vocational and applied students to value what students can do. Like Evans *et al.*, (1997); Coffield (1998) and Leitch (2006) the findings of this study suggest that more relationships need to be established and they need to be effective. There is evidence of this occurring with the diploma qualifications but not with the top ranking universities.

Chapter 7

Further Research

Within the search criteria used for the literature review (see appendix B) that was completed before this study was carried out; no published literature on leadership of vocational education in schools was found. This study has provided some evidence into this area but it has highlighted how more research to understand the specifics of managing employer relationships, curriculum structure and allocation of resources in schools that offer VET is required. This would add to the evidence on learning partnerships (Parkes, 1991; Evans *et al.*, 1997; Coffield, 1998) as current research does not focus on schools specifically.

Chapter 8

Discussion

The findings of this study are drawn from the focus group and interview evidence which corroborate, suggesting internal validity (Yin, 2003). The evidence from this qualitative case study agrees with the conclusions found in the review of the literature, specifically in terms of: assessments that constrain learning, constraints of an inflexible curriculum structure, the difficulties in maintaining learning partnerships with employers and recruiting incompatible students for the VET courses. This study provided a case study which investigated leaders' views on applied A level and vocational courses at key stage five in preparation for students progression.

This study made a distinction between applied and vocational learning which few studies on VET do. It focused on vocational education in a school which is considered to be different to colleges (Ecclestone, 2006) and it focuses on the leadership of vocational education which was not found in the review of the literature within the search criteria used (see appendix B).

The study found that an over focus on assessment can be at the expense of vocational learning that would make the subjects different and useful for students' progression. This supports the literature review and conceptual framework (part 1). Smith *et al.*, (2001) argued that lessons can focus on preparing students for the assessments at the expense of learning for progression to HE and competitive employment (Brown and Keep, 1999; Mulford, 2005). Leaders expressed a vision

to have more vocational and applied aspects included in the course but these were constrained by a pressure to focus on examined performance. This reflects the work of Knight *et al.*, (1998) who state that the pressures on teachers meant the benefits of courses were constrained to examined performance. Although their study focused on GNVQs the interview evidence suggests it is also the case for the new diploma qualifications. This has been compounded by changes in VET policy which make it difficult for leaders to allocate resources because the future of VET is uncertain under the new coalition government. Furthermore, leaders are unwilling to invest time in creating vocational links with employer partners because they are concerned policy will be changed and this work cannot be re-used. Thus, making learning applied seems to be the opportunity cost of examined performance.

The insight of leadership of vocational education in the case study school suggests that effective leadership of vocational education and applied learning can give students maximum chances of progression to employment and/or higher education but this involves leaders using their views on educational priorities and vision to develop learning partnership with employers. In the literature review Maguire (2002) was used to explain how this is often difficult; although the interview evidence agrees with this it also provides examples of when relationships exist, they can help to improve progression to employment because the employers understand the qualifications and the skills and knowledge they give students and how this is relevant for their businesses.

Penultimately, this study also corroborates with the literature on how important leadership of student recruitment onto VET courses is. All leaders spoke of how they felt the qualifications were misused, so weaker students could gain qualifications to improve the school's league table position, rather than using VET to develop knowledge and skills in specific industries. This is written about extensively in the literature (see Gleeson and Hodkinson, 1995; Hodkinson, 1998; Williams, 1999; Conlon, 2005; Ecclestone, 2006).

This study also revealed how structuring the curriculum can support improved VET assessment and employer relationships, which would allow for vocational learn-

ing and applied learning to take place in the context of real employment. This curriculum structure must be backed up by staff and resources to effectively manage stakeholder relationships. McKinsey and Company (2007) stated how leaders are able to make concerning these decisions but this study did support the work of Southworth (2004). He stated that government policy may conflict with the educational priorities of leaders. This meant that the decisions leaders took over recruitment and curriculum structure were often to meet examined policy requirements and not to support learning skills and knowledge which would benefit students progression to HE and employment.

Further research on the practicalities of building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders to enhance vocational and applied teaching, learning and assessment within the constraints of a school system would be beneficial to help improve vocational education progression.

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Appendix A

Structure of education in England

Table A.1: Structure of education in England

Age (in years)	School Year	Curriculum Stage	School Type	
0-3	N/A	N/A	Play schools; playgroups; parent and toddler groups	
3	Nursery	Foundation	Primary School (and Middle schools in some areas ages 6-8)	
4	Reception			
5	Year 1	Key Stage 1		
6	Year 2			
7	Year 3	Key Stage 2		
8	Year 4			
9	Year 5			
10	Year 6			
11	Year 7	Key Stage 3		Secondary School
12	Year 8			
13	Year 9			
14	Year 10 *	Key Stage 4		
15	Year 11 *			
16	Year 12 * *	Key Stage 5	Sixth Form/Further Education College	
17	Year 13 * *			
18 upwards	N/A	See QCF Framework for Level 5 upwards	Further Education College/Universities	

Table adapted from Aim Higher (2010).

Currently Post 16 education in non-compulsory, from 2015 the leaving age will rise to 18, meaning all those aged up to 18 years old will need to be in some form of education or training (DCSF, 2008).

* During these years Level 2 examinations are taken such as GCSEs, BTECs.

* * During these years Level 3 examinations are traditionally taken such as GCEs and BTECs. Currently Post compulsory/post 16 education.

Table A.2: Qualifications and credit framework

Level	Qualification Examples	Traditional Curriculum Stage
Entry	Entry Level Certificates	Key Stage 3
1	GCSEs Grades D-G	Key Stage 4
2	GCSEs Grades A*-C; NVQ Level 2; Diploma Level 2	
3	GCE A2 Levels; Level 3 NVQs; Diploma Level 3	Key Stage 5
4	Level 4 BTEC Higher National Diploma	
5	Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diplomas; Foundation Degrees	N/A
6	Graduate Certificates; Bachelor Honours Degrees	
7	Level 7 Diplomas; Masters Degrees; Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas	
8	Doctorates	

Table adapted from Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2006).

Appendix B

Literature review search strategy log

The search engines below were searched and the number of relevant articles found are displayed next to the search terms in table B.1.

Table B.1: Literature review search results

Database	Search Terms	Result
Web of Knowledge	Vocational Education AND	
	- Routes	1
	- Pathways	4
	Vocational Progression AND	
	- to higher education	1
	- to employment	
	- higher education skills	2
	- employability skills	5
	16-19 Post Compulsory VET	
	- Vocational Skills	
	- Vocational Teaching and Assessment	
Vocational Education AND Leadership		
Post 16 education AND Leadership		
ERIC	Vocational Education AND	
	- Routes	2
	- Pathways	
	Vocational Progression AND	
	- to higher education	
	- to employment	2
	- higher education skills	
	- employability skills	
	16-19 Post Compulsory VET	
	- Vocational Skills	
	- Vocational Teaching and Assessment	
Vocational Education AND Leadership		
Post 16 education AND Leadership		
COPAC	Vocational Education AND	
	- Routes	
	- Pathways	
	Vocational Progression AND	5
	- to higher education	
	- to employment	
	- higher education skills	
	- employability skills	
	16-19 Post Compulsory VET	
	- Vocational Skills	
	- Vocational Teaching and Assessment	
Vocational Education AND Leadership		
Post 16 education AND Leadership		
British Educational Index	Vocational Education AND	
	- Routes	4
	- Pathways	8
	Vocational Progression AND	17
	- to higher education	4
	- to employment	16
	- higher education skills	9
	- employability skills	12
	16-19 Post Compulsory VET	
	65 Vocational Skills	
	- Vocational Teaching and Assessment	14
Vocational Education AND Leadership	12	
Post 16 education AND Leadership		

Appendix C

A history of VET in the UK from 1980-2010

Table C.1: History of VET in the UK

Period	VET Qualifications	Typical Authors
1986	NVQs	Bates (1998a; 1998b)
1992	Intermediate/Advanced GNVQs	Gleeson and Hodgkinson (1995); Ecclestone (2006); Hodkinson (1998); Maguire (2002); Bathmaker (2005)
1993	Foundation GNVQs	Allen (2007)
1994	Youth Training Scheme	Hodgson and Spours (2003; 2007)
1998	BTEC Nationals	Bathmaker (2001)
2000	Foundation & Advanced Modern Apprenticeships	Atkins (2005)
2001	National Traineeship	Hodgson and Spours (2003; 2007)
2002	Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education	Maguire (2002)
2003	Vocational Certificates of Education	Allen (2007)
2004	Applied A levels	Greatorex (2001); Allen (2007); Carter (2009)
2008	Diplomas	Hodgson and Spours (2004; 2010) Ecclestone (2006); Allen (2007); Hodgson and Spours (2004; 2007); Carter (2009); Laczik and White (2009)

Appendix D

Email study invitation

This email will be sent to the school email addresses of the study population.

Dear X,

You will remember that I have an interest in improving vocational education for students. As part of my MA I am carrying out research into this area.

I would be grateful if you would take part in a study to discuss your experience of key stage five vocational courses on preparation of students for progression to further study or employment in the context of your school. This is an exciting opportunity to begin to understand more about the opportunities and challenges of vocational education. I am interested in your perspectives of your own leadership and teaching of vocational courses. In the long term, our learning will contribute to future research, policy and practice.

Your participation is valuable and voluntary. This study is anonymous and your data will be treated in strict confidence. Your name will never be associated with your data in publication. A summary of the data collected and results will be disseminated to all participants. Please reply to this email to express interest and then I will contact you with further information. I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Kind Regards, Graham Garforth

Appendix E

Participant information sheet

Thank you for taking part in this study to discuss your experience of key stage five vocational courses on preparation of students for progression to further study or employment in the context of your school. This is an exciting opportunity to begin to understand more about the opportunities and challenges of vocational education. I am very interested in your perspectives of your own leadership and teaching of vocational courses. In the long term, our learning will contribute to future research, policy and practice. Your participation is valuable and voluntary. This study is anonymous and your data will be treated in strict confidence. Your name will never be associated with your data in publication. A summary of the data collected and results will be disseminated to all participants.

About You

Name:

School:

Gender: Male / Female (Please circle)

Years of teaching:

Years in your current school:

Position:

Subjects taught:

Brief history of work in vocational education (e.g. qualifications and subjects taught):

Contact email:

Contact telephone number:

I would be interested in attending a presentation of the study's findings: Yes or No

(Tick if yes)

Appendix F

Interview questions

Record the participants: Gender; Time in this school; Years of teaching service; Post; Subjects taught; Full time/part time; School number of students; Students Age; School Type; Ethnicity breakdown; Single sex school?

Please note: the letter is the question identifier and the number, the area of research from the conceptual framework (see page 25 for the authors).

What do you see as the purpose of vocational education? A1

What is the impact of policy on vocational education in this school? B2

Are there similarities of current courses with previous courses? C2

As a leader how do you mitigate any conflicts in policy with your views on educational priorities at a local level? D2

How do you ensure effective VET as a leader? (e.g. CPD, structures, vision/policies, environment/resources, engaging curriculum, monitor pedagogy/assessment, people management) E1

How do you work with stakeholders e.g. employers? F4

Are there any problems with stakeholder engagement, e.g. lack of skills to engage? G4

What do you see are the benefits in working with stakeholders? H4 (match courses

to real world work)

What does the course lend itself to after students complete? I5

What type of universities and employers do they wish to progress to? J5

How do admissions procedures help in recruitment of suitable students? K5

What skills do students practice? L4/5

How are students assessed? M1

How could the assessments have increased validity? N1 (barriers to making the course more vocational)

Does the course offer depth of understanding? O1

Is the learning broad or specialised? P1

Do students learn to follow a perspective in life? Q1

Do students care about the work they are doing? R1

Appendix G

Focus group instrument

ACTIVITY 1: How do you teach these skills and how often?

Communication skills

Team-working skills

Integrity

Intellectual ability

Confidence

Character/personality

Planning & organisational skills

Literacy (good writing skills)

Numeracy (good with numbers)

Analysis & decision-making skills

Commercial awareness

Passion

Relevant work experience

Personal development skills

ACTIVITY 2: How do you assess these skills and how often?

Communication skills

Team-working skills

Integrity
Intellectual ability
Confidence
Character/personality
Planning & organisational skills
Literacy (good writing skills)
Numeracy (good with numbers)
Analysis & decision-making skills
Commercial awareness
Passion
Relevant work experience
Personal development skills

ACTIVITY 3: Please rank which skills you believe are most important for student's progression to HE/employment & why you think that.

Communication skills
Team-working skills
Integrity
Intellectual ability
Confidence
Character/personality
Planning & organisational skills
Literacy (good writing skills)
Numeracy (good with numbers)
Analysis & decision-making skills
Commercial awareness
Passion
Relevant work experience
Personal development skills

Appendix H

Interview and focus group analysis tool

Stage 1: An overall summary are presented of the interview evidence.

Stage 2: The key points in the interview transcripts were highlighted.

Stage 3: The key points were coded, and the codes listed in table H.1.

Stage 4: The code frequencies across all the transcripts were totalled in table H.1. The table are presented in descending order by total frequency of code from the interview transcripts.

The above stages (1-4) were repeated for the focus group transcripts:

Stage 5: the frequency of the codes was summed for the interview and focus group transcriptions and the overall frequencies are below in table H.2. Where coded groups changed ranking as a result of comparing both interview and focus group transcriptions, these are highlighted in bold.

Stage 6: Where Leadership themes were related to vocational educational discussions table I.1 marks the link between the topics with a “Y”.

Stage 7: General themes were presented with individual differences highlighted.

Stage 8: An overall summary were presented of the transcription evidence.

Table H.1: Interview transcription codes

Participants/Code Description	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	All mention?	Mentioned by No. Leaders	Total Frequency Mentioned
Assessment	6	1	5	4	6	5	3	Y	7	30
External Relationships	5	2	7	2	3	6	2	Y	7	27
Resources	7	2	5	1	2	4	1	Y	7	22
Progression	2	1	3	1	6	4			6	17
Real world Experience			7	4	1	2			4	14
Aims	2	1	2		1	2	2	Y	4	14
CPD	1	1	1	1	2	2	1		6	8
Types of student	1	1	1	1	1	4	1		5	8
Staff			2	2	1	1	1		5	7
Professionalism			1	2		1	1		4	5
Traditional Progression Changes	1	2			1	1			4	5
Recruitment			4	1					2	5
Advice	2	2							2	4
Performance Management	1				1	1			3	3
Policy Making	1		1	1					3	3
Societies Needs	3								1	3
Curriculum Structure	1				1				2	2
Course Content				1					1	1

Table H.2: Focus group transcription codes

Participants/Code Description	1	2	3	All mention?	Mentioned by No. Leaders	Total Frequency Mentioned
Assessment	5	5	1	Y	3	11
External Relationships			1		1	1
Resources	1	1			2	2
Progression	1				1	1
Real world Experience	2	2	2	Y	3	6
Aims					0	0
CPD					0	0
Types of student					0	0
Staff					0	0
Professionalism					0	0
Traditional Progression Changes					0	0
Recruitment					0	0
Advice					0	0
Performance Management					0	0
Policy Making		1			1	1
Societies Needs					0	0
Curriculum Structure	1	2	3	Y	3	6
Course Content					0	0

Table H.3: Triangulation Analysis

Participants/Code Description	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	All mention?	Mentioned by No. Leaders	Total Frequency Mentioned
Assessment	6	1	5	4	6	5	3	Y	7	37
External Relationships	5	2	7	2	3	6	2	Y	7	28
Resources	7	2	5	1	2	4	1	Y	7	24
Real world Experience										
Progression	2	1	3	1	6	4			6	17
Aims	2	1	2	1	1	2		Y	4	14
CPD	1	1	1	2	2	2	1		6	8
Types of student	1	1	1	1	1	4	1		5	8
Curriculum Structure	1						1		2	8
Staff			2	2	1	1	1		5	7
Professionalism			1	2		1	1		4	5
Traditional Progression Changes	1	2			1	1			4	5
Recruitment			4	1					2	5
Advice	2	2							2	4
Policy Making	1			1	1				3	4
Performance Management	1					1	1		3	3
Societies Needs	3								1	3
Course Content							1		1	1

Appendix I

Chain of evidence record

This table shows the associated literature areas from the literature review alongside the topic code definitions from the focus group and interview analysis. The table shows where leadership is linked with vocational education in descending modal order.

Table I.1: Chain of evidence record

Vocational/Leadership Topic	Topic Number	Recruitment	Values	Relationships	Vision	Curriculum	Resources	Staffing	CPD
Progression	5,6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			
Assessment	1		Y	Y		Y	Y		
Societies Needs	3,4	Y	Y		Y				
Qualification Changes	1,2					Y	Y	Y	
Working with employers	4,6			Y		Y	Y		
Aim	1,2	Y	Y						
Types of student	1	Y					Y		
Teaching & Learning	1			Y			Y		
Policy	2				Y				

Appendix J

Focus group card exercise analysis

Stage 1: The frequency of skill assessment for each group is noted below, see table J.1. The total frequency of each skill was calculated. This analysis highlights to what extent vocational skills are practised, which is then built on below.

Stage 2: The forms of assessment for each skill were noted along with any comments from each group, see table J.2. This gives depth to the analysis of how relevant assessment methods are to real vocational environments.

Stage 3: The order of importance for the skills is indicated in table J.3, with 1 being the most important and 14 being the least important. This is noted for each group, the reasons are recorded and then compared.

Stage 4: The ranked importance grid was then compared to which skills are taught and assessed using the tables in stage 1 and 2 to make comparisons between the leaders intentions and the teaching and learning reality. The analysis of their discussion (carried out in the same way as the interview transcripts) was then used to

add depth of understanding.

* Refers to the focus group number.

Table J.1: Focus group analysis: stage 1

Skill	Group 1 Frequency	Group 2 Frequency	Group 3 Frequency
Communication	Most lessons	Occasionally	Group work
Team-working	Every 4		Group work
Integrity	Every lesson		Plagiarism
Intellectual ability	Most lessons		Extension activities
Confidence	Most lessons		Praise
Personality	Not that much		
Organisation	Most lessons	Once	Coursework
Literacy	Coursework monthly		Infrequently
Numeracy	Coursework		
Analysis	Monthly (A02/3)	Once/twice a term	
Commercial awareness	Once a week	Case studies	Business examples
Passion	Every lesson		
Work experience	None		
Personal Development	None		

Table J.2: Focus group analysis: stage 2

Skill	Assessment G1 *	Assessment G2	Assessment G3
Communication	Questions, peer discussion	Will praise	None
Team-working	Presentations		None
Integrity	Teacher-Student Relationships		N/A
Intellectual ability	Coursework		Frequently
Confidence	Daily		None
Personality	Daily		None
Organisation	Coursework		Comments
Literacy	Coursework monthly		Infrequently
Numeracy	None		None
Analysis	Coursework monthly		None
Commercial awareness	Coursework monthly		Applying context
Passion	Daily		None
Work experience	None		None
Personal Development	None		Once

Table J.3: Focus group analysis: stage 3

Skill	Place order G1*	Comments G1	Place order G2	Comments G2	Place order G3	Comments G3
Communication	2	Both	3	Employment	2 &4	Presentation Skills
Team-working		Employment		1		
Integrity		Both		3		
Intellectual ability		HE	1	HE		
Confidence		Employment	1	Employment	8	
Personality	5	Both	Both			
Organisation	1	Both	3			
Literacy		HE	4		5	Oracy
Numeracy		Both	4			
Analysis		HE	5		6	
Commercial awareness	3	Employment		7		
Passion		Both				
Work experience	4	Employment	Employment			
Personal Development		Both				

Appendix K

Participant consent form

Exploring leaders' views on the influence of key stage five vocational courses on preparation for progression in the context of an inner city London school.

Researcher: Graham Garforth

Supervisor: Dr. Sveta Mayer

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part. I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it. I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future. I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my data will remain confidential. I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interview and focus group. I understand that data will be stored electronically on a firewall and password protected computer and backup disk to which only the research has access. Hard copies and audiotapes will be stored in a locked office. This data will be deleted, erased and shredded once the study has been published. I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator, if I wish to

make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed: (Participant)

Print Name:

Date:

Contact Details:

Researcher: ggarforth@ioe.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. Sveta Mayer s.mayer@ioe.ac.uk

Research Ethics Coordinator: researchethics@ioe.ac.uk