

Skills competitions: a winning formula for enhancing the quality of vocational education?

by

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Abstract

The profile of UK involvement in skills competitions has increased since hosting Worldskills London 2011, and colleges of further education have been encouraged to engage with this initiative. It is seen as a means to enhance the quality of vocational education. However the use of skills competitions within further education is a relatively unexplored topic.

This thesis seeks to establish the merits of engaging in skills competitions and the requirements for further education colleges to consider in doing so effectively.

This study uses qualitative methodology based on data gathered from two case studies, each being a college of further education in the West Midlands. The case studies produced transcripts from 22 semi-structured interviews with staff employed at these colleges, and responses from 28 vocational teachers from the case study colleges to an on-line questionnaire.

The perspectives of the respondents are considered against themes emerging from a review of relevant literature on skills competitions, quality assurance, vocational teaching, change management, vocational identity and continuous professional development within further education. Following an analysis of the findings it is suggested that skills competitions can be used to enhance vocational education. This is enabled through embracing the “craft” of vocational teachers and their students, within a corporate approach to the introduction and use of skills competitions by colleges of further education. This approach is sustainable where colleges encourage the development of environments that are defined as “expansive”, but is less likely to sustain enhancements in vocational education where environments are seen as “restrictive”.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The current Coalition Government, like its predecessor Labour administration, recognises the importance of vocational skills through the resources allocated to fund further education courses and the engagement of students and employers in apprenticeships and other work based learning. Further education colleges are significant contributors to the provision of vocational learning in the UK. Every year colleges educate and train around 3.4 million people, of which approximately 850,000 are aged 16 to 18, and colleges provide 38% of the entrants to higher education. The total income of colleges in England in 2010 was £7.5 billion, with colleges employing 265,000 people, 140,000 of whom are teachers and lecturers (Association of Colleges 2010).

Vocational education has been the focus of numerous UK government reports, including The Foster Report, (2005); World Class Skills, (2007), and The Wolf Review (2011). These reports recognise the contribution of further education to this area, and the significance of acquiring vocational skills to the promotion of economic prosperity and social mobility. The effectiveness of the further education sector is a key ingredient in developing the capacity of the UK's workforce to enable the country to compete within the global economy. The Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills in the Labour government, in office until 2010, Lord Mandleson (2009) said:

“The better the [training] market reflects the skills needs of business and the expectations of learners, the clearer the benchmarks of quality and relevance for our further education colleges will be....we will reward colleges that respond, and cut back funding to courses that fail (page 3)”.

The use of skills competitions, in colleges of further education, as a means to enhance the quality of vocational education, is a recent initiative. Skills competitions are organised within further education colleges and evaluate the skills demonstrated by entrants against predetermined criteria reflecting key competencies of specific

“trades”. The competitions are organised at intramural, local, regional, national and international levels. There are skills competitions that aggregate to enable progression through varying stages for successful competitors, often determined by the vocational area and the age of the individual. The practical nature of the competitions provides opportunities for demonstration by those taking part to onlookers and subsequent recognition and exposure for the competitors.

Skills competitions represent a means to demonstrate improvements in performance against the criteria contained within the Common Inspection Framework, used to inspect colleges by Ofsted (2012). A positive inspection by Ofsted has many important consequences for a college, due to its influence on the students and staff within the organisation, reputation, competitiveness and the possible indirect reflection on the quality of vocational education in the UK. This study explores the experience of participating in skills competitions and addresses the following focus:

“Skills competitions in colleges: a winning formula for enhancing the quality of vocational education?”

The endorsement of this initiative in colleges of further education across the UK, to continue and extend commitment to competitions or to the introduction of skills competitions, may have leadership implications that this research will consider. The findings of this research may, or may not, support the use of skills competitions. The encouragement of the then Minister for Further Education for colleges to engage in this initiative does not compel them to become involved, however, the expectation for quality to rise within further education, as mentioned above, may be supported by this initiative. UK Skills, the element contained within Find a Future, the organisation responsible for co-ordinating skills competitions, understandably promote the benefits of skills competitions in improving the performance of vocational teachers, vocational students and providers of vocational education. The UK Skills website contains information entitled, “A unique contribution to Education and Skills”, within which they say:

“UK Skills is in a privileged position to act as a catalyst for positive change across the education and skills system in the UK. Well designed and delivered

skills competitions and awards drive up standards of performance by displaying the exceptional skills of well-trained competitors and of organisations which are committed to effective learning” (2011).

Whilst recognition of the importance of vocational education, of trades and craft, is illustrated by the history of investment made by government, encouraging skills competitions to improve quality in further education is particularly contemporary. The UK hosted the largest vocational skills competition Worldskills in London during October 2011. The, then, Minister for Further Education, Mr. John Hayes MP encouraged involvement by further education colleges and private training providers in Worldskills, believing that they would raise the aspiration of vocational students'. He says:

“I would like colleges and providers to make Worldskills 2011 a component of your promotion, curriculum and quality improvement strategies for the coming year” (2011).

The profile of skills competitions was promoted within colleges as a part of the UK preparations to host Worldskills in 2011. UK skills competitions attracted 4731 entrants in the academic year 2009/2010. This was an increase from 3416 in the previous year. Competitions took place in 43 vocational areas. The competitions in 2009/2010 produced a squad containing 86 students, from which the 43 members of Team UK were selected. The UK Team exceeded the 9 Worldskills medals won at the previous event in Calgary 2009, winning 13 medals in London in 2011, and being placed 5th in the medals table. UK Skills enlisted the support of nine college principals who are regional “Worldskills Champions”. There are “Champions” for each of the devolved nations and a “Champion” to promote equality and diversity in UK Skills competitions. As a “Champion” and a college principal, it is important when requiring colleagues to allocate resources to an initiative, to base advocacy on empirical evidence. This research may allow this or, conversely, may determine an alternative stance.

The then Minister for Further Education, Mr. John Hayes MP views, reported following a speech to the Royal Society of Arts (2010), have a resonance with those of Morris (1888). He said:

“..there is...the “certainty of movement of a master craftsman” and about the “dignity of labour-the satisfaction of a job well done... and passing skills from one generation to the other” (page 4).

However, the then Minister for Further Education, and the UK Skills organisation’s claims above, of the positive benefits of skills competition, appear to have an absence of an evidential base, and this acted as the catalyst for this research to be undertaken. The position I occupy allows empirical evidence relating to the use of skills competitions to be collected. Integral to this thesis is the recognition of the researcher’s position in the field. The relationship between “subject” and “object” presents challenges as the researcher is a Principal of a College of Further Education and a “Worldskills East Midlands Regional Champion”. Whilst this enables access for the research, it produces potential conflicts. However, in attempting to conduct the research, the awareness of this position, helps to ensure compliance with the conventions and requirements of academic research, as outlined by BERA (2004).

1.2 Thesis outline

This research considers the use of skills competitions as an initiative to enhance the quality of vocational education. The proposition of the research is that staff and students who engage in skills competitions may have positive views of their use within vocational education. However, competitions could impose additional demands on staff and students and may challenge their views of the experience of working and or learning within further education. In addition, leaders may need to consider the extent to which students and staff are aware of skills competitions, and how to incorporate the views of those who do not engage in competitions, or having engaged may not have been successful, into quality improvement strategies. The advocacy of the initiative by government to use skills competitions within quality improvement strategies within colleges, whilst appearing to offer a contribution to the range of approaches available, is untested and may have unconsidered organisational implications.

This research produces what de Vaus (2001) describes as, “theory building”. The incorporation of skills competition within quality improvement strategies is a theory

through which this, and subsequent research could build an empirical base to evidence their use. This thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. In what ways do skills competitions affect the practice of vocational teachers?
2. To what extent do skills competitions use the vocational identities of teachers within vocational education?
3. In what way do skills competitions contribute to the experience of students on vocational courses?
4. In what ways can an initiative such as skills competitions contribute to quality assurance processes in colleges of further education?
5. What approaches to change management processes appear to support or hinder the use of new initiatives such as skills competitions in enhancing the quality of vocational teaching?
6. Can a specific initiative such as skills competitions act as an effective form of continuous professional development for vocational teachers?

Three themes emerged from the findings of this research that address these six research questions. The themes relate to the perceptions of vocational teachers, and the implications for vocational students of the use of this initiative, and the need for a Corporate Approach for its use. Research questions 1 and 2 relate to the theme of vocational teachers; research question 3, to vocational students, and research questions 4, 5 and 6 to the use of a Corporate Approach.

The scope of this research is restricted to vocational education delivered within two case study colleges of general further education, and does not include private work based learning providers, school sixth forms, universities, land based or specialist colleges. Case study college A, referred to from now as College A, is a College of Further Education that has a history of engaging in skills competitions, and Case study college B, referred to from now as College B, a comparable organisation, has only recently begun to enter into competitions. The skills competitions referred to throughout this thesis are those organized by UK Skills that have local, regional and national heats and engage students and staff at different levels of the competitions.

The focus of the research is restricted to two vocational areas, construction and hairdressing and beauty therapy, although College A includes floristry within its hair and beauty therapy department. Each of the vocational areas has local, regional and national competitions that lead to Worldskills. The data discussed derives from twenty two interviews with staff members, ten in College A and twelve in College B. On-line questionnaires were completed by twenty eight members of staff, across the two Colleges and their responses provide quantifiable data included in the discussion of the findings chapter. This sample of staff provides sufficient breadth to compare the areas of research indicated in the six questions illustrated above. The intention was to investigate the perception of individual staff members within each College. The methods used purposive samples of staff employed at each of the Colleges. Survey Monkey software generated the electronic questionnaires, and the researcher conducted the interviews, transcribing the responses of interviewees from tape recordings. The Colleges were selected for logistical reasons, both being situated in the West Midlands, and due to their contrasting experience of the use of skills competitions.

The literature review is organised to reflect the core themes contained in the research questions and focuses on the use that an initiative such as skills competitions may have on quality improvement within further education colleges; vocational teachers' practice, experiences of their students, change management, vocational identity and the continuous professional development of vocational teachers.

1.3 The value of this research

The value of this research is that it investigates an area where little research exists. The history of competitions in many vocational skills is long and includes many successes. The first Skills Olympics were held in 1950 in Portugal with the purpose of raising the status and standards of vocations. In 1989 the Skills Olympics were held in Birmingham. The UK won only one gold medal, in hairdressing, and as a consequence the Department of Education established UK Skills to encourage and co-ordinate the UK effort. UK Skills was founded in 1990 with the aim of helping industry by promoting world class standards of vocational skills through

competitions. Worldskills is now a global organisation with UK Skills contributing through support provided by the UK Government via the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. Further education colleges have entered students into competition and hosted local, regional and national competitions. This research however, considers the use of skills competitions by colleges as an initiative to enhance the quality of vocational education, when there is little evidence to support this advocacy.

This work considers the perceptions of staff within colleges either supporting or not supporting the use of skills competitions as advocated by government. Where positive evidence exists, regarding the use of skills competitions on the quality performance of colleges, this could support an expansion or development of this initiative. Therefore, the audiences for this research are communities within government, Awarding Bodies, colleges of further education and their representative organisations. The findings from this research will be presented at conferences, to disseminate the information to the bodies outlined above, and to raise awareness of this research beyond these boundaries.

1.5 The structure of this thesis

Chapter 1 of this thesis has provided an introduction to this research. Chapter 2 is the literature review and has six sections, with each aligned to the research questions. Chapter 3 considers the design of the research, and is structured to show the philosophical approach that is the basis of this work, the methodology and research strategy adopted, along with the methods deployed to collect data, the analysis of the data and how it was interpreted. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the data from this research, chapter 5, a discussion of these findings, and chapter 6 is the conclusion of the thesis and its recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this research is to consider the use of skills competitions as an initiative to enhance the quality of vocational education. Although there is little research that has directly addressed this area, a range of literature is relevant to the implications of this initiative and supports this research. The structure of this review corresponds to the themes that emerged from the literature. These themes consider the perceptions of vocational teachers to the use of this initiative, the implications of skills competitions for vocational students, and how a corporate approach influences its adoption and potential sustainability. The six research questions act as sub-headings within Chapter 2 informing the most appropriate theme.

This literature review contains material obtained from a variety of sources. A wide range of leadership literature informed this work and provided sources from which further exploration of specific themes could be undertaken. Skills competitions were promoted extensively in colleges of further education during the academic year 2010 to 2011, due to the UK acting as host of Worldskills. Media interest in skills competitions has led to the production of a range of articles in education sections within newspapers, some of which are included within this literature review. The profile of the 2011 event has led to advocacy for skills competitions by the government, reflected in a range of communications including letters to further education colleges, media briefings and conference pronouncements. These communications have been a source of information for this literature review.

My professional role allows access to the communications from Ministers of State from within the Department of Education and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. Practitioner information is also available to me as a “Worldskills Regional Champion”. The network of “Champions” receives information from the organisation responsible for the co-ordination of skills competitions in the UK, Find a Future, and this information has informed the literature review. In addition access to research into skills competitions undertaken by the Skills Knowledge and Organisational

Performance Unit (SKOPE) of Oxford University has informed the literature review, as has research commissioned by the Worldskills Foundation.

The literature reviewed includes books and research studies based upon empirical research and scholarship. Although there is material from the United States, Finland and Australia contained within the review, there is a paucity of literature relating directly to skills competitions.

The principal means used to conduct this literature search was electronic searches of the materials accessible via the e library of the University of Birmingham. Internet software searched key words associated with the area of research such as skills competitions, vocational education, quality improvement, educational change and vocational identity, and, following support from the university library, the application of Boolean logic combined different concepts within the search for material for this research. Bibliographical databases, such as the British Education Index (BEI), the North American Education Index (ERIC) and the Australian (AEI), sourced relevant research articles and publications, along with electronic journal services such as SwetsWise. Websites of organisations significant to this research produced information, as did more general web sources, such as Google Scholar. Course materials supplemented information gathered from the electronic search along with publications housed in Birmingham University's Education library. The associated literature underpinning this research is arranged below in relation to each of the three themes and their associated research questions.

Vocational Teachers

2.2 Research question 1: In what ways do skills competitions affect the practices of vocational teachers?

2.2.1 Teachers as coaches

The literature reviewed considers the nature of the relationships that exist between vocational teachers and their students. These relationships are often built through a variety of the practices deployed by vocational teachers, one of which is acting as a coach for their vocational students. When considering the “partnership” between vocational teachers and vocational students, the empathy of vocational teachers towards their students influences the learning that takes place. Learning within vocational education is often beset by the problem illustrated by Pring et al (2009), cited by Lucas et al (2012) saying:

“A very real problem with vocational education is that the significance of practical learning, learning by doing, is not recognised. Learning by doing is different from doing theory and then applying it. To learn to do you need someone looking over your shoulder saying “no, it’s not quite like that, it’s like this”. That’s how a carpenter or bricklayer acquires a practical grasp of the standards expected.” (page 79).

The lack of recognition for the learning taking place within vocational education may create the tensions that exist between this form of education and academic education, and this is considered further below. In examining the promotion of excellence in vocational education the relationships between vocational teachers and their students are considered in the research undertaken by Hughes et al (2004). They consider the requirements necessary to customise a curriculum of excellence in skills development, believing:

“A mature relationship between teacher and learner, more akin to that of expert and novice, often underpins the development of excellence. Good relationships with external enthusiasts, who can be enlisted as “natural supporters”...will also support the development of excellence.” (page 2).

Berger (2003), cited by Lucas et al (2012), has explored how different pedagogical approaches may cultivate an “ethic of excellence” in schools in the United States of America. He recognises the value of “craftsmanship” and believes that positive peer pressure, built around a pride in “beautiful student work” can support a culture of excellence, and for students’ self-esteem to build through accomplishments. Berger (2003) cited by Lucas et al (2012) believes teachers should see their profession as “a calling” and should seek to constantly develop both their craft and their scholarship. He says:

“Students who see their work as a craft say of themselves: “I intend making this work activity part of myself. I am going to live it because while I am doing this work others identify me by it and I measure myself against it...Role modelling by vocational teachers is very important as are coaching and mentoring more generally. Watching, imitating, conversation and teaching and helping others are also examples of useful methods. Competing can also play a role when tied to an ethic of high levels of performance.” (page 51).

The concept of “craft” is recognised within vocational education, and is illustrated above in the part it plays in promoting high standards. Sennett (2008) defines “craftsmanship” by saying that it:

“...names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake...craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself.” (page 9).

The relationships that may develop between vocational teachers and their students often exist against a backcloth of prior experience for each participant. However, both are brought together by the vocational area that one teaches and the other studies. The vocational teacher and student may have passed through the education system experiencing, what Bowles and Gintis (1967) refer to as a “correspondence” between their “schooling” and the anticipated environment they will occupy within the workplace. For many vocational teachers and students their school experience, according to Bowles and Gintis (1967), will have “positioned them” for their roles through the practice of their teachers. Their experiences may reflect a lack of autonomy and high levels of coercion in preparation for their assumed work destination. The research of Bowles and Gintis (1967) agrees with that of Jephcote et al (2007), who illustrate below how vocational teachers interpret the experience of students entering into further education negatively in relation to the time they have spent at school. The prior experience of students influences the pre-disposition of vocational teachers towards vocational students and informs the practices they deploy. The response of vocational tutors to their students is significant for each of the participants in the relationship and has implications particularly for vocational students. Hodgson et al (2007) are cited by Edwards et al (2007) who:

“...demonstrate the importance of the tutor-learner relationship, especially for learners whose previous experience of education had been poor. From the learners perspective...a committed and motivated tutor can restore their self-respect, and help learners achieve and grow, in learning and in confidence. If those tutors struggle to cope with the change, become weary and

demotivated, or leave the sector, the ultimate losers will be the learners.”
(page 158).

Practices by which vocational teachers can restore the self-respect and confidence of vocational students may sustain both the teacher and student. The practice of vocational teachers often relies on “one to one” relationships with students and the relevance of the craft that is being passed from one to the other is highlighted above by Sennett (2008), while not necessarily given value as a method of learning, as Pring et al (2009) point out. Sennett (2008) believes that acquiring craft knowledge is reflected in a relationship between an individual and a craft that he likens to that of parenting. In order to raise a child with the requisite skills for life, Sennett (2008) believes the characteristics of parents are reflected in skills that become honed over time through practice and may enable those possessing them to replicate these behaviours in their dealings with others. Honing vocational skills takes place within vocational education through the teaching methods used that could be interpreted as replicating the ways of working in many “crafts” that are the subject of college courses.

While vocational teachers may have preconceptions of vocational students they may find similarities between their experiences over time. The concept of “homophily” is used by Watts (1999) cited by Rhodes (2012) and refers to “...a tendency to associate with people like yourself” (page 440). The relationships that develop between vocational teachers and students may have a basis in an implied empathy that is derived from the teachers’ experiences from their formal education, and the preference vocational students indicate for the practices within vocational education. Coffield et al (2007) illustrate how:

“Learners, for example, valued an experience of learning that was different from that which they had had at school, in which there was a relaxed and safe atmosphere, a culture of mutual respect, more one-to-one attention and (for younger learners in particular) a relationship in which students were treated as adults. Similarly, the practitioners’ accounts suggest that their educational relationship with learners is the cornerstone of success for many learners who had previously failed at school.” (page 739).

Frykholm and Nitzler (1993) believe the role of a vocational teacher is often characterised by their transmitting dispositions and attitudes more so than providing

knowledge and skills for specific tasks. They see the role as being one that leads the socialisation of the learner to their vocation as opposed to simply steering an individual towards a qualification. The use of skills competitions to enable this socialisation may be a way in which the practice of vocational teachers could be influenced. Parallels between sporting competitions and skills competitions are echoed by including coaching as an approach applicable to either. The term skill is often defined within sports by writers such as Knapp (1963) as:

“...the learned ability to bring about pre-determined results with maximum certainty; often with minimum outlay of time or energy or both”. (page 4).

The collective noun “skills” is appropriate for this research, as the competitions relate to the “...aptitudes and abilities appropriate for a specific job” (Chambers 2006).

Worldskills International defines the areas for skills competitions as:

“...a closely related cluster of technical and vocational activities that it is reasonable to expect a well-trained young person to demonstrate excellence in.” (page 10).

Colleges where skills competitions are a part of their approach to improving the quality of vocational education make provisions to develop the coaching skills of their staff. The guidance produced by LSIS (2012) shows how:

“Some colleges support staff to obtain coaching qualifications and use their coaching skills in a cross-college capacity to support competitions in different specialisms.” (page 13).

The support provided for vocational teachers to develop coaching skills promotes the practical learning advocated by Pring et al (2009), and is reflective of the constructivist interpretation of learning discussed within the next sub-heading.

2.2.2 Applied Learning

The application of skills competitions to vocational teaching is an area that is under researched however their application is one that can be interpreted within existing research. The way in which teachers think and model the minds of learners influences their approaches to their vocational practice. Bruner (1996) argues that teachers have four dominant models of learners’ minds. He believes learners are

seen as “imitators”, “recipients”, “collaborative thinkers” or “knowledgeable”. Learning is acquired through imitating a more experienced person, as is demonstrated in vocational education lessons in many further education colleges; or through didactic teaching, through which learning is imparted “to” students “by” teachers, or where learners think and reflect to modify their understanding or practice, or by accommodating their personal, or prior knowledge, with knowledge accumulated over time by “experts”.

The opportunities skills competitions may present for vocational teachers can be reflected in the research undertaken in schools by Williams and Sheridan (2010) cited in Lucas et al (2012). They point out how:

“Constructive competitions can be defined as a social and cultural phenomenon that can enhance learner’s abilities, develops their ambitions and encourages their learning. It can motivate individuals to stretch beyond their own expected abilities.” (page 81).

For vocational teachers to adapt their practice to accommodate the use of skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education requires an evaluation of a range of complex variables, some of which are considered by this thesis. There are a number of operational issues that are also of concern for vocational teachers. One area for vocational teachers to consider is the extent to which skills competitions are seen as additional, or as a “bolt on”, as opposed to them being embedded in the day to day practice of vocational teachers. Aligning the assessment criteria of qualifications with those for skills competitions could reduce perceptions of competitions being “bolted on” and enhance them being perceived as adding value to the process of teaching, learning and assessment. Where the requirements of skills competitions are embedded into the day to day activities of vocational teachers they may provide evidence to address the needs of the current Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (2012). This Framework requires that:

“Staff initially assess learners’ starting points and monitor their progress, set challenging tasks, and build on and extend learning for all learners”. (page 6).

The guidance produced by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) (2012) is aimed at promoting the use of skills competitions within further education

colleges. They recognise the tangential relationship between skills competitions and the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework, but provide practical illustrations of how skills competitions could be used by vocational teachers to support teaching, learning and assessment though their inclusion in student induction providing evidence for inspectors.

An area in which skills competitions may be applied by vocational teachers is the potential they afford to provide feedback to learners following their engaging in an element of competition. Rhodes and Brundrett, cited in Bush et al (2010) believe:

“...good teaching and establishing that achievement is supported by good planning, resources, written and verbal feedback and approaches to behaviour management...enable access to learning and support for learner confidence and self-esteem”. (page 163).

Their inclusion of the use of feedback within the holistic learning experience is supported by other writers such as Coffield (2008), who illustrates how feedback enables the relationship between learners and their tutors to develop and is an iterative process that acts to the benefit of both. He says:

“So learners in their turn act on the feedback tutors provide; and then tutors need to act on the responses the learners make to the initial feedback and so on upward. Again, I use the metaphor of the *virtuous spiral* to capture the notion of steady improvement in the quality of the professional relationship between tutor and learners, as both respond to the positive suggestions and reactions of the other in order to make a success of the joint task of teaching and learning.” (page 36).

Coffield (2008) also cites Powell (2008) who suggests the incorporation of targets for students to reach as a part of the feedback provided by tutors. Smeaton et al (2002) observed catering students, as a part of their research, being prepared for skills competition entry through a series of assessments in which criteria and targets were set aimed at moving them to beyond the competence required by their formal qualification. They believed:

“The whole selection and assessment process, culminating in the competitions, proved to be strongly motivating. The students remained focused and attentive in all their classes. The attendance and retention rates were 100%. There was a sense of competition between the students as each one tried to be the best. This raised the quality of their work and improved their attitudes towards their work.” (page 26).

Through their engagement with skills competition learners may be exposed to feedback from their vocational teachers that they would not otherwise experience. Hughes et al (2004) point out:

“Competitions provide experience of working under pressure and within set constraints. Maximising this experience depends on effective feedback and debriefing on performance.” (page 1).

The use of feedback develops the potential of the vocational teacher-student relationship. Bruner (1996) illustrates how through “collaboration” teachers may model the minds of learners and enhance the “partnership” that supports learning, as identified by Silcock and Brundrett (2006) cited by Rhodes and Brundrett, in Bush et al (2010). Sfard (1998) compares what she interprets as two metaphors for learning. She believes that learning can be viewed as a process of “acquisition” or “participation” and the table below illustrates how the different metaphors influence component parts of learning.

Table 2a

Two metaphors compared

	Acquisition	Participation
Goal	Individual enrichment	Community building
Learning	Acquiring facts and skills	Becoming a participant
Student	Recipient, customer	Apprentice, peripheral participant
Teacher	Deliverer, provider	Expert, dialogue partner
Knowledge	Possession, commodity	Aspect of practice
Knowing	Having, possessing	Belonging, participating

Sfard (1998)

The table illustrating the comparison provided by Sfard (1998) reflects two theories of learning, with the “acquisition” metaphor being aligned to the behaviourist theory and the “participation” metaphor more closely containing elements associated with the theory of constructivism. The difference between these theories rests on their assumptions of the cognitive processes involved in learning. The constructivists believe that there is an innate human drive to make sense of the world, where

learners construct knowledge, as opposed to the behaviourist belief that individuals absorb, or passively receive information that is determined as “objective” knowledge. These different interpretations may lead to alternative practices being used by teachers. As Kerka (1997) points out:

“Using a constructivist approach, teachers facilitate learning by encouraging active inquiry, guiding learners to question their tacit assumptions, and coaching them in the construction process. This contrasts with the behaviourist approach that has dominated education, in which the teacher disseminates selected knowledge, measures learners’ passive reception of facts, and focuses on behaviour control and task completion. A constructivist teacher is more interested in uncovering meanings than in covering prescribed material.” (page 2).

These concepts are reflected in the metaphors of Sfard (1998), where learners are interpreted as “apprentices” in “communities of practice”. Billet (1993) cited by Kerka (1997) argues that learning based in the constructivist theory could be seen to contain elements of the “participation” metaphor described by Sfard (1998). Kerka (1997) cites Billet (1993), saying:

“...effective learning resulted from learners’ engagement in authentic activities, guided by experts and interacting with other learners. Although construction of understanding was unique to each individual, it was shaped by the workplace culture of practice.” (page 3).

The influence of the work place on learning is returned to later through considering the research of Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010). However their work is relevant here, as Coffield (2008) points out, they believe the “participation” metaphor has shortcomings. He says that they believe this metaphor fails to recognise the power relationships within the workplace, and the contribution of formal learning, specifically to apprenticeship programmes. They also believe that roles change within learning environments, and that “partnerships” can be influenced by this.

The change in roles experienced by vocational students is also reflected in the research of Hughes et al (2004). They illustrate how using skills competitions may “spot students with natural aptitude” for particular vocational skills, and alter how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves. Acknowledging the “predisposition” of students to embrace a vocational skill or be capable of exceeding the requirements established by the assessment criteria of a qualification, may enable the “partnership” approach to learning, advocated by Silcock and Brundrett

(2006) cited by Rhodes and Brundrett, in Bush et al (2010), to be incorporated into the practice of vocational teachers and influence the experience of their students. They believe that, through a “partnerships” between teachers and students, learning opportunities will be enhanced when compared with less developed relationship models. They say:

“...within this co-constructivist approach...educators will...work with students in order to enable them to appreciate alternatives, experiment with radical positions, and show a tolerance usually untested within monocultural settings.” (page 155).

The approaches to vocational teaching outlined above act to support learning by vocational students.

2.2.3 Motivation for teachers

The use of skills competitions within learning environments predicated on a constructivist model of learning may support the practice of vocational teachers and their motivation. The guidance produced by LSIS (2012) says:

“There is a huge motivation and enjoyment in training learners to a standard that has the potential to change their lives”. (page 11).

The projects undertaken within the research of Smeaton et al (2002) illustrate the “uplifted staff morale within the department” (page 42) following their engagement with skills competitions. The motivation of teachers is an important element of improving the quality of teaching and learning, as is illustrated by Leithwood et al (2006), cited Rhodes and Brundrett in Bush et al (2010).

Coffield (2008) illustrates the motivational possibility of feedback to students for vocational teachers. To allow the time that Coffield (2008) considers necessary for vocational teachers to generate what he refers to as a “virtuous spiral”. The role of leaders within colleges is essential to enable sufficient resources to be allocated to support structures and approaches that allow sufficient time for vocational teachers to incorporate a “virtuous spiral” into their practice. Rhodes and Brundrett, cited in Bush et al (2010) point out:

“...headteachers in schools and principals in colleges are encouraged increasingly to understand the importance of their role in enhancing the learning experience of students and to seek to ensure that the structures and

systems to support teaching and learning are created as part of their leadership responsibilities and accountability.” (page 156).

The role of leaders, and their development, is a part of the corporate approach referred to below, to enabling skills competitions to be used to affect the practice of vocational teachers. The position of Coffield (2008) cited above, endorses the findings of Hughes et al (2004) who believe that:

“It is clear that many teachers have the expertise to differentiate the learning experience and to coach learners to achieve beyond what would normally be expected. But to do this they need the encouragement, resources and, to some extent, permission.” (page 41).

The literature cited above illustrates how the opportunity for vocational tutors to use skills competitions to affect their practice may lie in areas within, or beyond, their control and could vary according to their specific organisation.

2.3 Research question 2: To what extent do skills competitions use the vocational identity of teachers within vocational education?

2.3.1 “Contextualising” Vocational Education

In considering the use of the vocational identity of teachers an area of focus within the literature reviewed was the context within which vocational education exists. The position of vocational education is often contextualised by comparisons with academic education, a chronic characteristic of the education system in the UK. The emphasis on vocational education is not isolated and there has been a shift towards traditions of academia within schools, illustrated by the alteration of criteria measuring the performance of secondary schools, following the advocacy of an English Baccalaureate by the then Secretary of State for Education Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP. Lucas et al (2010) illustrate the relative esteem of vocational and academic education, saying:

“Virtually all young people are allocated to a pathway based on their suitability or unsuitability to the academic route, rather than their suitability or unsuitability to the vocational route. Young people are often allocated or counselled into a vocational pathway not on the grounds of talent or interest in those domains, but because they are thought unlikely to succeed at the net level of academic education. Conversely, those young people expected to

succeed in academic education are tacitly or openly discouraged from considering vocational pathways.” (pages 15-16).

The introduction of University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools into the UK education system emphasises the priority for schools to deliver core academic subjects. A proposed reduction of the GCSE equivalent tariff for vocational courses provided by schools follows the recommendations of the Wolf Review (2011). These changes coincide with a significant increase in the number of schools moving from within the remit of Local Authorities through the provisions of the Academies Act (2010), and a review of the costs of tuition for higher education courses. Gleeson, (2014), says:

“Essentially, market regulation and governance in education has, since the late 1970’s following Jim Callaghan’s Ruskin Speech (1976), gradually eroded municipal public authority at local level...centrally imposed market levers regulate the relationship between public professionals and the state.” (page 21).

These changes have eroded the role of Local Authorities and stand at odds with several historical precedents. The Samuelson Commission (1884), which led to the Technical Instruction Act (1889), permitting newly established County and Borough Councils to provide day and evening classes, was a response to political concerns that Britain was falling behind its commercial competitors because of a lack of technical skills. The Education Act (1902), also known as the Balfour Act, gave local education authorities a greater role in co-ordinating technical, commercial and “continuation” classes and trade schools, with additional education provision being available as further education emerged from a series of regulations before the First World War.

The development of a tri-partite system included technical schools following the 1944 Education Act but the expansion of further education continued. The Plowden Report (1967) stimulated the provision of adult education due to its advocacy of the role of family in child development. In 1973, The Russell Report recommended broader adult education opportunities, although contrasting views have persisted regarding educating adults to enhance quality of life or to increase economic development.

These provisions, through history, remain relevant today, as does the importance of vocational education during a time of increasing change. However, while some things are long established context may alter and the changes vocational teachers have experienced within their profession in recent years are considerable. Gleeson and James (2007) argue:

“..when it comes to concepts of professionalism, and how new models of professional practice need to operate, some recognition of the tensions, contradictions and paradoxes that surround FE practitioners work is essential” (page 465).

The tensions referred to by Gleeson and James (2007) are concerned with the introduction of the professionalising reforms and whether they have achieved their objective, or have acted to “deprofessionalise” the teaching role within further education. Coffield et al (2005), cited in Gleeson and James (2007) argue that the vocational identity of teachers within further education has changed within a broader policy context. They say:

“Rather than occupying the position of trusted public servant, practitioners have come to be regarded as licensed deliverers of nationally produced materials, targets and provision” (page 452).

Berger (2003) agrees with the view of Coffield et al (2005) and says that in the United States of America:

“Much of the country seems seduced at the moment with visions of teacher-proof curriculum, where teachers are seen as little more than semi-skilled gas station attendants delivering curriculum into student brains.” (page 11).

Berger (2003) argues that accountability is at the forefront of the minds of teachers and that they prioritise statistical success, as defined by the performance indicators against which they are measured, above all other considerations in relation to the education they provide. Fitzjohn, a senior official within Ofsted, cited in Lucas et al (2010), agrees with Berger (2003) and says:

“If you go into a workplace a mentor or coach is absolutely clear about what they are teaching someone to do. It might be a craft or technique, like filleting a fish for example. But if you go into a class in a college and ask the class

tutor what its purpose was, they would tell you it was about passing the test, passing the module, completing the assignment.” (page 37).

The “deprofessionalisation” of vocational teachers outlined above could be compounded by changes in funding available for qualifications. Keep (2014) illustrates how funding for skills policy has, and will continue to reduce and this may lead to the available hours for vocational teachers to deliver competency based qualifications to lessen. While this affects the abilities of vocational teachers to apply teaching, learning and assessment to anything beyond the boundaries of the qualification it may alter the perception of the profession both for external observers and those within it.

2.3.2 The Identity of Vocational Teachers

Research into identity often attributes the contributions of Erikson (1950) whose theories illustrate how adolescents develop by resolving specific “crisis” that influence their future identity. However while his work remains influential, it has been refined to show how the process of forming identity is more fluid. The definition of identity provided by Fearon (1999) indicates how groups and individuals combine to produce identities that could be applied to those developed by vocational teachers. Fearon (1999) says:

“...an “identity” refers to either (a) a social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviours, or (b) socially distinguishing features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or (a) and (b) at once)...”identity” is a modern formulation of dignity, pride, or honour that implicitly links these social categories”. (Abstract).

Viskovic and Robson (2001) illustrate how the development of identity is not confined to one period in our lives or to one specific setting but is a reconciliation of various “memberships” into one identity that constitutes a “nexus of multi-memberships” (page 225).

The “deprofessionalisation” of vocational teachers may influence how they see themselves as a consequence of changes to their role. The process of acquisition of an identity as a vocational teacher is complex and has been the focus of literature

reviewed here. The issues of transition between school and college, experienced by students, may be similar to transitional challenges faced by staff within further education and may derive from experience gained in a prior “trade”. The vocational identity of vocational teachers may, as a consequence of prior experience, lack singularity. Orr and Simmons (2009) cite the work of Robson (1998) who considered the concept of the “dual professionalism” of vocational teachers. The need for teachers to deploy reserves of emotional labour, as a part of their role, helps to accommodate the acquisition of a new “vocational habitus”, the concept of Bourdieu (1977), used by Colley et al (2003) in their research into student transformation. The process of “becoming” for students, while seen with some scepticism by Colley et al (2003) due to it being seen as reinforcing social inequalities, may also be relevant for staff within further education.

Many teachers in further education having worked in other vocational areas maintain, or even prioritise, their allegiance to their previous profession. Robson et al (2004), cited in Orr and Simmons (2009), believe that for teachers new to the profession their previous experience gives them credibility during their transition, and this may act to insulate them against the challenges of their new role. However, if this strategy is prolonged it may detract from their transition of “becoming” a teacher. Jephcote et al (2007), illustrate the accommodations that vocational teachers make saying:

“Teachers’ invest heavily in emotional labour as a form of coping strategy to deal with the pressure and stresses they face from college managers and especially from challenging learners.” (page 10).

The numerous challenges facing vocational teachers are experienced by a group who are far from homogeneous. Gleeson (2014) illustrates how “becoming” a vocational teacher has many different routes. He says:

“The nature of the transition is marked by strong identities, linked to earlier career and job experience associated, for example, with being an engineer or caterer “in teaching...If some accounts of practitioners are associated with an altruistic desire to put their expertise and experience back into the community, others talk of “sliding” into FE through part-time work, often regarded as unofficial apprenticeship into FE teaching.” (page 22).

Brown (1997) cites Lave (1991) through illustrating the dynamic nature of identity and how changes in identity are supported by “situated learning in communities of practice” (page 7). She is cited by Brown (1997) in illustrating how:

“...newcomers become old-timers as they develop a changing understanding of “practice” through participation in an on-going community of practice” (page 7).

The fluidity of identity and it’s relation to the context within which vocational education exists is also recognised by Orr and Simmons (2009) who say:

“...identity is not fixed and relates to how the teacher/trainees improvise within their current situations.” (page 12).

Communities of practice are created and sustained over time to pursuit a shared enterprise. Lave and Wenger (1991) show how communities of practice contain, what they term, “legitimate peripheral participation” and how these roles are often a starting point for new members. From the periphery newcomers can gain an overview of the community before immersion takes place into specific areas in which they may specialise. The “legitimate peripheral participant” is an active member of the community of practice and not one restricted to observation, although they may undertake lesser tasks compare those carried out by full members, tasks that will usually accommodate greater degrees of error being acceptable. However the primary function of a community of practice is learning. The learning for new members does not need to be sequential to the competence they acquire and these skills may move over time aligned to their growing experience. As a consequence the community changes to accommodate the expansion of skills and learning it acquires. Lave and Wenger (1991) believe that it is the relationships within communities of practice that provide an environment for learning with any “master and servant” roles existing to enable legitimate access to the community. As a consequence the mastery sought by newcomers to gain full membership resides with the community of practice as opposed to any specific individual within the group.

Wenger (1998) develops his interpretation of communities of practice by describing three contributing characteristics. He believes that within communities of practice there is “mutual engagement” amongst participants to progress a “joint enterprise” through a “shared repertoire”. The “mutual engagement” of members of communities of practice can only exist where negotiation takes place and knowledge of the

diversity of the community is gained. Through the acquisition of this knowledge the community can contribute to enable some members with strengths in specific areas to compensate for others who need support. Wenger (1998) believes that a “joint enterprise” is reflected in communities of practice through the existence of a communal goal. These goals produce levels of accountability for members of the community of practice and are constantly re-negotiated. The third characteristic of a “shared repertoire” reflects the composite resources of the community, such as its vocabulary or symbols that have no value outside of the community but could be seen as a “thermometer” for the health and wellbeing of the community.

The characteristics of communities of practice developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and subsequently revised by Wenger (1998) are subject to critique as illustrated by Eraut (2002). He believes the communities induct newcomers to enable the reproduction of the community as opposed to introducing a capacity for change and that they appear to tolerate change to ensure their continuity. These observations concur with those of Colley et al (2007) who illustrate how the power operating within communities of practice acts to preserve what exists. They show how some practices demonstrated by newcomers are deemed illegitimate by existing members of the community and they are precluded from full membership as a consequence.

Wenger (1998) is further criticised by Fuller et al (2005) for his limited exploration of the experiences of individual learners within communities of practice. While Wenger (1998) considers the “trajectories” of members of the communities of practice, see below, he does not recognise how individuals learn differently and how learners appear to occupy one “trajectory” as opposed to another. While these “trajectories” are important for this thesis the concepts of newcomers to communities of practice is less relevant. Those who responded to the interview or questionnaire conducted for this research were “established” in communities of practice however, the potential for skills competitions to influence their “position” was relevant.

Viskovic and Robson (2001) cite his belief that:

“Communities of practice are not good or bad in themselves. They may be sites of creative achievement or of inbred failure. The importance...is that they hold the key to real transformation and have the potential to make a real difference to people’s lives.” (page 224).

The complexity of the transformation of identity experienced by participants within vocational education requires the influence of communities of practice to be acknowledged. Avis (2009) illustrates the “specificity, situatedness and uniqueness of workplace learning” (page 7) and points out how this may result in a lack of generality across workplaces. He cites Evans et al (2006) who say:

“A strength of the situated perspective is that it treats learning transfer as problematic. If learning is conceived as a process embedded on particular social activities and relations, it follows that learning cannot straightforwardly be replicated from one situation to another.” (page 8).

Holland et al (1998) cited in Orr and Simmons (2009), refer to the possibility of a “legacy” identity through illustrating how identity is a response to cultural circumstances. They believe:

“...identity is one’s “history in person” which is the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises using the cultural resources available in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present.” (page 12).

The interpretations of Lave (1991), Orr and Simmons (2009) are consistent with the constructivist view of learning illustrated above by Billet (1993), and the “participation” metaphor described by Sfard (1998), in that vocational teachers construct knowledge as participants within the process of acquiring a new identity. The transformation between identities is considered in research by Wenger (1998). He believes that individuals have a “positional” identity along a “trajectory” that is, what he refers to as, “situated” in relation to each individual and that their learning relies on social activity. Wenger (1998) believes that individuals obtain identities equally through participation in practice but also through non participation, and as a consequence we understand both who we are and who we are not. The concepts of “peripherality” and “marginality” are incorporated into the “trajectories” of individuals between identities. Viskovic and Robson (2001) say:

“As we go through a succession of forms of participation, our identities form trajectories both within and across communities of practice. There can be various types of trajectories: “peripheral trajectories” may provide access to a community and its practice, but never lead to full participation; “inbound trajectories”, on the other hand, offer the prospect of full participation in the future. “Insider trajectories” are those where the formation of identity does not end with full membership, but where the evolution of practice continues to

create occasions for the re-negotiation of one's identity. "Boundary trajectories" span boundaries and link communities of practice, while "outbound trajectories" lead out of a community altogether." (page 225).

Multi-membership of communities of practice with varying "trajectories" in relation to each may inform the identity of vocational teachers and influence their practice. "Dual professionalism", as defined by Robson (1998), may only represent a partial view of the identities of vocational teachers. However, the potential that more than one identity affords vocational teachers may be interpreted positively. Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) cite Robson et al (2004) who argue that the "dual professionalism" of vocational teachers forges identities reflecting academic and vocational experience, and while there may be a reluctance for some vocational teachers to move away from their prior identity, equally for others there is a disposition to embrace change, that may lead to practice as a teacher containing a commitment to students that "went beyond" programme requirements in an attempt to develop the "whole person".

Bathmaker (2005) contrasts these views illustrating how the tenure of vocational teachers may affect their inclination to embrace change and enter into communities of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) believe that prolonged exposure to cultures of practice will encourage new comers to align themselves to that culture, however Bathmaker (2005) argues that the interaction between new vocational teachers and existing communities of practice is iterative and, as the new comer adapts, so does the community of practice. Her observation of the experience of newly qualified vocational teachers was to comply with the "survival" strategies established by the community but to recognise that those within it had become marginalised by the changes they had encountered in recent years. While she recognises that all further education colleges are not represented in her observations, she witnessed:

"Poor workplace conditions, lack of resources, perceived lack of management support [that] all impact on communities of practice within further education and lead to communities which can be characterised as having low morale, being burnt out, and having lost their commitment to students." (page 30).

The conditions reflected by Bathmaker (2005) illustrate the environment within which some vocational teachers work and the perception of some teachers. Therefore the relatively "pessimistic" position adopted by some vocational teachers may affect their abilities to engage in new initiative or embrace new identities. Bathmaker (2005)

cites Gleeson and Shain (1999) who have witnessed both what they refer to as “unwilling compliance”, where vocational teachers disengage from their work context but also “strategic compliance” where there is a “re-professionalisation” stimulated by a commitment to students and learning agendas. The extension of identities and membership of many communities of practice is reflected in the experience of vocational teachers who engage in skills competitions. The LSIS (2012) guidance illustrates how:

“Teachers and trainers develop relationships beyond their own organisations with staff and employers, making contacts and developing communities of practice with their peers in the same specialist areas.” (page 12).

Opportunities for vocational teachers to develop communities of practice with peers from the same specialist area may enable a sharing of experience drawn from a number of identities common to these colleagues and bring together like minded teachers who may influence others.

Vocational teachers who act as Training Managers within Worldskills competitions are clearly committed to the use of skills competitions however they appear to contrast the characteristics of the vocational teachers identified by Bathmaker (2005). A Training Manager from the Worldskills London 2011 event provided the following for Nokelainen et al (2012), saying:

“For a trade person, the Worldskills experience is an opportunity to celebrate the trade and to participate in an extremely high level of competition. It celebrates our trade and displays all the good we have to offer. The focus is on youth and it gives us great pleasure to be passing on the trade to a competent next generation. It brings together industry, education and government as we work together in an attempt to fill the need for new workers in our trade.” (page 64).

The breadth of what constitutes vocational teachers and of their perceptions and experiences is reflected by comparing the comments of the Training manager cited above with the observations of Bathmaker (2005).

2.3.3 The Status of Vocational Education

The status of vocational education is an issue that is, as is alluded to above, often seen within the context of academic education, and a disparity may be perceived in

the comparable status between these two areas of education. The conditions within the UK contrast with those found in other European countries in relation to the status of these two forms of education. The role skills competitions play in other countries is also worthy of consideration. For example, in Finland:

“Skills competitions are intended to increase Vocational Education and Training attractiveness by putting a spotlight on skills and vocational competence. The primary purpose is to raise awareness and promote the learning of professional skills and the dissemination of good practices: competition itself is seen as secondary”. (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), 2014 page 152).

Developments in the UK have begun to mirror the use of skills competitions in Finland. A specific illustration in the UK has been the establishment of the Skills Show in 2012 as a legacy of hosting WorldSkills 2011. This event acts as the venue for the finals of domestic skills competitions, and is aimed at promoting vocational education. However, this show takes place against a backcloth of tensions that exist between the introductions of new initiatives aimed at improving the status and quality of vocational education and reductions in time and funding available to deliver vocational qualifications. The LSIS (2012) guidance acknowledges that:

“There can be a gap between striving for excellence in skills and performance and the requirements of qualifications. Many providers of vocational learning and skills are concerned at the lack of differentiation in some vocational qualifications.” (page 14).

However, whilst the observations made in the LSIS (2012) guidance may be relevant the challenge for vocational teachers to deliver qualifications is highlighted by the respondent to research undertaken by Edwards et al (2007) who says:

“I really don’t feel that I have enough time to produce everything for the course that I would like to produce...The main thing would be to allow me to have more time to mark and prepare the work...that is where it is so difficult at the moment. You are really chasing your tail all year...The amount of pressure that everybody is under is crazy.” (page 165).

During the period when vocational teachers are practising in what the teacher above considers to be a pressurized environment the need for professional standards and requirements relating to them, have changed. Orr and Simmons (2009) believe this practice may have led to the imposition of standards for teachers within further

education that attempt to apply a consistency to their practice and to their values. These changes are considered as “deprofessionalising” further education teachers, for example by Gleeson and James (2007), however they continue to be adopted with a number of organisations co-ordinating their introduction. The oversight of these standards has been the responsibility of a number of bodies, established by successive governments. The Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) preceded the Sector Skills Council for Further Education, Lifelong Learning UK, and the professionalization of teaching within further education continued with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service and the Institute for Learning. Teachers in further education were required to join the Institute for Learning, to gain teaching qualifications, and to complete thirty hours of Continuous Professional Development to maintain membership

However, these reforms have been succeeded by further change with the Continuous Professional Development and the need for vocational teachers to achieve teaching qualifications. These two factors were requirements for membership of the Institute for Learning. The rapidity of change experienced by vocational teachers is evident in the speed within which the organisations overseeing the changes are abandoned. The Institute for Learning was superseded by the establishment of a new organisation, The Education and Training Foundation, following the recommendations of the Professionalism in Further Education Report (2012), and this body now continues to oversee the reform of the further education workforce.

The introduction of the workforce reforms aimed at professionalizing teachers in further education may fail to encapsulate what Frykholm and Nitzler (1993), cited by Colley et al (2003), believe is encompassed by the role. They say:

“...vocational teaching is characterized more by socialization than by qualification, ie...it is more a question of transmitting dispositions and attitudes than of giving the knowledge and skills required for specific tasks” (page 474).

Gleeson (2012) criticised the introduction of the Education and Training Foundation, following the recommendations of the Professionalism in Further Education Report

(2012), the removal of the need for institutional membership of a national body for vocational teachers and for required annual continuous professional development.

He says:

“Justification of the abolition of the legal requirement to achieve teaching qualifications, to be replaced by voluntary means, is in danger of downgrading the standards and status of FE teaching and learning.” (page 17).

The challenges outlined above for further education to improve are to take place within an environment where the professional requirements for vocational teachers have been reduced. The corresponding emphasis on teaching, learning and assessment within the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework, may act to influence the practice of vocational teachers, however this is administered by an inspectorate as opposed to the professional body in place.

Vocational Students

2.4 Research question 3: In what ways do skills competitions contribute to the experience of learners on vocational courses?

2.4.1 Student Aspiration

The rationale for introducing any initiative within further education is to directly or indirectly influence the experience of vocational students in a positive way. We have considered above the vocational identity of staff and how skills competitions may influence their practice. Skills competitions may also contribute to the formation of a vocational identity for students and the way their identity is constructed include a range of complex variables similar to those influencing the identities of vocational teachers.

The use of skills competitions may contribute to the experience of vocational students through enhancing the low level of aspiration that characterises the

behaviours of a proportion of these learners. The LSIS (2012) guidance illustrates how colleges could develop “learning cultures” by saying:

“Many learners and apprentices in the Further Education and Skills sector have modest aspirations and live in areas where employment prospects are mostly limited to jobs with low levels of skills. Competition activity can be instrumental in increasing motivation, widening horizons and improving achievement.” (page 10).

Griffiths (1993) cited by Rhodes (2012) illustrates how positive self-esteem can be drawn from an enhanced feeling of “belonging”. The benefits of skills competitions are unsurprisingly experienced by students who represent their country in Worldskills competitions. Nokelainen et al (2012) surveyed competitors from Worldskills London 2011 and found that they had enhanced their self-confidence as a consequence of their experience and felt a greater sense of belonging to their intended vocation.

The increase in student motivation following their engagement in skills competitions is observed in the research of Smeaton et al (2002), illustrating how student attendance on their course of study improves following entry to skills competitions. The LSIS guidance 2012 illustrates how “learning cultures” can influence the experience of vocational learners and influence their “cultural theory of learning”. They say:

“Many senior managers see competition activity as a way of overcoming the low aspirations and lack of self-esteem that are common in some areas of deprivation. Some have developed 10 year plans to incorporate competition activity designed to provide world-class provision and training”. (page 22).

However the aspiration of vocational students is also interpreted through consideration of identity by Colley, James, Tedder and Dimert (2003). They concentrated on three vocational areas within colleges of further education; engineering, childcare and health care.

They argue that learning is a process of “becoming”, as learners are transformed following their exposure to specific vocational cultures. Colley et al (2003) offer a sociological perspective and draw upon the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) to develop the concept of a “vocational habitus” (page 475). The authors explore the

relationship between the predisposed cultural and personal identity of the learners' and their "vocational habitus". They consider how learners "acquire" both the means of "how to be" in a specific vocation, and the required feelings, morals and the capacity for emotional labour associated with their "vocational habitus".

The work of Jephcote et al (2007) extend the predisposition of students considered by Colley et al (2003), in which class and gender were the focus, to include further complexities of student lives. The desire to address difficult family relationships, or the disappointment of parents resulting from teenage pregnancy, revealed the compensatory approach of students and their desire to succeed at college. Their work also indicated how the motivation of students varied according to age and their mode of study. Older students' drive to succeed was evident where they studied full time, whereas day release students were minimalist in their approach to the requirements of their course.

Colley et al (2003) say:

"Many students have arrived on the [childcare] course as a result of having their ambitions to become teachers or nurses lowered due to poor results in school examinations. Childcare is low-status work within the field of education, and nursery nurses are usually subordinate to professionally qualified teachers or health workers" (page 477).

Jephcote et al (2007), argue that staff within further education view students' enrolling on college courses as taking their final opportunity at the "last chance saloon" (page 9), following low attainment during compulsory schooling. They argue that this view is a reflection of the low esteem in which teachers within further education hold the experiences of students during their compulsory education. This view often compounds the difficulties that are associated with the complexities of the lives of many of the students, the disappointment of their ambitions being unfulfilled and may reinforce their low aspiration.

Colley et al (2003) believe the concept of "vocational habitus" could lead to the reproduction of social inequalities. Their position represents a Marxist interpretation and they argue the role of identity within vocational education may be an important determinant in perpetuating the economic conditions. Crotty (1998) says:

“...Marx...is ready to claim, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness” (page 120).

This is consistent with the views of Colley et al (2003) where the complexity and the preconditions of the lives of students within further education create the social beings that determine their consciousness. It is also aligned with the research undertaken by Jephcote et al (2007) where vocational teachers may compound the consciousness of their students. The “learning cultures” described above may create environments that could challenge, as opposed to compound the consciousness and vocational identity of vocational learners. Through building aspiration in students their potential to progress in their vocational areas is supported by skills competitions. The advocacy of skills competitions by LSIS (2012) highlights positive influences they introduce to the experience of vocational students and is illustrated in their guidance below. They say:

“Many of the teachers consulted noticed positive changes in the behaviour of learners who took an interest in competitions-both the participants and the observers.” (page11).

Dewey, cited in Lucas et al (2010) recognises the opportunities education affords for the transformation of lives and advocated that vocational education should not merely progress young people to occupations that “people like them” had traditionally chosen. The extent to which young people may excel within vocational education may be influenced by skills competitions, however they may also contribute further to reinforce social inequalities as they emphasise and compound “becoming” for vocational students.

2.4.2 Student Differentiation

Skills competitions act to differentiate vocational students and their use should be considered carefully, particularly as a result of the influence of vocational education in recreating social inequalities (Colley et al, 2003). The introduction of study programmes for full time 16 to 18 year olds enrolled on courses at further education colleges from September 2013 require students to undertake work experience within their college course. The research of Vondracek and Skorikov (1997) demonstrate

the complexities of the transitions undertaken by adolescents and how exposure to realistic work experience may act to support their development. Their work illustrates how the experiences of students act to draw them towards vocational preferences and self-efficacy. In contrast to the rationale provided by Colley et al (2003), they believe the high school experience of students in the United States may mislead them into what they would consider to be unrealistic patterns of self-efficacy. The area of sports demonstrates this, and is a reflection of the attractiveness of occupations to students that do not realistically take account of their abilities. They attribute this misalignment to the lack of realistic work experiences that the majority of American High School students engage in. Many students have part time jobs, but these are concentrated in a few areas of the economy, such as the fast food sector and the vocabulary of work experience that is available for young people is relatively impoverished. The data collected by these researchers shows the dominating role of school experience in the formation of interests and vocational identity in adolescents, but they believe that students:

“..should be encouraged to explore and, if possible, participate in the widest possible range of activities, regardless of whether they are classified as leisure, school, or work related” (pages 333).

In experiencing a wide range of opportunities the scope of opportunities in the labour market would inform student choice, potentially avoiding what Vondracek and Skorikov (1997) view as unrealistic expectations, and also what Colley et al (2003) consider are tendencies for vocational education to reproduce social inequalities.

Lucas et al (2010) illustrate how organisations within the UK are developing more realistic opportunities for school pupils to engage in work experience. They say:

“My-work-experience.com, for example, claims to provide “a fresh approach to school work experience and enterprise learning at Key Stage 4 by enabling Year 10 and 11 students not only to learn about work and the skills for work, but also to learn and develop enterprise skills, such as business understanding, personal finance and problem solving, through the experience of work.” (page 14).

The unrealistic expectations of students completing their high school education in the United States may reproduce vocational identities that are low in aspiration. In

comparison the LSIS guidance (2012) illustrates how the confidence of students can be supported for those who engage in skills competitions. They say:

“Competition activities can be powerful tools for boosting confidence, developing high-level technical competence and encouraging self-reliance.” (page 6).

A further influence that differentiates the experience of vocational learners is the locality in which their vocational education is delivered. Vondracek and Slorilov (1997) recognise the strength of variations within adolescent experience and their influence on vocational identity. They say:

“Rural American adolescents may have less variation in their activities across various domains than either their European or urban counterparts.” (page 335).

Jephcote et al (2007) endorse this view and believe that teachers may have preconceptions that stereotype the localities where learners live, and how they may characterise dispositions towards learning. Some colleges have numerous sites, and there may be different emphasis at alternative locations. The emphasis of a specific campus altered the perceptions of teachers towards the students attending the college at that locality.

The differentiation of approaches used by vocational teachers towards students, while necessary and required within the provisions of the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (2012), may be enhanced by the use of skills competitions and lead to what Sfard (1998) refers to as “communities of practice”. The experience of vocational students could be influenced through their exposure to additional learning opportunities provided by skills competitions. This differentiation may be enhanced or diluted by the philosophical interpretation organisations construct of skills competitions and may, in some cases, expose colleges to allegations of elitism within the composition of student groups. The philosophy underpinning the use of skills competitions has challenged the liberal education traditions of some countries, such as Finland. Helakorpi, cited in Kaloinen et al (2010) points out how in Finland:

“The principle of access to education entails that every citizen must have the same opportunities for accessing education, regardless of their place of residence, wealth or any other factor...The principle of equality in educational

outcomes means that similar results should be achieved for instance by providing different kinds of teaching. At one extreme there is the thought that “everyone can learn everything”, as long as teaching is sufficiently differentiated...Traditional Finnish “one track education” produces similar qualifications and competence, when the labour market is actually in need of workers with different kinds of competence. Equal opportunities could be fulfilled so that each student receives access to education that corresponds to his or her abilities and needs, and eventually finds employment in a position where his or her competence is valued.” (pages 32 and 33).

The opportunities for vocational students to access differentiated educational opportunities may be enabled by skills competitions, while recognising their potential to generate elites. However, the underpinning philosophy associated with their introduction may lessen the impact of this occurring, as is the case illustrated by Helakorpi, cited in Kaloinen et al (2010) in relation to their use in Finland:

“The primary purpose of vocational skills competitions is to promote the learning of professional skills and the dissemination of good practice. The competition itself is secondary.” (page 38).

Whether this philosophy will translate into an English setting remains untested.

2.4.3 Managing Student Disappointment

While it may be intended for skills competitions to interpret the competition element as secondary to the opportunities they provide to extend the experience of vocational students, there is the need for vocational teachers to be aware of the possible disappointment felt by students who may not succeed having entered skills competitions. The LSIS guidance (2012) says:

“Learners benefit from the extra mentoring associated with competition preparation, the feedback they receive from industry experts and the extra tuition...Involvement in competitions can be a powerful means of growing a learner’s self-esteem and self-confidence...Competitors who don’t not win still gain...One disappointed learner soon realised the experience had made him stronger and worked out how he could overcome his nerves to do better next time: another was able to analyse the winning entries to work out how she could improve her own work.” (page 8).

Williams and Sheridan (2010), cited in Lucas et al (2012), recognise the potentially destructive nature of competitions and how the manner in which they occur impacts upon their usefulness to the learning process. They say that competitions require:

“...the opportunity to collaborate and compete in an “open”, permissive learning environment, where the teacher focuses attention on the collective knowledge of the group rather than individual competence alone.” (page 81).

The LSIS guidance (2012) shows how vocational students experience opportunities from entering skills competitions that differentiate them from their peers, while recognising the need to acknowledge the possible disappointment felt by students who do not succeed. The cross cultural illustrations provided above may inform the practice of vocational teachers and counteract the possibilities of skills competitions compounding social inequalities, and adding to the disappointment of some vocational students.

A Corporate Approach

2.5 Research question 4: In what ways can an initiative such as skills competitions contribute to quality assurance processes in colleges of further education?

2.5.1 A Corporate Approach

As mentioned above there is little research into the use of skills competitions in vocational education. This thesis considers whether they are a winning formula for enhancing the quality of vocational education. The literature review therefore needs to extend to incorporate studies that consider excellence in vocational education. Migler et al (1990) illustrate how institutional factors provide the basis from which excellence can flow, saying:

“Attention to excellence in vocational education is most frequently focused towards programs, classrooms and individual student performance...the study of institutions in which exemplary vocational education is found might provide insights regarding the nature and importance of this environment.” (page 2).

The need for institutional level improvement to create a “scaffold” in which initiatives are introduced and are sustained within vocational education, requires the corporate approach to be considered. The guidance provided by The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) (2012) shows the characteristics of further education colleges where skills competitions are embedded to differing extents. They provide illustrations of colleges within which skills competitions are “totally embedded and well established”; “committed but not embedded” and “competition work is run by enthusiasts” (pages 28 and 29).

The LSIS (2012) recognises that where skills competitions are totally embedded and well established, while this is an ideal stage of development, it would have evolved over a period of time. The characteristics of this stage of embedding include the following:

“

- Quality improvement and self-assessment processes explicitly include competition activity.
- Commitment to skills competition activity is visible in mission and strategic plan, all relevant policy documents and schemes of work.
- Competition activity is planned and formal competition work is aligned with major competition cycles, such as WorldSkills.”

(page 28).

The characteristics listed above represent some of those identified within the LSIS (2012) guidance and a number of these are more relevant for some of the other research questions contained within this thesis, as opposed to that being considered here, although some overlap exists.

Research conducted by Berry-Lound et al (2012) concurred with many of the findings of LSIS (2012), an illustration of this showing how vocational educationists responding to their questionnaire knew of their organisations inclusion of skills competitions as a part of their quality assessment processes. Sixty per cent of respondents to the questionnaire integrated evidence gathered from skills competitions into their Self-Assessment Report. The pertinent recommendations for this specific research question relate to the use of skills competitions in quality improvement and self-assessment processes and the role of leadership in ensuring

a corporate approach via their commitment and planning for skills competitions that are reflected in documentation used within colleges.

Berry-Lound et al (2012) cite a further education college where a strategic approach to using skills competitions linked to quality improvement has been developed. Similarly, they illustrate how at another college of further education their approach to skills competitions has been “corporate” by saying:

“The college had always taken part in catering and hairdressing competitions but in 2008 the Principal chose to move towards a broader, all college route for entries and participation. This has produced clear benefits, not least in that it contributed to a move from good to outstanding on their last Ofsted appraisal”(page 27).

The research of Berry-Lound et al (2012) cited above, illustrates how one college’s “corporate” approach to skills competitions was seen positively and resulted in favourable comments being included in their published Ofsted report. The LSIS (2012) study endorses the view of Berry-Lound et al (2012) saying that:

“Embedded approaches to competition activity need strong leadership and a clear strategic direction. The leaders of the organisations interviewed...demonstrated their commitment to excellence in vocational learning and provided a facilitating infrastructure to put this into place”(page 22).

The infrastructure referred to by Berry-Lound et al (2012) requires that the area considered next in this thesis forms part of the corporate arrangements put into place to support the initiative of using skills competitions within vocational education.

2.5.2 Planning

The need to integrate and embed skills competitions into the strategies of colleges is recognised as important by the LSIS research (2012). They point out:

“...competition activity cannot be undertaken lightly-there are undoubtedly risks that must be managed and health and safety issues that must be addressed. It is also important to ensure that formal competition activity is not a stand-alone or marginalised activity, but is an integral part of the mission and strategy” (page 5).

The need for engagement in skills competitions to be planned and for their introduction to be acknowledged as representing a change in the way in which the development of any new initiative would be seen are considerations for the vocational education sector. Issues relating to change management are considered later. The need for planning to support the use of skills competitions within quality assurance processes is referred to by Hughes et al (2004) who consider this an essential element of any initiative or project aimed at customising the curriculum in an attempt to deliver excellence in skills development. They illustrate their belief by saying:

“Careful planning and launch of a project will ensure a successful outcome. It is essential that it is achievable within the set time frame. The project will have greater will have greater impact and absorb the learners’ interest and motivation if it:

- can be integrated seamlessly in the learners’ main programme
- gives rise naturally to opportunities that will further develop the learners’ technical and personal skills
- is not regarded as a “bolt-on” additional element

It is important that resources are available on demand and, therefore, good technician support is pivotal to the smooth running of the project.” (page 42).

The extent of planning required to enable the use of skills competitions as an initiative to enhance the quality of vocational education may rely upon the position a college occupies in relation to its existing quality and the engagement it has with skills competitions. It has been illustrated above that the requirements of skills competitions need to be integrated with the needs of vocational qualifications, for example in relation to assessment criteria, in order that vocational teachers do not see them as “bolted on” to the main purpose of their role.

2.5.3 Ofsted’s Common Inspection Framework (2012)

Further education colleges are required to have robust self-assurance processes that are inspected by Ofsted and evaluated to consider if they enable a college to “know itself”(Ofsted 2012). Where colleges believe they are strong they provide evidence to justify this view and similarly there is a need for them to recognise areas

for improvement, know why improvement is required and illustrate the plans they have to address these areas. The Case studies used for this research consider that they are “good” when compared to the criteria used by Ofsted to differentiate categories of institution and their current inspection grades would concur with their self-assessment.

The Ofsted Chief Inspector’s Annual Report (2013) illustrates how further education colleges, irrespective of their current Ofsted grade, are required to continue to improve. He says:

“Last year, we raised serious concerns about the further education and skills sector. This year, we have cause for optimism. In many of the providers we inspected, we have seen improvements in the quality of teaching, as well as higher expectations for learners...However, there is still too much provision that is not responsive to local employment needs. This provision is therefore inappropriate for young people, regardless of the quality of teaching”(page 5).

Evidence exists of the need for the vocational education sector in the UK to improve when comparing its overall achievements with other countries (Department of Business Innovation and Skills 2013). Within the UK there are perceptions of vocational education institutions relating to some of the concerns raised by employers and their representative groups, although, as was illustrated in the introduction to this thesis, this is not a new view (Samuelson Commission (1884)). Coffield (2008) illustrates the paucity of relationships that often exist between colleges of further education and employers. However these relationships may result from systemic failure, such as the validity of vocational qualifications, as Stasz (2011) points out. The knowledge employers have of changes to the content of qualifications and the relative merit of one award when compared to another may be unclear, and reduce the validity of qualifications and their perception of further education. The Wolf Review of 14-19 vocational education (2011) made 27 recommendations for improvement within the vocational education system: it says;

“...many of England’s 14-19 year olds do not, at present, progress successfully into either secure employment or higher-level education and training. Many of them leave education without the skills that will enable them to progress at a later date. The [Wolf] Review received many hundred submissions form individuals and groups with extensive knowledge of our vocational education system. Many highlighted its strengths and

achievements. But none wanted to leave things as they are: nor did they believe that minor changes were enough. This is surely correct". (page 8).

Within the quality assurance processes used by further education colleges as they attempt to continue to improve the practice of vocational teachers is observed by colleagues and college managers. It has been illustrated above the increased importance placed on teaching, learning and assessment within the criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of colleges by Ofsted, therefore the practice of vocational teachers becomes more publically accountable. When considering excellence in skills development Hughes et al (2004) state that:

"Good teachers make a difference!" (page 1)

An observation made by an interviewee, who was a college senior manager, in the LSIS (2012) research showed how some of the best lessons she observed included the use of competitions. Her endorsement of the use of skills competitions is contained in a guide promoting their use and therefore should be contextualised. However there may be merit in these observations and they should not be overlooked. Another area evaluated by the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework is the effectiveness of leadership and management. Ofsted inspectors look for evidence that:

"Providers demonstrate an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all learners can achieve, and attain high standards of quality and performance" (2012).

The ways in which skills competitions can contribute to providing evidence of high quality vocational education for Ofsted inspections, as is mentioned above, is known by vocational teachers to be captured in self-assessment reports. The nature of evidence that may be collected to support colleges during Ofsted inspections is illustrated by LSIS (2012) as a means to encourage the engagement of colleges with this initiative. Inspectors consider the progress made towards targets set for learners and the "distance travelled" during their time on a course. During the course of the LSIS (2012) research they indicate that many providers consider that learners engaged in skills competitions achieve or exceed their qualification aim. An extract from one inspection report illustrates this claim saying:

“Students have very high standards of work and develop very good practical and work-related skills. Many students win awards at regional and national competitions”(page 20).

Ofsted’s Common Inspection Framework includes a grade for colleges inspected with regards to the outcomes of their learners. The report above reflects the positive contribution of skills competitions to learners’ achievements and is further endorsed by anecdotal evidence of the enhanced potential for learners who engage in skills competitions gaining employment. The “outcomes” Ofsted consider extend to the destinations of learners and their moving into employment is a principle aim of their studying for vocational qualifications. The LSIS research points out:

“Many of the learners with whom we consulted commented on the development of employability skills...Providers engaged in competition activity are convinced that this stretches and extends the achievement of their learners and leads to employment in better jobs”(page 20).

The Wolf Review (2011) also recognises the need for vocational courses to lead to employment opportunities for young people and, as is illustrated above, engaging with employers remains a challenge for those working within vocational education.

2.6 Research question 5: What approaches to change management processes appear to support, or have hindered, the use of new initiatives, such as skills competitions, in enhancing the quality of vocational teaching?

2.6.1 Change Management Processes

Since the early 1990’s, the adoption of government reforms has required significant changes to be accommodated by the further education sector, and these have influenced the experience of staff working in colleges. Jephcote and Sailsbury (2009) say these include:

“...(1) the incorporation of colleges in 1993, and (2) associated external regulation in the form of audit and inspection, (3) the ongoing association of FE colleges with the failings of the British economy and, (4) more recently the re-branding of FE as the “learning and skills sector” and, (5) the introduction of national professional standards” (page 967).

The incorporation of colleges created individual legal entities, under the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). The employment of staff working in colleges transferred from Local Authorities to the newly formed legal entities. The risks perceived as associated with the move from the arm of central government in local areas was mitigated by the introduction of new audit and inspection regimes and successive funding bodies, such as the Further Education Funding Council, The Learning and Skills Council and the Skills Funding Agency.

The incorporation of colleges introduced competition to the supply of post compulsory education in localities and the funding mechanisms used to provide resources to colleges annually were determined to a significant extent by the number of students enrolled. This funding regime provided colleges with greater resources if they grew. Growth by colleges and an increased control of staff terms and conditions led to change. Mather and Worrall (2007) argue that the response by further education colleges to market based reforms has increased workloads for teachers and insufficiently strong acts of collective resistance have led to greater feelings of staff alienation. They argue that in order to make a positive impact on the professional practice of individual teachers there may need to be more recognition of the change experienced.

However, there may be difficulties associated with the changes encountered by staff within further education that result not only from the frequency or extent of new requirements but from the change processes used to introduce them and this may have led to what Orr (2009) refers to as “reform overload” (page 487). The management of change within organisations has been the focus of research by, for example, Burke and Litwin (1989) cited in Burke and Litwin (1992) and research specifically relating to change management within the field of education by, such as, Fullan (2001, 2007). He says:

“Most researchers now see three broad phases to the change process. Phase 1.. initiation, consists of the processes that lead up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change. Phase 11- implementation... involves the first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice. Phase 111.. institutionalisation-refers to whether the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition.” (2007, page 50).

Policies aimed at reforming further education instigate what Fullan (2007) referred to as the “initiation” phase of change and may alter the practice of vocational teachers. Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) illustrate how the regulatory regimes that colleges experienced post incorporation from 1993 increased significantly to ensure the assiduous use of public funds. The increase in auditing of colleges associated with the shift from Local Authority controls may have been more evident in the daily work experience of teachers. Etherington (2009) illustrates how lecturers within a college forming part of his research view the changes they have experienced in their role. He says:

“Lecturer A comments: “My job has totally changed in the last five years, there’s more paperwork and moderation”. Similarly, another colleague [says] “I wouldn’t mind filling in meaningful figures, it’s the meaninglessness of them that is frustrating” (Page 16).

The interpretation of vocational teachers of the “meaninglessness” of the changes that they encounter could be interpreted as a failure to introduce initiatives through sufficiently comprehensive processes and may illustrate the need to communicate the reasons for new ways of working more effectively. The impact of changes can be reduced, and failures in their introduction have been argued to have an opposite effect to that intended. Edwards et al (2007) cite Hodgkinson et al (2005), who say:

“...it is hard to identify major policy or managerial initiatives that have contributed to the improvement of learning in any site. However, we can document numerous examples of such initiatives that have made successful learning less likely. Tutors protect their students from these pressures as far as they can, and this is a major factor in the overwork and stress that many of them display.” (page 6).

The current Coalition government priorities reflect many of the previous governments and endorse further education colleges as an instrument via which the UK may

compete within the global market. The policy of successive governments is outlined by Keep (2014) who illustrates how their intentions aim:

“To make England/the UK “world class” on skills, so that our education and training system and the outcomes and qualifications levels it generates allows us to figure close to the top of the OECD’s various “league tables”. The Leitch Review of Skills (2006) was the apotheosis of this approach, but the current government’s endorsement of a “global skills race” (Truss 2014) shows that the importance of international comparisons remains undiminished within government.” (page 3).

This strategy could enhance the profile of the further education sector and be reflected in the reform of the professional practice of further education teachers. However, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009) pointed out that, with the exception of the target for higher education, the other aspirations for a world class skills system by 2020, that had been laid out in the Leitch Review (2006) will not be met. The funding reductions that the learning and skills sector is experiencing as a part of the current government’s budget provisions announced in 2013 require future policies for improvement to reflect how these will be achieved with less available resources.

The second phase of the change process outlined by Fullan (2001), “implementation”, requires the interpretation of the external factors generating the initiation phase to allow their introduction to practice in individual organisations. The interpretation of policy however may reflect other priorities identified by managers within the organisation. Edward et al (2007) say:

“We are mindful that not all the changes affecting the sector stem directly from government policy. As Spours et al (2007) discuss, institutions can be seen to “translate” government policy into systems of implementation that suit their local or administrative needs, which may or may not reflect accurately the intentions of those who designed the policy” (page 156).

The extent of changes in policy experienced within further education over recent years is evident and leads Edwards et al (2007) to ask two questions:

“Are staff simply reduced to responding to change, or do they still, in the midst of so much imposed change, find time and energy to be innovative in their own teaching, to make changes of their own volition?”

Do these changes strike at the tutors' "soul" (Ball, 2003), or do staff find ways of reconciling their personal professional motivation with the demands of others, ways of coping that still allow them to believe that they are doing the job they chose to do when they entered teaching?" (page 165).

In answering the questions they ask, Edwards et al (2007) believe that, in spite of the observations of Hodgkinson et al (2005), vocational teachers still find time within the plethora of initiatives that they face to reflect on their practice and initiate changes to improve their work in addition to initiatives imposed upon them that they are required to implement. Their response to their second question is equally positive as they consider the professionalism of vocational teachers:

"...included compliance with bureaucratic demands, but what they were truly enthusiastic about was the impact they could have on the lives of their learners. If that was the main driver of their practice, and their main source of motivation, frequent administrative changes might be an irritant, but their professional "soul" survived intact." (page 166).

The research of Edwards et al (2007) agrees with that of Smyth et al (2000) who believe that vocational teachers find space within the controls that confront them:

"...to pursue a course that they believe is in the long-term interests of the students in their care." (page 51).

They observe the resilience of vocational teachers within the context of the changes introduced to the further education sector. The third element of the change process outlined by Fullan (2001) is the "institutionalisation" of change. Whether a change that is introduced becomes incorporated into the way in which an organisation works, or withers due to attrition may reflect the success, or otherwise, of the process of change management used.

2.6.2 Hosting competitions

Fullan (2001) argues that the implementation of change requires consideration of the need for the change, clarity in explaining the change, recognising its complexity and ensuring its quality. The need for a new initiative to be "justified" within environments faced with overloaded improvement agendas is important. New initiatives exist within the context of other initiatives, each having relative priorities. The requirement for

clarity is essential in the process of change and may become more so where the extent of the introduction of a new initiative is considerable. The structure of skills competitions enables further education colleges to be engaged to varying extents. Their involvement extends from organising internal skills competitions within their organisation, to engaging in external skills competitions within the remit of UK Skills as entrants, suppliers of training managers or as hosts for regional and national competition finals. The extent of engaging in any initiative may influence the need for it to be “justified” and its purpose communicated clearly.

The literature outlined above relating to constructivism as an approach to learning for students is also relevant for vocational teachers with regard to “justifying” the use of an initiative. Kerka (1997) illustrates how the disposition of students is crucial in embracing learning. She says:

“Often neglected are dispositions...attitudes, values, and interests that help learners decide: Is it worth doing? Knowing “how” and “that” is not sufficient without the disposition to “do” (page 2).

The findings of Kerka (1997) may be more applicable when the extent of “justifying” initiatives increases due to the disruption they create for vocational teachers and vocational students. Changes to teaching within further education cited above (Jephcote and Salisbury (2009), Edwards et al (2007), illustrate the requirement for clarity and an understanding of the complexity of a new initiative, agreeing with the position of Fullan (2001). The rate and frequency of change may compromise its implementation and consequently reduce the quality of the intended outputs. Edward et al (2007) cite Lumby and Foskett (2005) who:

“.. warn of the dangers of equating evidence of changes with evidence of change:

“Changing the way things are done...does not necessarily change either the ultimate outputs of the system or the underlying principles that characterize the sector.” (page 156).

Fullan’s (2001) argument agrees with their view, that the role of the teacher influences the implementation of change. He says:

“In the final analysis it is the actions of the individual that count. Since interaction with others influences what one does, relationships with other teachers is a critical variable”. (page 84).

Edwards et al (2007) argue that the position of teaching staff is significant in the implementation of policy reforms. They say:

“Their position is pivotal; from the perspective of policy-makers, teaching staff may be seen as the last link in the policy chain, the ultimate implementers whose behaviour they seek to change, if the experience of learners is to change. From another perspective, teaching staff may be seen as the victims of change, obliged to react to dictats from above, even if this conflicts with their own assessment of their learners’ needs” (page 158).

The research of Hughes et al (2004) illustrates the positive effect hosting skills competitions can have on students within colleges. The project leader from one institution within her research said:

“It was interesting to see the effect that watching young professionals who had already been out at work for a couple of years had on the learners. None of them had seen a cookery competition at college before...” (page 21).

Vocational teachers seeing the positive benefits of hosting skills competitions for their students may address some of the observations from the literature above, where the management of the change processes required are secure.

2.6.3 The role of Middle Managers

An element of the change management processes underpinning the successful introduction of an initiative is sufficient management capacity. The development of managers in further education is an area addressed in advance of the workforce reforms. Success for All (2002) established the Centre for Excellence in Learning (CEL). The mission of CEL was; “To improve the standards of leadership and the diversity and talent pool of leaders in the learning and skills sector” (2004). CEL was succeeded by LSIS and subsequently the Education and Training Foundation. A theme within the leadership programmes for managers is distributed leadership. The awareness of this leadership style and exploration of its potential application through the leadership courses represents a change for some practitioners. Managers may

resist changes to their preferred and established ways of working, in line with the characteristics illustrated by Lewin (1948). Distributed leadership is an area of extensive educational research with its merits contested. Gleeson and Knights (2008) cite Lumby et al (2005) who say:

“Though a transformational style is considered to be the most effective way to improve organisational performance, line managers are more often seen as employing transactional approaches. Distributed leadership is often the distribution of operational responsibilities, rather than a distribution of power.” (page 8).

Illustrations of distributed power could include the allocation of budgetary responsibility to managers and staff at different tiers of an organisations structure. While the commitment to an initiative is required from the Principal and Senior Managers within a college, power over its delivery may be distributed. Coffield (2008) considers how policy may best be implemented across the further education sector by citing Thompson and William (2007), who advocate the use of both “tight” and “loose” control of power to achieve this aim. Their views may be replicable within an institution and across institutions and they point out:

“The “Tight but Loose” formulation combines an obsessive adherence to central design principles (the “tight” part) with accommodations to the needs, resources, constraints, and particulars that occur in any school or district (the “loose” part) but only where these do not conflict with the theory of action of the intervention.” (page 56).

The extent to which Middle Managers engage in the change management process may be determined by the nature of the initiative being introduced. Page (2011) argues that initiatives aimed at improving the experience of students, through enhancing teaching and learning, are more likely to be “tolerated” by Middle Managers. He believes that Middle Managers often resist, to differing extents and in different ways, the instructions of Senior Managers, often in an attempt to “shield” those whom they are responsible for from the excesses of “managerialism”, allowing their focus on vocational students to be maintained. However, he illustrates how the resistance of Middle Managers created by their distance from senior managers within further education colleges may create a lost opportunity to engage more managers, and consequently more vocational teachers, in the ways of working within colleges. Page (2011) says:

“This study suggests that first tier managers and senior managers rarely interacted, which serves to perpetuate the perception of conflicting values, even when other studies...suggest that senior managers share the values of teachers and first tier managers...greater direct and unfiltered interaction between senior and first tier managers may reduce the distance and, perhaps, allow resistance to become an act of participation rather than separation and to blur the dichotomy between the professional and managerial paradigms.” (page 10).

Etherington (2009) portrayed the role of middle managers within change processes as being agents of “obligation or compliance” (page 12). Many managers were expert teachers who, following promotion, acquire management responsibilities.

Mather and Worrall (2007) argue that the introduction of “new managerialism” within the further education sector creates:

“..a general tendency towards both work intensification and a relocation of job controls in managers’ rather than workers’ hands, illustrating how the application of the free market logic to public service delivery may be explicitly linked with .. work intensification, deskilling and “deprofessionalisation”” (page 113).

Gleeson and Shain (1999) argue that the role of middle managers within the process of change, and within the “new managerialism” is complex. They say:

“[middle managers] .. show how a variety of identities and responses [to change], though shaped and influenced by managerialism, are not determined by it. This suggests that managerialism is not as complete or uncontested as is often assumed and that we should look for innovative signs of professional life in new ways and places” (page 489).

The resilience of middle managers not to be determined by new managerial approaches prevalent across further education is mirrored in teaching staff. Edwards et al (2007) illustrated how teachers’ commitment to their students maintains their innovative practices during times when the challenges presented by further changes continue. They say:

“Even in this initiative-laden sector, some tutors were making space among the teaching, paperwork and assessment for reflective practice and individual development. This may be a therapeutic and effective coping strategy, a way of reasserting their own sense of professionalism, especially if, as Avis et al (2002) suggest, they may be feeling a sense of loss of control over teaching and learning” (page 166).

Fielding et al (2005) argue that the transfer of good practice between schools within an area encourages “joint practice development” and this may further respond to the concerns raised by Avis et al (2002) through emphasising the importance for vocational teachers of their practice and relationships with vocational students.

2.7 Research question 6: Can a specific initiative such as skills competitions act as an effective form of continuous professional development for vocational teachers?

2.7.1 Workforce reforms

The concept of continuous professional development is advocated for and, in some cases, required by professions. It was not until 2001 that it became a requirement for teachers and trainers working in further education colleges to hold a teaching qualification. New teachers were required to gain a recognised initial teaching qualification and the full professional status within five years of entering teaching in further education. The introduction of the workforce reforms to the further education sector, administered by the successive bodies illustrated above is one change amongst many for staff to absorb. Ofsted (2010), said:

“There was widespread welcome for the [workforce] reforms because of their contribution to improving the professional status of teachers and trainers, leading to an extension of the range of approaches to professional development” (page 4).

This view accorded to that of the then Chief Executive of the Institute for Learning, Tony Fazaeli, who said:

“The case is irresistible that qualified teachers and trainers who stay up to date in their subject and in teaching methods deserve proper high status... If FE has for too long been seen as the poor relation in the education sector [the Institute for Learning] is starting to address a vacuum in policy debate on FE pedagogy and professionalism” (2011).

A review of further education by Sir Andrew Foster (2005) included remarks relating to areas of reform within this sector and these included the introduction of national standards for vocational teachers. Foster (2005) said:

“Within the FE system, there needs to be new collective attention to...improve vocational and pedagogic skills through comprehensive workforce planning... through a comprehensive set of reforms across the whole of the FE system, its power to fuel economic achievement through helping individuals realise their personal potential will provide the basis for a progressive enhancement in FE’s standing and esteem in the nation’s eyes” (page 3).

Within these work force reforms further education teachers were required to pay an annual subscription for membership of the Institute for Learning. The trade unions representing vocational teachers engaged in a dispute with colleges due to the requirement to pay the subscription, a position that contributed to the requirements of these reforms being abandoned and the Institute for Learning being replaced with a new agency the Education and Training Foundation. This change produced a new set of Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training-England (2014), and a relaxation of the need for vocational teachers to hold qualifications. Coffield (2008) believes that through ensuring the centrality of teaching, learning and assessment, the purpose of vocational education will maintain learners as the focus of its activity. He says:

“...I am arguing for the professional development of tutors as the main lever for improving teaching and learning because of “a growing research base on the influences on student learning, which shows that teacher quality trumps virtually all other influences on student achievement” (Thompson and William 2007).” (page 23).

Opportunities for continuous professional development may “compete” with the other demands placed on vocational teachers and could represent challenges when determining the time available for this priority when compared to the time other demands may appear to need. For example the importance of providing sufficient structured feedback to vocational students in relation to their work be it associated with the use of skills competitions or more generally, is illustrated above. Coffield (2008) says:

“If rich feedback is to be given to all learners, then tutors need the **time** to read and reflect on their assignments, **time** to write encouraging stretching comments, and **time** to discuss these face-to-face with students.” (page 36, using his emphasis).

The research conducted by Lloyd et al (2012) agrees with Coffield's view. They provide the observations of a Head of Department in one college from their research, who says:

“What everybody lacks is the time. You sit down and talk to some of them [teachers] for a little while and you get these amazing ideas coming out and that's what they need is the time together to be able to thrash ideas out, inspire each other. Lack of time and space tended to encourage a more ad-hoc and individualised approach, with teachers sharing ideas with each other as and when the opportunity arose.” (page 4).

The lack of time available for vocational teachers for their professional development fails to recognise the requirements of the craft which they attempt to pass on to their students. Sennett (2008) says:

“Craftsmen take pride most in skills that mature. This is why simple imitation is not sustaining satisfaction: the skill has to evolve. The slowness of craft time serves as a source of satisfaction: practice beds in, making the skill one's own. Slow craft time also enables the work of reflection and imagination-which the push for quick results cannot. Mature means long: one takes lasting ownership of the skill.” (page 295).

Although Sennett (1988) recognises the tension that exists between the time required to exercise the ingredients of a “craft” within modern productive process, he illustrates how acquiring a “craft” enables a longevity and sustainability of the skills associated with it. The cultures that exist within colleges may determine whether an initiative such as skills competitions could act to support the acquisition of “craft” skills, and form an effective way for vocational teachers to continue to develop their practice.

Opportunities for Continuous Professional Development through an allocation of time and an investment in organisational improvement that involves evolution and incremental change are elements within, what was referred to above as the “scaffold” needed to support institutional improvement. The literature requires the iteration between institutional improvement and the use of an initiative such as skills competitions, containing “craft” to be investigated.

Villeneuve-Smith et al (2009) consider the purpose of Continuous Professional Development to be the maintenance of professional standards for vocational teachers and that this should involve:

“...continuously learning about:

- What they teach (updating their subject specialism)
- How they teach (refreshing teaching approaches)
- And the relevance of what they teach and the kind of learners they teach (institutional and national policy context)

The first two of these areas comprise the teachers “dual professionalism.” (page 8).

The “dual professionalism” and transformation from a prior “trade” identity to “becoming” a vocational teacher for those employed within further education colleges is discussed above as “dual identity”. The use of skills competitions as a part of the Continuous Professional Development may support this process. The guidance produced by LSIS (2012) illustrates how:

“Some colleges link continuous professional development activities to the competition work, seeing it as a valuable way of updating staff and making their teaching more relevant. In some cases the staff are taking coaching awards, enhancing their ability to coach and mentor their colleagues and competitors.” (page 24).

The attraction of coaching for vocational teachers is discussed above however the LSIS (2012) guidance illustrates how the use of skills competitions could enable opportunities to deploy this method with vocational students.

2.7.2 The Engagement of Vocational Teachers

The challenges facing vocational teachers in colleges across the UK, is to accommodate the plethora of initiatives illustrated above by Orr and Simmons (2009) and to navigate their transition of identity within this complex landscape. Colleges, like all organisations, vary and different environments may influence the engagement of vocational teachers with their continuous professional development and opportunities to contribute to, or accommodate, new initiatives.

The research of Fuller and Unwin (2004a, 2004 b and 2010) considers different cultures within organisations by illustrating how, what they call, “learning environments” either provide, or curtail opportunities for learning by those employed in these organisations. Coffield (2008) says of their research:

“...improving our cultures of learning calls for expansive, rather than restrictive, learning environments at all levels of the system. By the term “expansive”, Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) mean workplaces which, for example, offer a breadth of learning opportunities; planned time off-the-job for reflection and for courses on teaching and learning; support for all employees as learners; and the alignment of the teaching and learning goals of the institution with those of individuals.” (page 20).

Expansive and restrictive environments focus on how learning environments are created from the behaviours and practices that exist within organisations rather than prevailing company structures. Learning is seen by Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) as a dynamic, collective process. Their notion of expansive learning environments is reflected in the work of Engestrom (2001) who says:

“The object of expansive learning activity is to expand the entire activity system in which the learners are engaged. Expansive learning activity produces culturally new patterns of activity. Expansive learning at work produces new forms of work activity.” (page 139).

The opportunities to use skills competitions, to contribute to improvements within vocational education may require the existence of cultures similar to the “expansive learning environment” identified by Fuller and Unwin (2004a, 20004 b and 2010). The characteristics of “expansive work environments” compared to “restrictive work environments” are illustrated in Table 2b, below.

Table 2b

Organisational Learning Cultures

Expansive	Restrictive
Strong workforce learning infrastructure/department and dedicated staff	Workplace learning conceived narrowly as ‘events’
History of training/handing down training	A historical, lack of organisational

values	memory.
Learning valued throughout company kept as a constant.	Shift in business culture can cause sudden shift in approach to workplace learning.
Learning activities are proactive rather than reactive.	Learning activities may appear ad hoc
Employees given time to develop and reflect on their learning away from the workplace	All learning opportunities confined to immediate workplace/work station
Traditional, knowledge-based VQs valued, whole qualifications valued	Competence-based VQs and unit-based approach preferred for ease and speed.
Strong concept of apprenticeships/formation training model	Weak concept and little or no tradition of apprenticeship/formation training.
Broad approach to developing whole workforce and organisation	Emphasis on management training and behavioural change
Long-term investment in people	Purpose of activities often unclear
Good training reputation in local community	Reputation for routine jobs, problems with staff turnover
Purpose of workplace learning is enhanced capability as well as for immediate business goals	Relationship between workplace learning and performance not understood
Approach to workplace learning evolves/incremental change	Approach to workplace learning reflects short-term business strategy

Fuller and Unwin (2004 b)

The requirements of an initiative that includes dimensions of what Sennett (1998) defines as “craft”, appear more consistent with the characteristics of an “expansive environment”. James and Holmes (2012) illustrate from their research that:

“The underlying premise is that the more aspects of the workplace the employee was given access to – the elements identified as constituting an expansive work environment – the better the opportunities for developing skills and knowledge, leading to vocational excellence.” (page 10).

However the belief that expansive environments are “good” and restrictive environments “bad” requires contextualising. Avis (2009) illustrates how expansive environments may act to intensify the labour process and ignore the social antagonism at the site of waged labour. These “good” environments may merely provide a consensual framework to produce what “bad” environments also attempt to achieve, the production of surpluses for employers.

Fuller and Unwin (2004c) also introduce their term “learning territory” to reflect the different experiences of learners. They sub-divide “learning territories” into “learning regions”, comprising formal education, informal learning at home, and workplace learning. Apprentices studied within their research from relatively poor socio-economic backgrounds, when placed in restrictive work environments, did not overcome their disadvantages and only experienced a limited contribution to extend their “learning territory”. This observation may be useful in considering the experiences of vocational teachers as it recognises the multiple sources influencing their learning.

Lee et al (2004) extend the work of Fuller and Unwin (2004c) and suggest that there may be other “learning regions” to those identified by Fuller and Unwin (2004c) that go beyond the physical environment and could include gender, class, ethnicity, religion and the membership of sub-cultures.

The behaviours and practices that Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) recognise in expansive and restrictive environments could influence the engagement of vocational teachers in continuous professional development or in any initiative. The situated nature of learning environments, as Evans et al (2006) illustrate, show how different interpretations of expansive environments may enable the use of skills competitions and that these could vary between colleges of further education.

There may also be a need to consider the varying ingredients for the continuous professional development of vocational teachers. Villeneuve-Smith et al (2009) illustrate how the guidelines for vocational teacher Continuous Professional Development, produced by the Institute for Learning, require teachers to continue to develop the components that comprise a vocational teachers “dual professionalism”.

Timperley (2011) says:

“...much professional development in schools has little or no impact where it matters: in the classroom. In so many cases professional development has occurred but no learning has resulted.” (page 70).

For vocational teachers to develop professionally it is consistent for teachers to follow a similar approach to that of how students learn. The nature of vocational teachers, and their parallel experience to that of their students in “becoming” a professional, may indicate that a constructivist approach to their Continuous Professional Development could be appropriate.

Villeneuve-Smith et al (2009) say:

“...it could be argued that good CPD should practice what it preaches. Why should the [further education] sector accept development activities that don't reflect in their delivery what you already know about good teaching and learning? You already understand that the **time** in front of the teacher is just “the visible part of the iceberg” in the process of teaching and learning. In the same way effective CPD applies a full armoury of techniques to effectively develop domain knowledge, skills and reflective practice.” (page 6).

The potential that skills competitions offer is an opportunity for Continuous Professional Development that addresses both “dual identities”, as a teacher and vocational specialist, and they could engage vocational teachers through applying their learning in the way in which it is applied for students. For vocational teachers the application of their vocational identity may support their development as a teacher. Petty (2014) cites Hattie (2009) in arguing the value of applied learning by saying:

“Many teachers say active learning would be great “if they had the time”. But the research shows that if you make the time for effective active learning by doing less didactic teaching, then your students will do better.” (page 30).

The tension many vocational teachers feel in relation to the time they have to carry out their role is emphasised by Coffield (2008), but Hattie (2009) offers an alternative perspective to this tension by suggesting how reallocating the time available may enable active learning to take place. Through experiencing active learning via the use of skills competitions vocational teachers may firstly, experience higher levels of

achievement similar to those witnessed with students, as illustrated by Marzano et al (2001) cited by Petty (2014), and secondly, modify their vocational practice. The practical illustrations of how to use applied learning, provided for members of the Institute for Learning by Petty (2014) include ways in which feedback methods can include self and peer assessment, as used within constructivism.

They propose that vocational teachers would benefit from ‘multi-membership’ of communities of practice to incorporate their “dual professionalism” and support their development. Viskovic and Robson (2001) illustrate how vocational teachers are “situated” within their journey to “becoming” a professional and require informal learning gained from interaction with others to enable their transition. Organisations are rarely uniform or consistent across their entirety and within different vocational areas of further education colleges, many alternative ways of working exist, and correspondingly opportunities for “situated” learning will vary. These variations compound the differences of vocational teachers in relation to their journey of transition to their professional identity. This may be further exacerbated as those engaged in skills competitions travel outside of their college to attend skills competitions. The exposure these vocational teachers experience to a broader range of communities of practice may enable a speedier or more complete transition to their new professional identity.

The development of communities of practice may “incubate” the use of skills competitions for Continuous Professional Development. To accommodate the development of these communities may extend the planning required prior to the introduction of this initiative and accord with the approach adopted in Finland (CEDEFOP 2014).

Viskovic and Robson (2001) say:

“Provision of full and appropriate training and professional development opportunities for members and newcomers in teaching departments should be part of a teaching community’s practice. Failure to make such provision would suggest that “we can invest in the learning of the nation without investing adequately in the learning of the staff who are directly involved in helping that learning to happen” (Bathmaker 1999, page 191)”. (page 235).

The opportunities to use applied learning to support the engagement of vocational teachers in Continuous Professional Development and subsequently greater

participation in new initiatives such as skills competitions, represents a challenge, not least due to the potential resource implications, however the literature above would indicate it is one worth undertaking.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 considers the design of this research, including the methodology and methods used. The section also addresses issues relating to access, ethics, validity and the approach taken to collect and analyse data. The themes of this research; the perception of vocational teachers and implications for vocational students of the use of skills competitions, and the need for a Corporate Approach to the initiative, along with the research questions for this thesis, were produced by the literature reviewed in chapter 2. These research questions are what De Vaus (2001) defines as descriptive. He believes that when considering descriptive research questions, the level of abstraction is significant. By this he is referring to the extent of abstraction within the research that is represented by the distance between the perceptions of individuals and the implications of their views. Abstraction will reduce where perceptions relate to individual issues, as opposed to those of an organisational level. While both perceptions are significant for this thesis, as the research questions refer to both individual perceptions of vocational teachers, their vocational students and to the whole organisation, the unit of analysis, discussed below, remains at the level of each individual case study college.

3.2 Philosophical approach

The philosophical position that forms the basis of this research is reflected in the ontological and epistemological influences on the research design. Crotty (1998) says that:

“Ontology is the study of being. It is concerned with “what is”, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such. [it sits] alongside epistemology informing the theoretical perspective, for each theoretical perspective embodies a certain way of understanding *what is* (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *what it means to know* (epistemology)” (page 10).

In defining epistemology Crotty (1998) says:

“[A] theoretical perspective...is a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. It involves knowledge, therefore, and embodies a certain understanding of what is entailed in knowing, that is, *how we know what we know*...Maynard (1994, page 10) explains the relevance of

epistemology...”Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Page 8).

Ontology may give rise to two extreme positions. In one, “reality” and “truth” are “given” and are external to any individual, whereas alternatively, “reality” and “truth” are contained within the perceptions of individuals. These positions align epistemologically to different claims of what constitutes knowledge, of what is “real” and whether it is possible to discover absolute “truth”. The first produces an “objective” position, where meaning exists “outside” of consciousness, and a theoretical perspective associated with the ontological and epistemological position of positivism. The second, a stance in which knowledge is “constructed” through the engagement of individuals with the world, and is aligned to a standpoint in which reality and truth are interpreted. Given that this research has as its source the views and experiences of vocational staff working within two further education colleges, it is clear that the notion of absolute truth is not appropriate here. This research considers social practices and assumes that human action is meaningful and requires understanding within social contexts. Myers (2008) considers the theoretical perspective that is embedded within this form of enquiry is interpretive, and defines this through saying;

“Interpretivism, as the name implies, involves researchers to interpret elements of the study, thus interpretivism integrates human interest into a study. Accordingly interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only possible through social construction such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments” (page 38).

It is clear that the ontological and epistemological position adopted by this research therefore is positioned within the interpretivist theoretical perspective and this philosophical stance the basis of this thesis.

3.3 Wider frameworks

This research design is influenced by its location within a wider context. A way to contextualize the research is to consider it within the “five knowledge domains” identified by Ribbins and Gunter (2002). Table 3a below, illustrates the “domains” and their meanings.

Table 3a

Knowledge Domain	Meaning
Conceptual	Concerned with issues of ontology and epistemology, conceptual clarification.
Critical	Concerned to reveal and emancipate leaders and followers from social injustice.
Humanistic	Gathers and theorizes from the experiences and biographies of those who are leaders and managers.
Evaluative	Abstracts and measures the impact of leadership effectiveness on organizational outcomes.
Instrumental	Provides leaders with effective leadership strategies to deliver organizational outcomes.

(Ribbins and Gunter 2002).

Although there are elements within this research of three of the “domains” identified above, the humanistic, evaluative and instrumental, the closest alignment is with the humanistic “domain”. The experiences and biographies of vocational staff and their perceptions of the use of skills competitions could influence opportunities for enhancing the quality of vocational education within colleges of further education.

A second framework that enables this research to be contextualised was devised by Wallace and Poulson (2003). They consider five “intellectual projects”, with each having a different rationale, value stance towards an aspect of the social world and each producing different questions that are asked about the social world. The “intellectual project” they describe as “knowledge for understanding” (page 18), is most closely aligned to this research as it intends to understand policy and practice through theory and research. However, they also interpret areas of research as

“knowledge for action” (page 18), in which the rationale is to improve policy makers’ efforts to improve practice through research and evaluation. An intended outcome of this research is to produce findings that could be presented at conferences, illustrating the potential use of skills competitions and their appropriate application within colleges to enhance the quality of vocational education, and this intention may indicate that this research also falls within this “intellectual project”.

3.4 Research Strategy

A research strategy based on an interpretive theoretical perspective focuses on understanding the views of individuals and their thoughts on issues surrounding the use of skills competitions within the case study colleges. These will be set in unique contexts and will provide interpretations from which it is likely “multiple realities” will emerge. Crotty (1998) argues the interpretivist approach evolved as a response to efforts to develop a natural science of the social, and cites Weber who he says that:

“...in the human science we are concerned with *Verstehen* (understanding).. [and].. look for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (page 67).

An interpretive approach is consistent with the philosophical position adopted and the context of this thesis within the wider frameworks discussed earlier. Pizam and Mansfield (2009) show how interpretivism seeks “meaning” that is relative in relation to context and culture. They believe the information that is sought relates to what people think and do; what kind of problems they are confronted with and how they deal with them.

3.5 Research Methodology

The use of case studies is consistent with the interpretivist basis of this research. Case studies focus on particular issues in depth and are concerned with relationships and processes as opposed to outcomes. The use of a case study for this research reflects the position of Robson (2002), who says:

“Case study is a strategy for doing research that involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon, within its real life context, using multiple sources of evidence” (page 178).

This research considers a contemporary phenomenon, the use of skills competitions within further education and the perceptions of those within the “real life context” will indicate areas for leaders to consider in relation to enhancing the quality of vocational education.

This research uses two colleges as case studies, and therefore a multiple case design is used as, what Yin (1989), cited in de Vaus (2001), defines as the “holistic” unit of analysis, with “retrospective” data collected from people who have participated in or experienced past events. Within each case study there are “embedded” units of analysis (Yin 1989, cited in de Vaus 2001) in that only vocational teachers working in the areas of construction and hairdressing and beauty therapy were interviewed or completed on-line questionnaires, although two floristry teachers were interviewed from College A due to their organisation including this vocation within their hairdressing and beauty therapy department. However, as is mentioned above, the findings from this thesis use the “holistic” unit of analysis as the basis for conclusions and recommendations.

Each institution chosen for this multiple case study research is a general further education college, delivering courses across a similar range of vocational areas, to approximately the same number of vocational students. One case study has a tradition of skills competitions and a history of entering students into skills competitions each year, and the other has less experience. Each case study recruits vocational students from the age of sixteen from their localities to further education courses and apprenticeships. Both case studies also provide higher education courses that enable progression routes for vocational students from further education programmes. The Ofsted grade of each case study is “Good”, although College A was previously an “Outstanding” college and has been recognised in both of its previous Ofsted reports as using skills competitions to promote vocational learning. This case study hosts UK Skills competition regional and national finals, and has co-hosted the squad and team selection events for the UK team representing the country in Worldskills events in Calgary in 2009 and London in 2011. The Principal of this case study is a UK Skills Regional Champion, is the Chair Person of the Association of Colleges Worldskills portfolio group, and a member of the Skills Show Board; a group that oversees and promotes the Skills Show, an annual event raising awareness of vocational education and hosting finals for a

number of UK skills competitions at the National Exhibition Centre, near to Birmingham.

Both cases studies allocate resources to support their engagement in skills competitions, although the nature of their allocations varies. College A has a Competition Strategy and a budget specifically allocated for skills competitions, The Innovation Fund, which comprises £100,000 annually, representing less than 1% of the organisation's annual turnover, with this fund also supporting other innovation as and when it arises. Each case study has a Senior Manager with overall responsibility for skills competitions however their involvement is limited in the operations of their organisations engagement. College A has a Competitions Coach, interviewed within this research (R2, College A, Hairdressing) who oversees co-ordinators of skills competitions in vocational areas, such as R3(College A, Beauty Therapy), training for vocational teachers engaged in skills competitions, and a Competitions Club, arranged as extra-curricular activity for vocational students wishing to enter competitions. This case study has produced a number of UK Skills team and squad members in recent years. College B allocates resources for skills competitions via remission of three hours per week from their contractual teaching commitment for co-ordinators within specific vocational areas. These co-ordinators are vocational teachers, one of whom, R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy), was interviewed as a part of this research. There is no specific budget to support skills competitions and materials and other costs associated with competition entry are sourced from general college budgets.

There are practical considerations that support the use of these two colleges within a multiple case study that include permission to access the field for the researcher, gained through professional relationships with each Principal resulting from working at both colleges, although the most recent engagement was over eight years ago, and the relatively low costs incurred and little time spent travelling due to their locations in the West Midlands. The case study colleges deliver courses from a number of locations, with College A occupying a more rural setting than College B, which is located across a city centre.

The selection of each of the multiple case studies reflects the framework illustrated above of Wallace and Poulson (2003), where this research can be interpreted as

attempting to gain “knowledge for action”, due to the intention to present the findings to conferences in the future to influence policy. The observations of Hakim (2000) are consistent with positioning this study within this “intellectual project” as she says;

“One type of organizational case study that is exclusive to policy research is the best practice case study, which is used to illustrate and thereby promote and encourage, organizational policies and practices that are seen as successful or exemplary” (page 69).

Multiple case studies afford the opportunity to compare and to consider how initiatives are used within further education colleges, and can produce, what Denscombe (2007), refers to as “discovery led” research, which is closely associated with the approach de Vaus (2001) calls “theory building”. These categories contrast to what Denscombe (2007) calls “theory led” research, or de Vaus (2001) calls “theory testing” research. De Vaus (2001) says:

“The difference between theory testing and theory building approaches is that in the former we begin with a set of quite specific propositions and then see if these work in real world situations. In the theory building model we begin with only a question and perhaps a basic proposition, look at real cases and end up with a more specific theory or set of propositions as a result of examining actual cases” (page 223).

The view of de Vaus (2001) is reflected in this research conducted using multiple case studies.

3.6 Research methods

This research used semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with the predominance of data collected being qualitative, along with a lesser amount of quantitative data. The anonymity of the on-line questionnaire responses produces undifferentiated analysis between the case studies. As a consequence the semi-structured interviews are the basis of the data used to discuss each case study college with the data from the on-line questionnaire being illustrative of both colleges.

Prior to undertaking this research I was a part of the project team investigating, “The use of Skills Competitions in Further Education Colleges in the East Midlands” (2011) on behalf of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). The researcher obtained permission to use a part of the LSIS project as a pilot study for

this research. The results of the pilot study led to revisions in the research methods, specifically with the conversion of a paper based questionnaire to an on-line questionnaire and changes to some of the questions used in the final on-line questionnaire. Similarly the semi-structured interview questions were developed, along with the timing of the schedule for the fieldwork and the scope of the interviewees and questionnaire respondents being narrowed to vocational staff, as opposed to including vocational students.

Activities relating to skill competitions within colleges are at their height in June, due to finals taking place in the annual cycle of competition. The completion of students' assignments for their vocational courses also takes place at this time, with vocational teachers and students' working to ensure course work is prepared for verification before the end of the academic year in July. However, as access to the case studies was agreed by the relevant college principals for the month of July requests for students to answer on-line questionnaires or to attend semi-structures interviews was removed to avoid distracting them at this important time within the academic year.

The questions in the pilot study questionnaire and semi-structured interview for vocational teachers are contained at Appendix A (i and ii). The questions for vocational teachers were modified to reflect themes that emerged from the review of literature, specifically relating to the introduction of initiatives within further education, the selection process for students entering competitions, and the way in which competitions are organised within each college within this multiple case study research.

The pilot study was completed by three vocational students, whose responses were destroyed, and by three vocational teachers. The most significant issue to arise from the responses of the vocational teachers was that single words were used to answer the "closed" questions in the questionnaire and during the semi-structured interviews. Denscombe (2007) illustrates the benefits of "open" and "closed" questions, and indicates how "closed" questions can have a series of alternative responses. The development of the on-line questionnaire produced an instrument more able to avoid the difficulties associated with the "closed" questions. The statements required respondents to indicate their position against a five point scale,

as illustrated by Likert et al (1993) to reflect the strength of the view held. The on-line questionnaire is contained in Appendix B.

Requests were made for on-line questionnaires to be completed by thirty eight vocational teachers, with ten working in the construction area of each case study college and ten in the hair and beauty department of College A and eight in this department at College B, due to alternative staff commitments at the time of the request. The samples selected for the on-line questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews reflects a technique that Denscombe (2007) refers to as “purposeful”, Glaser and Strauss (1967) as “theoretical” and Hakim (2000) as “focused”. Hakim (2000) says:

“Focused sampling is the selective study of particular persons, groups or institutions, or of particular relationships, processes or interactions that are expected to offer especially illuminating examples, or to provide especially good tests for propositions of a broad nature” (page 170).

The vocational areas chosen have skills competitions that take place each year and as a consequence offered the potential to illicit data relating to this research. Responses to the on-line questionnaire were received from twenty eight vocational teachers, 12 from College A and 16 from College B, representing an overall response rate of 74%. The responses were collated using the Survey Monkey software and a report produced.

Twenty two semi-structured interviews took place, with six hairdressing and beauty therapy staff from each case study, and six construction staff from College B and four from this area at College A; due to one interviewee having alternative commitments and another absent through sickness. The composition of the interviewees included a middle manager from each vocational area within each case study, with the remaining respondents being vocational teachers. No Senior Managers were interviewed as a part of this research as the perceptions sought were of those “receiving” as opposed to initiating decisions. The staff members had a range of exposure to skills competitions and varying degrees of recent experience. Some staff had no experience of competitions but worked in the relevant vocational areas, within sufficient proximity of the competitions to have an awareness of their existence. The experience of staff included engagement in competitions in previous years. The duration of each staff interview was approximately an hour. The

researcher collected data by recording, and later transcribing the interviews, an illustration of which is contained at Appendix C.

Several methods, consistent with an interpretivist approach, of collecting data were considered. These included the methods chosen along with observations and focus groups. Observations were discarded as they would not enable the perceptions sought to be collected. Convening focus groups may have been inconvenient for the colleges that were the case studies as access to several members of staff, constituting a significant proportion of a specific department, at one time could impede the operational needs of the vocational areas.

While it was recognised that a possible weakness with the use of on-line questionnaires is the potential response rate, this was not seen as a limiting factor in its use in this research. The endorsement each case study gave for the request for staff members to complete the on-line questionnaire and the ease of access respondents had to computers to undertake the exercise produced the response rate of 74% and vindicated the use of this method.

The semi-structured interviews generated the “richness” of the data sought by this research, reflecting the epistemological basis of the design and the unit of analysis of this research. Hannan (2007) says that semi-structured interviews provide:

“...considerable flexibility about how and when issues are raised, and for a considerable amount of additional topics to be built [into] the dynamics of conversational exchange” (page 2).

The use of a semi-structured interview for this research is appropriate, when the views of Denscombe (2007) are considered. He says that the semi-structured interview:

“...let[s] the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. The answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest”. (page 176).

He goes on to illustrate the advantages of this method as those contained in the Table 3b below.

Table 3b

Advantages in the use of interviews

Advantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information can be gathered in depth and detail. Issues can be pursued over a relatively lengthy period.• Valuable insights can be gained due to the depth of information gathered.• Simple equipment is required together with conversational skills.• Data is based on the informants' priorities, opinions and ideas.• Flexibility in data collection. Lines of enquiry can be developed during an interview.• Validity can be established as the data is collected.• As interviews are scheduled at a convenient time and location a high response rate is guaranteed.• A rewarding experience for the respondent who may enjoy the opportunity to share their insights.

Denscombe (2007 pages 202 and 203)

While the time consuming nature of interviews is a recognised weakness of this method and the costs associated with both time and travel may also deter their use, they were not seen as impeding the field work for this research and the advantages of this method were judged to outweigh the disadvantages.

As part of a case study approach the methods used produced quantifiable and qualitative data, but these are not intended to generate statistical generalizations.

Denscombe (2007) says:

“..cases are not randomly selected; they are selected on the basis of known attributes.. Instances selected for an experiment or large scale survey are chosen on a random basis to ensure as far as possible that they do *not* represent any specific factors relating to the variable that is being studied, but quite the opposite is true when it comes to case study research” (page 39).

The case studies used for this research represented different lengths of experience in engaging in skills competitions.

3.7 Criteria for judging the quality of Quantitative and Qualitative research.

The difference between quantitative and qualitative research is often interpreted as fundamental and flows from the contrasting epistemological basis from which each are derived. Quantitative research, as is illustrated above, is often based on a positivist epistemology. The criteria for judging quantitative research reflects the positivist's requirement to demonstrate internal validity, external validity (or generalisation), reliability and objectivity (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Internal validity requires that quantitative research studies measure or test what they intend to measure and consider any cause or effect relationships between independent and dependent variables. Internal validity can be jeopardised by extraneous variables, such as history; maturation, testing and selection (Campbell and Stanley, 1966). External validity is established where the findings of research enable broader conclusions to be made for larger populations who were not included in a specific study. Instances that may undermine external validity include pretesting subjects prior to the study; the setting in which studies take place and limitations that arise from multiple studies in relation to their ability to generalise (Campbell and Stanley, 1966). The reliability required by quantitative researchers is to show if their work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, similar results would be obtained. The objectivity sought by positivists, Patton (1990) associates with the use of instruments in science that are not dependent on human skill or perception. He recognises however that the use of methods such as questionnaires and tests inevitably introduce an element of bias as they are designed by people.

The epistemological basis of qualitative research in contrast is interpretive as it considers an "objective truth" a false concept. As a consequence the criteria required by quantitative researchers cannot be addressed in the same way in qualitative research. However corresponding terminology has been proposed firstly, in an attempt to illustrate how the robustness of qualitative research can be judged while secondly, creating a distance from the positivist paradigm.

Guba (1981), cited in Shenton (2004) constructs corresponding criteria to those used by quantitative researchers. These are:

- “a) credibility (in preference to internal validity);
- b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalizability);
- c) dependability (in preference to reliability);
- d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity).” (page 64).

Shenton (2004) points out how these corresponding constructs provide trustworthiness for qualitative research projects. He says:

“In addressing credibility, investigators attempt to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented. To allow transferability, they provide sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork for a reader to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting. The meeting of the dependability criteria is difficult in qualitative work, although researchers should at least strive to enable a future investigator to repeat the study. Finally, to achieve confirmability, researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not their own predispositions.” (page 63).

Of these criteria Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness within qualitative research. Shenton (2004) illustrates a number of provisions that researchers can adopt to ensure the credibility of their work and these include the use of established research methods; a familiarity with the culture of organisations participating in research, using random sampling, tactics to help ensure honesty in the contribution of respondents, iterative questioning and peer scrutiny. In relation to my study the trustworthiness of the research is supported through the use of established research methods and my familiarity with the cultures of the two case study colleges.

The research uses case studies and Bassey (2002) proposes replacing the term reliability with that of trustworthiness for this methodology in a similar way to the alternative provided by Guba (1981), saying:

“Reliability is an impractical concept for case study since by its nature case study is a one off event and therefore not open to exact replication” (page 111).

Within the requirements he states to establish trustworthiness in case studies he believes a researcher must have a prolonged engagement with the data source; there must have been sufficient triangulation of data leading to analytical statements, and that a critical friend has challenged the findings of the research thoroughly. In relation to these criteria I analysed the data collected for this study, along with that from the pilot study over an extensive period of time. The composition of the semi-structured interview respondents included a middle manager from each vocational area within both case studies enabling the perspectives of a range of respondents to strengthen the triangulation achieved. The critical friends referred to by Bassey (2002), for this thesis were my supervisors who have been crucial in ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.8 The position of the researcher in the project.

The position of the researcher within the field is significant in any research as is illustrated by Hargreaves (1972) who says:

“All social systems...consist of a complex structure of interrelated positions...These positions are really categories of persons with certain attributes who hold certain structured relationships with members of other positions.” (page 70).

My position in gathering the qualitative data for this thesis requires that I recognise I am an “insider” within the further education sector and in work relating to skills competitions, as a result of knowledge and experience gained from working in senior roles within colleges for many years and through acting as a “Worldskills Regional Champion”. In addition I am a member of the Association of Colleges Worldskills Portfolio Group and a Director and member of the Board of the Association of Colleges. As a consequence the challenge to address was what Wright-Mills (1959) referred to as making the familiar strange. However exposure to the training I experienced to undertake this research equipped me to accommodate this challenge.

My position, acquired through professional roles and experience, confers a level of expert understanding and extends to having worked in the roles of those responding to this research, although in different vocational areas. My expert status aligned to the process I undertook in being trained to ensure what was familiar to me was

experienced as “strange”, helped to establish the trustworthiness necessary to enable me to apply the criteria outlined above of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, to endorse the legitimacy of the data gathered, its analysis and the subsequent conclusions reached. My position within my profession also enables the recommendations made in the conclusion of my thesis to have credibility in the organisations identified, through my access to senior officials working across vocational education and skills competitions.

The interpretivist approach acknowledges and anticipates the effects of the possible influence of the researcher on the respondents to both interview and on-line questionnaires and incorporates this context into the analysis of outcomes. As is mentioned above, I have worked at both colleges used as case studies, however not in the recent past. While the respondents to interview and the on-line questionnaire knew of this, the majority had been employed by each college in the time since my departure. These respondents were least likely to be influenced by, what Denscombe (2003) refers to as the “interviewer effect”, although it is impossible to remove this effect completely. The behaviour of the respondents however illustrated during the interviews that they were answering the questions fully and they were assured by me of the confidential nature of the interview.

3.9 Ethics

This research complied with the ethical requirements of the University of Birmingham and the application made for ethical review is attached at Appendix D. This form illustrates how the scope of the research was reduced as it was submitted at the stage of the pilot study. Subsequently the involvement of vocational students within this research was removed due to the time at which the fieldwork took place. This research also complied with the British Educational Research Association “Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2004), and ensured the entitlements of participants to voluntarily consent to their involvement and their right to withdraw for any, or no reason, at any time. Denscombe (2003) argues that researchers may be polite, responsive and neutral in order to put the respondent at ease but it is not possible to change our professional role. The interviews took place within the case studies, in rooms familiar to the respondents and the on-line questionnaires were completed in venues determined by each individual.

Refreshments were provided for the interviews and the privacy and comfort of the offices used contributed to providing a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in which in depth interviews could take place

Electronic access to staff to disseminate on-line questionnaires was enabled for me by each of the case study colleges. The use of email addresses without the infringement of data protection was possible through the permission of colleague Principals, whose colleges were used as case studies. The on-line questionnaires, distributed by the case study colleges, included an email from me requesting its completion. Whilst an explanation of the questionnaire was necessary, and the sender of the email provided legitimacy for the request, the source could influence the responses. This influence could manifest itself in the response rate of 74%, or in positive responses provided to “please” the college, and “endorse” support for skills competitions. The accompanying email acted to “frame” the request and highlighted the need to acknowledge, that whilst my role benefitted access, cost, and support to administer the on-line questionnaire, it may directly or indirectly influence responses. All respondents to the on-line questionnaire and to the semi-structured interview were informed that the outcomes of the research could be made available to them and the majority requested feedback from this research upon its completion. The Principal of each case study has also asked for a copy of this thesis to be provided, following this opportunity being afforded to them.

3.10 Analysing the data

The interview data collected for this research was analysed by the process described by Denscombe (2007). He outlines four tasks to complete to interpret data: code the data, categorize the codes, identify themes and relationships amongst the themes and codes, develop concepts and arrive at some generalized statements. This process is consistent with the approach outlined by Gunter (1999). The on-line questionnaire answers were printed to allow a matrix to be populated and the statement responses were quantified via the use of software. From the interview transcripts, supported by the on-line questionnaire answers, patterns emerged using the matrix referencing the data.

The semi-structured interview allowed questions, as Hannan (2007), says, "...to elicit information about attitudes and opinions, perspectives and meanings..." (page 2). The interview questions provided the opportunity for responses that elaborated on the indications of the strength of feelings of the respondents to the statements within the on-line questionnaire, as indicated by the Lickert et al (1993) scale.

Wragg (1978), cited in Hannan (2007) provides guidance of what to avoid when analysing interview data. He believes researchers may become stereotypes such as, "the squirrel", "the ego-tripper", "the optimist", "the amateur therapist", or use a "Guillotine". He uses these categories as indicators of the ways in which researchers can interpret data and undermine the credibility of their work.

Rather than generalize from the two case studies De Vaus (2001) cites the research of Denzin (1978), who proposes, what he calls, "analytic induction" (page 263). This requires an iterative process in which case studies should be carried out to continue the review of a theory, and they should include cases that disprove the proposition, until a proposition that accounts for all the cases is reached.

The process proposed by Denzin (1978), cited by de Vaus (2001), is a reflection of the limitations of this research. The use of samples from multiple case studies in specific vocational areas within colleges of general further education may produce findings that are not replicable in other areas. However, whilst the sample of staff members within the research are not representative of others within further education, the data collected from them represents their perceptions and remains valid due to its "trustworthiness", as defined above, by Bassey (2002).

Chapter 4: Presentation of the Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the findings of this research and is arranged to reflect the three themes that emerged, associated with the six research questions. The structure of this chapter draws on the guidance provided by Gunter (1999), in relation to analysing the qualitative data collected from the semi structured interviews and this is supported by the illustrative quantitative data produced by on-line questionnaires. This data is triangulated by comparisons being made between the responses to the semi-structured interview from each case study within this multiple case study.

It became clear that the use of skills competitions was seen positively by the respondents but their introduction and organisation within each case study college varied. Responses from the semi-structured interviews are used as quotes to illustrate specific themes, and quantifiable data from the on-line questionnaires supports or contrasts the quotes made. The anonymity of the respondents to the interviews is maintained with each being assigned a reference (R 1 to R 22). The references are ordered to reflect the chronology of interviews that took place at the case studies, within each vocational area, as illustrated in Table 4a below:

Table 4a

Categories of respondent

R1 to R8	Case Study A - Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy (including 2 Floristry lecturers)
R9 and R10	Case Study A – Construction
R11 to R14	Case Study B – Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy
R15 to R20	Case Study B – Construction
R21 to R22	Case Study B – Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

The middle managers interviewed from within the vocational areas in each case study were R2 (College A, Hairdressing), R9 (College A, Construction), R14 (College B, Hairdressing) and R15 (College B, Construction). All other respondents to this research, for both interview and on-line questionnaire, as is mentioned above, were vocational teachers.

The text within Chapter 4 uses terms to illustrate the proportion of respondents forming specific opinions or holding particular views. The words used within the text represent a quantifiable number of respondents. Table 4b below, provides the details of how the terms correspond to the number of respondents answering in a way to be recorded within the matrix as a result of their response to an interview question.

Table 4b

Categories of response

Semi-Structured Interview Responses		Questionnaire Responses
Term	Number of Interviewees	Percentage of Responses
All	22	100%
Most	17-21	Between 75% and 99%
Majority	12-16	Between 50% and 74%
Several	7-11	Between 49% and 28% 25%
Some	1-6	Between 27% and 1%
None	0	0%

The findings from the data relating to the three themes that emerged, along with the research questions associated with each theme, will now be considered.

Vocational Teachers

This theme provided six findings, three relating to Research Question 1, and three relating to the Research Question 2.

4.2 Research question 1: In what ways do skills competitions affect the practice of vocational teachers?

The first finding from the data relating to research question 1 from both Case studies was that relationships between vocational teachers and vocational students were improved through the use of skills competitions. 96% of on-line questionnaire responses either agreed or strongly agreed that skills competitions built relationships and R16 (College B, Construction) showed how his practice as a vocational teacher is affected by skills competitions. He says:

“I think sometimes when someone enters a completion you try to treat them as, you treat them as an equal. Well you try to treat them as an equal, to break down any barriers...They’re very different [students] from my own personal approach, as a teacher, lesson time, you know, we start at 8:30, I know we had this slot to work to, I kind of threw the rules away”.

The changes introduced by R16 (College B, Construction) mirror a coaching approach being used with his vocational students who enter skills competitions and a more relaxed one to one relationship. The support to encourage coaching with skills competition entrants was more developed in College A where R3 (College A, Beauty Therapy) commented:

“...the college has been quite good here, because a couple of years ago, we did a coaching course, and they brought somebody in externally. Kind of life coaching, whatever... we talked through the processes, which we were able to pass on to students, and so that was good...”

R10 (College A, Construction) discussed specific training he had undertaken to support learners in preparation for skills competitions and how this had developed his ability as a teacher, saying:

“... it’s getting people’s mind-set right, because we can train ... you can try and encourage people’s skills as much as you want, and try and try to get their skills better, but if the mind-set is not right before you start, if they are a negative person, and is always looking at the glass is always half empty, if you can’t change that, as soon as something goes wrong, they’ll go back. So, I think it’s around mentoring as well, there was a neuro-linguist....NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), they’re programming like. I think that could be really useful as well, to try and reinforce a change in habits, and making people think in good ways, and hopefully then it improves their mind-set. Hopefully, things like that would be useful, especially from my point of view, coaching and NLP.”

The one to one nature of the practice of vocational learners is reflected in the respondents’ answers and how support for coaching is welcomed. Through working closely with individual students skills competitions can act as a means by which learning is applied, and this was the second finding from the data relating to this research question. Practical ways of applying learning were provided by the respondents answering the on-line questionnaire. 54% felt that vocational skills could be refined via the use of competitions and skills competitions were seen as being opportunities to develop vocational teachers through providing additional assessment opportunities (27%) and increases in the range of teaching methods (34%). Having used skills competitions, opportunities within the learning process for feedback is an area commented on by two of the respondents and is combined with the potential to promote coaching by the observations of R6 (College A, Beauty Therapy) who said:

“...I think that the best sort of training you can have, is by seeing all of the feedback sheets, to review exactly what they’re looking for, and what it is they’re saying. A [colleague] she judges competitions, and so she has got a lot of experience in judging, and so that helps, and so we can sort of feed from that...I think coaching would be helpful, but that said, when we’re working in working environments, we’re coaching them all of the time...and feeding back to them, and guiding them, in every kind of way...when you’re formatively assessing them, you’re going through the process...if there’s specific coaching for competitions, then great”.

Aligning the requirements of skills competitions to the criteria for assessing qualifications was an area where staff training could potentially support vocational teachers. R17 (College B, Construction) commented:

“...I don’t actually know the marking sheet the judges use, I’ve never seen a sheet...Now should you see the marking criteria? Well actually, yeah, you should...our marking criteria are Diplomas 1, 2 and 3, hopefully and it should

be exactly the same as everybody else's...standards and so on and so on. It would be nice actually, to have a little bit of training or something, just on how they mark...so that everybody is playing on an equal playing field".

It appears that the closer alignment between the marking criteria used for skills competitions and the assessment required for qualifications the greater the potential for skills competitions to be applied to the students' learning and to influence the practice of vocational teachers.

The third finding from the data relating to research question 1 was the potential for skills competitions to motivate vocational teachers. R15 (College B, Construction) was a relatively new middle manager in the organisation, who had previously experienced skills competitions and wanted to promote them in his new college. His observations of the organisation were of a relatively insular environment that had seen little staff turnover in recent years. He had seen the motivational aspect of skills competitions for staff and illustrated this point in the following way:

"I think what it is, we have got one particular member of staff, who I thought was a better teacher than he was in the class. And by hook or by crook we encouraged him to get involved in competitions. And I think he is a better, more satisfied member of staff than he was before he got involved, and I think that has a knock-on effect to his teaching.... he was stale, he was, I don't know, maybe particularly with a place like this, lack of churn... we made him Competitions Champion and he will come in here today and he will buzz about competitions... I think that has had an effect on his teaching."

Of the respondents to the on-line questionnaire 60% agreed or strongly agreed that teaching standards were promoted by skills competitions, and these views are consistent with the observations of R15 (College B, Construction).

Opportunities to engage in skills competitions were constrained for some teachers as a result of a lack of time and respondents illustrated how in College A their engagement took place out of college hours. The motivation which some thought they provided was contrasted by the views of R7 (College A, Floristry) for example saying:

"Without the team, and the goodwill of the team, I don't think that we'd have done half as well as we have done...R8 (College A, Floristry) she is just superb, she goes to everything...and you know she will give up her own time...to make sure the students do well."

15% of the respondents to the on-line questionnaire did not feel that skills competitions developed teachers, reflecting a resistance from some vocational teachers towards this initiative.

However, there did appear to be support for the use of skills competitions and the extent to which they could contribute to “learning centred leadership” through the affect they may have on the practices of vocational teachers. This is considered further in Chapter 5.

4.3 Research Question 2: To what extent do skills competitions use the vocational identity of teachers within vocational education?

Responses illustrating these findings show how skills competitions help to “contextualise” different vocational areas for students. An example of how skills competitions broaden the geographical area experienced by students and adds physical as well as perceptual context to their chosen vocational area was provided by R1 (College A, Hairdressing) who said:

“...when I was training, there was things on TV about hairdressing, you had like a fly on the wall documentary in a salon, and it was a...competitions were a huge thing, and there was a huge hairdressing identity. I mean, I remember going to a competition, and there was a famous hairdresser on the microphone, going around and getting everybody’s view on the competitions...I mean when they go out and they see all that as well, and they think, “I’m in a big thing here”. Hairdressing is big across the country, not just [the locality specific to the college]...I think it’s good, but when they go to a competition they see it on a massive scale.”

A second area in which vocational education is contextualised through skills competitions related to elements additional to the criteria contained in qualification specifications required to enable students to enter into competitions. This can be illustrated by the comments of R2 (College A, Hairdressing) who compared qualifications to skills competitions saying:

“I see them as two different things. Now, whereas hair competitions are more of an artistic level...so it’s to me, it doesn’t make the skills better, and it hones skills but it’s different skills to what you would use commercially...I think it makes [students] up their game...I think that it makes you a better hairdresser”.

This observation is reflected in those of R9 (College A, Construction) below, who expresses his opinion that the requirements needed for students to successfully

complete a qualifications have been “watered down”, and that these changes are thought to reduce the contextualised position of specific “trades”. 73% of respondents to the on-line questionnaire illustrated a belief that skills competitions provide a greater recognition for their vocational area, and 65% thought that enabled opportunities for student differentiation, therefore contextualising student performance in ways that competency based qualification criteria did not.

The second finding from the data relating to this research questions was the importance to vocational teachers of the element of their identity that is derived from their previous “trade” occupation. Vocational teachers can consider that they have more than one identity. Most (n = 17) of the interviewees felt that skills competitions strengthened vocational identity, with 16 of the 17 expressing the view that it was the student identity that was strengthened, with 8 respondents, 4 from each case study college, believing their vocational identity was enhanced.

Of the respondents to the interview who felt skills competitions strengthened their vocational identity 50% referred to their “trade” as providing their identity as opposed to identifying themselves as a vocational teacher. Skills competitions may blur the distinction between the vocation in which the respondents had trained and their subsequent role as a teacher. However, illustrations of how skills competitions contribute to either, or both, identities were provided by respondents to the interview. An example of this is illustrated below.

“...we go out to competitions, and again, you’re updating techniques, you’re looking at new techniques that are coming in. And that, when you’re stand and delivering, it gives you more confidence to say, “Well this is just coming in”, and as well, apart from techniques, you want to raise your game, so that your students raise their game”. (R7, College A, Floristry).

Further blurring between respondents identifying themselves as vocational teachers and as their prior “trade” identity was provided by comments made differentiating the qualification that they were required to deliver and their interpretation of elements that constituted their “trade”. The time constraints and funding parameters associated with delivering qualifications appeared inconsistent with the scope of the areas covered by skills competitions. R9 (College A, Construction) illustrated this by saying:

“I think in the ten years I’ve worked in FE... the actual qualification has been watered down somewhat and the trade is losing out [students] will need to know some of the old methods, and I think that we’re losing them and that through competitions we can bring some of those back...I know that things have to move on, and, you know, we all have to work to targets and schedules, and money, finances and everything else, but I think that we shouldn’t lose sight of some of the old skills and the old..., the old trade methods, and I think it would be nice for students to have those, so that we don’t lose the trade perhaps...I think we would have to get on board the UK Skills and the Guild of Bricklayer’s and the Carpenters’ Craft, and such like, to work with them, to try and build in some of the old craft...within the competitions pieces, so that inevitably, if they are part of the competition, you will have to train towards that...and giving students an insight and a skill base outside their normal curriculum which does help the trade...I think it would benefit the trade, it would benefit the students, and it would boost moral for some staff”.

Vocational teachers identifying with their prior “trade” is evident from the comments above, as is a desire to pass on skills beyond those found in the criteria required for vocational qualifications. 86% of on-line questionnaire responses indicated how an increased pride in the vocational area resulting from engaging in skills competitions could strengthen vocational identity, and a further 73% through the celebration of achievement in skills competitions within the Case studies acted to strengthen vocational identity.

The third finding from the data relevant for Research Question 2 was indicated with all interviewees (n = 22) expressing the view that skills competitions helped to raise the status of vocational education. The comments were positive from both Case studies and illustrated two audiences to whom raising the status of vocational education applied. The first related to external audiences, such as between colleges. The feeling of the respondents was typified by R20 (College B, Construction) who said:

“Within the colleges, yes...because I know most of the colleges, the bricklaying departments in the West Midlands, over the years, and we know each other, we know which is a good college and which isn’t a good college and they change as people leave... it’s the staff within the college that makes it”.

The second audience that provided an opportunity to raise the status of vocational education was those recognising students’ successes. Several (n = 9) interviewees gave examples of recognition they had observed students receiving. The recognition was both published and “internalised”, with the first being evidenced in the media, for

example, and the second more personally displayed through the pride experienced by an individual. R3 (College A, Beauty Therapy) illustrated how skills competitions raise the status of her vocational area, saying:

“When you say to people that you’re a Make-up Artist, they kind of dumb the subject down, “So you put lipstick in all day?” “No, actually we don’t, we, you know...” and when you can kind of show what you do, when you do succeed, of are involved in competition work, there is a lot of press around it...so people are able to see actually what you can achieve and they get quiet astounded by the level of quality of work...I think that from that point of view, it shows people that you know, we’re not the stereotypical subject which you think we are”.

An “internalised” enhancement of the status of vocational education by skills competitions was illustrated by R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) who said:

“I think that it gives [students] a sense of pride in their qualification, and there’s a lot of examples of students who have won previous competitions, and I actually went to London, and saw them doing the World Skills competitions, and then it’s got examples of where these students have gone on to, and then employers see that, and they have taken them on and in fact one of the girls who went to the competition at the NEC, and she said that she going to put her certificate to say that she had entered...she had put that certificate on the wall because she was really proud of it. I just think it raises the level of vocational qualifications”.

The comments above support those collected in relation to Research Question 3 below, which illustrate the potential to increase the pride of students in their vocation following their engagement in skills competitions and opportunities for their confidence and self-esteem to be enhanced.

Vocational Students

Findings with regard to the implications for vocational students of the use of skills competitions in this research derive from comments made by vocational teachers. Due to the timing of the field work within the academic year vocational students were not interviewed.

4.4 Research Question 3: In what ways do skills competitions contribute to the experience of students on vocational courses?

Responses from the interviewees that address this question identify three findings. The first of these findings is that all (n = 22) interviewees felt that skills competitions

had the potential to raise aspiration for students from the areas that their organisation served and to influence their lack of prior success in the education. The statement below, encapsulates the view of the respondents from both case study colleges illustrating that the starting point of the students in both hairdressing and beauty therapy and construction was a relatively low one.

“... [skills competitions] raise their aspiration, very much so. Even from just in a normal classroom situation, it can get them to raise their aspirations of what they’re developing on a day to day, if you put a little bit of competition in there, it makes them sit up and think, “All right, ok, I want to do a little bit better than maybe what I would normally do”. It gives them a ..., I think that it’s their focus” (R2 College A, Hairdressing).

This comment is reinforced by another respondent (R4, College A, Hairdressing) who pointed out:

“... we had three hairdressers, and one of them went through to the second round... we have a lot of students that actually...they can’t...they probably haven’t been at school for a long time, or the youngsters, the under 19s didn’t do very well at school. And so when they come into a vocational area, they..., it makes them realise that it’s a very different form of learning, vocational, that it is to the academic side of it. And actually, they realise they have a lot of skills”.

The respondents to the on-line questionnaire concurred with the views expressed during the interviews. Of the 28 responding to the on-line question asking if competitions raise student aspiration 62% strongly agreed and 32% agreed. This question was supplemented by three statements with which respondents to the questionnaire were asked to illustrate their agreement or disagreement. The first statement asked for a response to whether skills competitions promote higher standards of learning. 89% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they did and 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that skills competitions supported target setting for students’ learning goals.

For vocational students studying at the case study colleges their prior educational experience and their aspirations being raised by skills competitions may have a positive effect on their success on their course. College A had evaluated the retention of learners entering competition and their achievement rate at the end of their programme. The college illustrates in promotional material that in the academic

year 2010/2011, of the 187 learners taking part in competitions 100% succeeded on their course. A leaflet produced to promote the college states:

“The competition ethos is embedded within the college mission statement through a robust and detailed Competition Strategy. The Competition Strategy identifies participation for all learners of all ages, levels and abilities. The College is committed to sustaining and developing competition work, which is fully embedded in the College’s Teaching and Learning Handbook,” (2013).

Although their findings do not constitute reliable data on which the rigour of academic research would be satisfied, they do illustrate how students entering competitions are more successful than their peers. Any causal link between competitions and educational success cannot be derived from this observation and College A may be seen as using this analysis for a variety of reasons, such as to support the use of resources for competitions or to promote the attractiveness of the courses. However, the use of this information by College A does differentiate it from College B, where the lack of maturity of their engagement in skills competitions has not afforded this type of analysis.

One respondent (R 6, College A, Beauty Therapy) illustrated how students who have entered skills competitions are differentiated from their peers, supported by the responses to the on-line questionnaire illustrated above, and are consequently more attractive to potential employers’. Additionally, data relating to the destination of students is required for Ofsted inspections, and illustrations such as that provided by R6 would support her case study in evidencing their work in this area to inspection teams. There was also a positive view of competitions promoting progression to employment from those completing the on-line questionnaire, with 93% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that competitions supported progress to employment.

The majority of respondents (n = 15) commented on the way in which they perceived skills competitions had helped to raise the confidence or self-esteem of students. One specific example relates to both confidence and vocational identity being developed for students by engaging in skills competitions.

“...it’s a learning tool for them as well, to actually be able to sell themselves. Give them confidence to speak to other people. We have a lot of learners here who have no communication skills. You know they speak to somebody with their heads down. And so, it’s growing them as well, because that’s part

and parcel of World Skills. You know, to see their confidence, especially in our industry, they've got to, whether they are confident or not, I always say to students, "You've got 2 pairs of shoes when you walk into the hair salon, a pair of shoes when you're out in the street...and a pair when you walk into the salon, where the professionalism comes in". (R14, College B, Hairdressing).

Through building confidence in students their aspirations may rise and promote transition into a new vocational identity.

The second finding to emerge from the data collected in relation to research question 3 considered the corresponding position to the one illustrated above, with the potential difficulty skills competitions may create by differentiating learners from their peers and of the potential for creating an "elite" within a cohort of vocational students. The observation of interviewees varied, reflecting the breadth of the definition of the term "skills competitions", as some saw these as internal and external competitions whilst others thought of World Skills competitions, those arranged outside of the organisation, as the only competitions available to students. This theme can be illustrated by a comment made by one respondent in their answer to this question. He said:

"... we have got to be careful that what we don't do, is pick an elite, and then promote an elite. What we need to do, is find a way of introducing it, right at the bottom, for everybody, and that is about internal competitions, not so much about external competitions." (R15, College B, Construction).

Both case study colleges held internal competitions and the majority (n = 15) of respondents referred to their use. The question contained within the interviews, relating to this research question, asked if students competing in competitions were treated differently to their peers and there was a subsidiary question that asked of the experience for those students who do not succeed in a competition. The majority of interviewees (n =12) felt that students entering competitions were not treated differently to their peers. College A, as is mentioned above, has a Competitions Strategy including a Competitions Club available as an extra-curricular activity for students entering external competitions.

The on-line questionnaire respondents recognised that students were treated differently but this was not encouraged during lesson time. 53% felt that students had equal access to staff and resources but 35% believed that more one to one teaching was provided for competition students and 10% said that more resources

were available to them. Of the 28 respondents to the questionnaire 68% identified that students were selected for external skills competitions following internal college competitions, although a larger percentage, 75%, of the 28 respondents said that students were selected for competitions by a tutor identifying a talented student.

While the opportunities skills competitions provide to differentiate vocational students care in the management of these students is required, so as not to generate resentment for a small number of students from their peers. In relation to the potential for resentment, one interview respondent commented:

“...they get more time with a member of staff for training, but they don't get anything special. No, because the stuff students...if we put them on a pedestal too much, the rest of the students rebel against them. And if you treat them just as a normal student, they're fine...But no, there's no resentment at all, because the students know that whoever is going to the competitions are good, they can actually see as they build things...speed, time, accuracy, and we don't sort of tell anybody like, “You're going, you're not” ...they actually mark each others, work and encourage it, to see, “He's going”...so it's all...everything is open, you don't hide anything, if you hide things, people...and it's yeah, no resentment at all, they love it”. (R20, College B, Construction).

Although all students are entitled to equal learning experiences it may be difficult to exercise this in practice and the management of learners where skills competitions are a part of a college's ways of working could require refined skills for the lecturers involved. One interviewee pointed out:

“I think it would be a lie for me to say that they're not treated differently, by some members of staff. Because...staff that is excited and gets swept along with the student that has got these skills...they have got to be careful not to forget the other students within that group...it's a skill the tutor really needs to develop, to make sure that they don't lose the interest and the motivation of other students, by treating students differently...but that is a problem I have witnessed...I have actually had comments from other students saying, you know, “Oh Golden boy” or went along those lines”. (R9, College A, Construction).

Several (n=9) respondents to the interview commented on the use of competitions to differentiate students. The form of differentiation varied from differentiating students in relation to their ability to secure employment to the way in which teachers taught students. An example was provided of a student securing employment due to being able to demonstrate competition experience.

“...there were eight people who went for the job, and she got it, purely because her additional was that she had done the competition”. (R6, College A, Beauty Therapy).

The differentiation between the approach of vocational teachers was shown by R16 (College B, Construction) who spoke of his experience saying:

“...if you’re successful in a competition...you’re treated with esteem, aren’t you? You’re lifted up. People are looking at you as a peer, rather than a student sometimes. And I think that probably, you talk to them a bit different, because you’re talking to them as the role of a teacher, I feel sometimes you’re the dominant teacher...tell, tell, tell, you know, finger wagging...control.”

The comments of R16 (College B, Construction) are also relevant to the observations above relating to vocational teachers as coaches.

The final finding to emerge from reviewing the data relevant to this research question also considers the possible difficulties skills competitions may create and their implications for vocational students. The supplementary interview question enquired of the experience of students who did not succeed in competitions. This question produced responses that considered managing the disappointment and expectations of students who enter, particularly, external competitions. This was commented upon by respondents from both case study colleges with illustrations of specific student responses. One respondent observed:

“... we had a young girl this year, [student name], she went to UK Skills, the heat and she had real big expectations, but unfortunately, she didn’t get a place. We really did well as a college, we won three out of six places at the heat, unfortunately, Megan wasn’t one of them. And she cried, and then I cried, because it upsets me. But yeah, I think that we will just have to teach them to take the knocks as well as the praise. And that comes in with the coaching. Well this is what we say we spend extra time with the student. We have to install in them that you cannot do well all of the time. You stay for your judges’ feedback, if it isn’t brilliant, you listen and then you move on from it. So we do try to coach them in taking the knocks as well as the praise because obviously you can’t do well every time.” (R7, College A, Floristry).

The management of vocational students who enter competitions appears to produce the need for vocational teachers to possess different skills to those of their peers who do not engage in skills competitions. The response by R7 (College A, Floristry) above, illustrates that refinements to the practice of vocational teachers can utilise the disappointment felt by vocational students, for example by using feedback from judges to inform a dialogue with their student and supports the observations of other

respondents in relation to coaching. The need for vocational teachers to manage their own “vicarious” disappointment is also illustrated within the findings of this research.

A Corporate Approach

The findings assembled under this theme illustrate the contrasting experience of being engaged in skills competitions for those interviewed from each case study college.

4.5 Research Question 4: In what ways can an initiative such as skills competitions contribute to quality assurance processes in colleges of further education?

Three findings emerge from the data collected illustrating varying “distances” from engagement with the initiative to use skills competitions. The vocational teachers in College B show a level of detachment that is less evident in College A.

The first finding of a corporate approach to introduce and embed skills competitions addresses the theme directly and illustrated differences between the Case studies. These differences were highlighted in the comments made by R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) who said:

“I think the competitions need to be at the beginning of the academic year, it needs to be built in. I think that all of the members of staff need to have a little part to play, without bogging staff down. But there needs to be something, even if it's some CPD training for the staff, so that they're more aware of competitions...a staff development day set aside to help, you know the progression of competitions, there has to be something done via management, to encourage it. But I think for everybody, I think that if it's a college thing, and a departmental thing, everyone gets involved”.

These comments reflect those made later by interviewees from College B, of a hurried and inconsistent approach to the introduction and use of skills competitions within their organisation. One of the interview questions relating to this research question asked; who are the main advocates of the use of skills competitions in the specific Case studies in which the interviewees were employed? The majority (n=13) felt that the Principal was the main advocate of competitions, representing 7, or 70% of interviewees from College A, and 6, or 50% of interviewees from College B. Most

(n=20) respondents recognised the advocacy for skills competitions within each case study college as being a management initiative.

Most (n=17) of the interviewees used, or knew of the use of, competitions within the quality processes of their colleges, with most being aware of their inclusion as evidence in self-assessment. Knowledge of their integration into self-assessment was known by 64% of the 25 on-line questionnaire respondents, with 3 failing to answer this question.

The second finding to emerge from the data collected relating to Research Question 4 has been alluded to above, and concerned the issue of planning. An illustration of the challenges faced by vocational teachers following their perception of a lack of planning in College B was provided by R12, (College B, Beauty Therapy):

“Of the competitions, like I’ve said they will be good fun in the future, if they are organised properly from the beginning and run well, and integrated. I think they would be fantastic for the college and I definitely think that it does raise students’... a lot more work, and a lot of support....and then a member of SMT who really does remain elusive, because you don’t see them, very good, there has to be your... an in between, there has to be a line manager. And there has to be a realistic budget set aside. It has to be real, and it can’t be that if you’re... you should never be going “cap in hand” asking for this, that and the other and feel as though you’re putting someone else out. And that’s how it’s felt this year. Next year they’ll...its teething problems and they’ll address the teething problems.”

These observations can be compared to those provided by R3 (College A, Beauty Therapy) who said:

“Everything I teach is towards competition, so like my First Years this year, obviously they competed ... in some face painting competition and that was their theme for their project. So I can now assess who has... whose ideas are good, whose sound good and you know, say “Right, I’d like to try this, I’d like to try that and move forward. The next project that we do, when they come back in September, is directed to the next as well. So every project is directed without them knowing that it’s directed.”

This response illustrated how competitions had become a part of planning for each academic year, in contrast to the experience and understanding of the staff from College B. The opportunity to embed competitions into the experience for vocational students may develop in College B, but the rapid introduction of this work was seen as impeding this at the time of the interviews and is considered in relation to Research Question 5.

These observations reflect the contrasting positions of each of the Case studies, may be illustrative of different transitions in introducing this initiative. R15, (College B, Construction) said:

“It’s going to take you 3 years to get success, but one thing you have got to do, is resource the staff”.

The gradient along which initiatives progress towards institutionalisation varies, although some recognition of different rates of absorption are reflected in the views of R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) and R15 (College B, Construction) two colleagues from College B, and the sustainability of initiatives is often a response to the approach to its introduction, as is considered below.

The third finding from the data relating to Research Question 4 considers a corporate concern of colleges of further education and derives from opportunities to provide evidence to address the criteria of the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (2012). This framework evaluates the enjoyment vocational students’ experience during their time at their college. The enjoyment skills competitions provide may contribute to a positive view during Ofsted inspections, as enjoyment may support the educational success of learners. The inspection framework evaluates the outcomes produced by colleges for their vocational students with the main focus of inspection being the percentage of students retained on a course, and of those retained the number who achieve their qualification. Students enjoying their courses may enhance the possibility of their being retained and achieving their qualification. 96% of respondents to the on-line questionnaire agreed that competitions were enjoyable for students. A specific illustration was provided by R4 (College A, Hairdressing) who said:

“...there’s a girl, and she’s almost special needs, but she loves competitions. And as soon as she can get one style, then she just practices it, practices and practices it, and she really loves that and all of her family come and it...it’s very good, because I don’t think she has ever achieved anything quite so much...she’ll practice day and night...”.

The observations of R4 (College A, Hairdressing) are endorsed by the views of R2 (College A, Hairdressing) who illustrates how skills competitions can challenge students and raise the standards of their work. She says:

“...quite a lot of time, when they are practicing in class, it’s “That’ll do”. There’s so much of that “That’ll do” society. Or, “That’s good enough”, when really, they’re not...they are not doing it to the best of their ability.”

The Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (2012) requires teaching, learning and assessment to “set challenging tasks, and build on and extend learning for all learners” (page 6). Skills competitions could be an initiative able to provide evidence for inspectors of this taking place. 89% of on-line questionnaire respondents felt that skills competitions contributed to higher standards of learning, and, as was mentioned above, College A has been commended for its use of skills competitions in its two most recent Ofsted reports.

4.6 Research Question 5: What approaches to change management processes appear to support, or hinder, the use of new initiatives, such as skills competitions, in enhancing the quality of vocational teaching?

The first finding from the data relating to Research Question 5 directly concerns the change management processes adopted within the case study colleges and their relative success was indicated in differences in the number of positive responses from College A, compared to College B. The “distance” from this initiative for vocational teachers is alluded to above and this is influenced by the ways in which the introduction of skills competitions is supported, particularly in College B. The perception of how skills competitions were introduced to College B are reflected in the comments of R21 (College B, Hairdressing). She pointed out:

“If I’m honest, we were kind of thrown in it at the last minute. It was, “Its World Skills...you’re going to need to do some things to sort it out”. So we were asked, to be fair, “Will you take part?” I think, coming from the group of people that it had come from, it was kind of pre-selected...but there was no, “Look, you’ve got competition work, so, we’re going to give you a little bit of training on just what they’re looking for, or what maybe has previously happened”. No, it was kind of “Here you go. Take it, now run with it””

R17, (College B, Construction) endorsed the view expressed by R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) by referring to the need for support to be, “top down and bottom up”. In College A however, where the relatively hurried experience of College B had been avoided in previous years one interviewee, R9 (College A, Construction) recognised the reluctance of vocational teachers to involved in this initiative

identifying staff as resistant to using skills competitions. R9 (College A, Construction) said:

“...some staff see it as, “Haven’t we got enough to do?” “Why are we bothering?” and I don’t think you’ll ever change them people’s perspective, because they are very much of the mind-set of the “Glass is half empty”. Some of them still have a moan, because they think “All of this work, for what?”...it doesn’t enthral everybody...but within our own area, I would say, the majority can see the benefits”.

The main advocates of skills competitions in the case study colleges are identified above, however the results from the on-line questionnaire identified those who may resist the use of skills competitions as students (38% of the respondents) and staff of the college (29% of responses). The perception of vocational teachers with regard to skills competitions varies as a consequence of how they may impact on their work load however the comments above recognise the need for change management processes to be employed to enable skills competitions to be accommodated by vocational teachers within their practice as the “distance” they feel from this initiative influences its absorption.

Another finding relevant to Research Question 5 differentiated the organisational skills needed to accommodate the potential disruption and resources required for a college to participate in competitions, when compared to a college hosting regional or national competition finals on behalf of UK Skills, or one of the vocational industry organisations. The experience of College A is extensive when compared to College B in relation to hosting skills competitions, although this experience was not wholly endorsed by interviewees from College A.

The issue of resources being used inappropriately was commented on in relation to college’s hosting competitions on behalf of UK Skills. R7 (College a, Floristry) observed how hosting events detracted from the space available for the more “routine” student course activity and the access to resources this organisation had, when compared to their college experience, saying:

“...this month has been horrendous for us...but when they come in, the skills competitions, it just takes over, we have to stand our students down as much as we can for that week because you’re constantly, “Can we have this, and can we have that?”...I mean we engage students as much as we can, but we don’t stand them down, in the sense that they don’t come in, because we like

them to come in and watch the competitions but regular classes are sort of like, “No we’re not teaching you today. You’ve just got to get on with it””.

Responses from staff from each of the case study colleges show how the engagement of their college affected the teaching and learning of the students differently. College A had hosted regional and national finals, whereas College B had hosted regional events only. The disruption caused by the scale of the logistics required to host the national finals had impeded the teaching and learning of students but there were also benefits derived from such an exercise. An illustration of this is shown below:

“...competitions can impede, especially when we’ve got a..., you know, if we’re holding that competition. And it can, without very careful planning, affect a student, most of the students’ main programme, when we have to create space to hold competitions, it can impede in that way... we had a skills competition here... but leading up to that competition, the week before, we had to get students’ work down, to make space for the competition being held.” (R9, College A, Construction).

He went on to illustrate how hosting competitions can also have a positive effect on teaching and learning by saying:

“....when you hold a competition at, college it can be very... it can really enthuse students, because they not only see their own trade, but they can see other trades and how other people cope with the stress and the pressure of competitions, and I have known students actually witness and be a visitor during a competition and the next week they’re banging on the door saying that they want to do a competition.” (R9, College A, Construction).

Most (N=21) of the interview respondents felt that skills competitions did not use resources inappropriately, although one respondent did believe that in-house competitions used resources appropriately, whereas UK Skills competitions used resources inappropriately, from her observations when acting as a host for their competitions.

R7 (College A, Floristry) commented:

“We hosted the World Skills last week, but when it came, and we saw the pieces that had been produced, and they could have got away with half the stuff...at a college level we are constantly reminded of budgets, so we try not to over-spend in the competitions, although the students have to have what they need [with] UK Skills and World Skills there is a lot of waste”

A further illustration concerning the time and physical resources used to host skills competitions was provided by R15 (College B, Construction) who said:

“...I have never been in a college as well resourced as this one, for construction...when we do a competition run through, and things like that, we buy in the same bricks as people will use in the competitions, even though they are a more expensive range... all of the people who are involved with all of the students in competitions, get 3 hours a week off their teaching timetable...which is a massive commitment...for a college of this size, and that’s across the college not just in construction”.

While hosting competitions requires further resources the findings of this research indicate how these are provided by the case study colleges, although the same level of resources are not always accessible for vocational teachers to undertake their day to day practice.

The role of middle managers in co-ordinating, promoting and introducing competitions, when compared to Senior Managers, was referred to, along with the allocation of resources for skills competitions, and is the second finding relating to this research question.

The interviewees recognised the role played by middle managers with regard to skills competitions. R13 (College B, Hairdressing) is a middle manager, and her views included the following observations:

“...management level [say] “We understand that [teachers] are restricted, because of their time, but we also understand that it is going to be very good for the college [to enter competitions] so they are given remission...I think they would like to say they support it but realistically, I don’t think it’s been supported enough...I don’t think [time and money] are an issue, but I do think there needs to be greater presence from Senior Management...even though at my level I’ve been there to support, but there’s only so much [I can do]...I call myself a buffer, because I take from there and I try to disseminate as well, as rosily as I can”

The role of middle managers in “selling” or “justifying” the introduction of skills competitions to engage vocational teachers in this initiative appears to be significant. Their advocacy of this initiative was recognised, although comments regarding the lack of a presence of Senior Managers engaging in skills competitions were evident in College B.

While some respondents recognised the commitment of resources for the promotion of this initiative, they also acknowledged a lack of operational planning to facilitate

resources being able to be flexibly allocated locally. The practical role played by middle managers in supporting competitions was illustrated by R1 (College A, Hairdressing) who is not a manager. He said:

“R3 (College A, Beauty Therapy) gives up a lot of her time during the summer, and during holidays and things, but R2 (College A, Hairdressing) is normally in charge of Competitions Club, and so R2 (College A, Hairdressing) is kind of the Competitions Coach. So even though, if I have got a student in I’ll go through what they’re doing, and kind of tell them what they’re looking for...but it will be R2 (College A, Hairdressing) that will give them the finer points, and say, “This is what you do, and this is how long you’ve got. This is what you need to practice, and this is what we need to work on”. R2 (College A, Hairdressing) holds the Competitions Club for one night per week... it’s twilight from 6:00pm to 8:00pm”

The difference between the views expressed by interviewees from College B appears to arise from examples provided by the Hair and Beauty staff, who had received a lack of support for ancillary supplies to enable their attendance at skills competitions held externally to the college. R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) said:

“...we got to college on a Sunday at 7:00am and we didn’t get back until 6:00pm, and the budget for food for the day, and I had to ask, because nothing is given unless you ask, it would be nice to not to have to ask, because I feel a little bit like I’m going “cap in hand”, was £50 for the day for 7 of us and that was from the secretary... it’s not enough, and so I ended up, out of my own money, buying the students something [as] it’s £10 to buy a meal at the NEC”.

The requirement for middle managers to support vocational teachers often appears to involve their securing resources to enable skills competitions to be accommodated without operational difficulties.

4.7 Research Question 6: Can a specific initiative, such as skills competitions act as an effective form of continuous professional development for vocational teachers?

The majority of interviewees (n = 14) said that training was available to support staff engaging in skills competitions, although of those answering positively the proportion was greater, 80% (n = 8) of the total interviewed (n = 10), from those employed at the College A. College B responses reflected positive views from 50% (n = 6) from the total number of respondents (n = 12).

The type of additional training the respondents felt would support the use of skills competitions was indicated in responses to the on-line questionnaire. The highest scoring answer related to 58% of respondents expressing a view that training in the criteria used in assessing competitions would support their use within their planning and day to day teaching. This response could be aligned with the second highest scoring answer which showed that 54% of respondents felt that further training in integrating competitions into course work would support their practice. 46% of respondents felt that the provision of training on the “soft skills” required by competitors would transfer to benefit quality improvement strategies and 35% believed that training to improve their vocational skills would benefit their Continuous Professional Development.

The findings from the interviews reveal how additional time, separate to normal contractual teaching hours, is available for staff to engage in skills competitions. The response from R 12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) illustrates this point. She said:

“...I just think, not so much training, but just think time...and also for those who have been involved in competitions, to feed back on what the competitions are about...what they’re looking for at competitions...because a little bit may be incorporated into our teaching...your don’t want to come back and say “ Well, this is what they were looking for, and that was what they were looking for, and our teaching isn’t up to [it]...they’re looking for the cream of the crop and...having gone and seen what criteria they’re looking for...that could help a little bit...the time [allocated] I was given permission ...for the staff to do competitions, the person has been allocated [3 hours remission from teaching each week], is fine”.

The issue of time being available for staff and the organisation of competitions was commented upon by vocational teachers from both case study colleges within the context of the demands to deliver qualifications within a reducing number of hours funded for each qualification. R5 (College A, Beauty Therapy) illustrated how time was used outside of teaching hours to engage in skills competitions, and the following comment illustrates the position in College A, regarding a lack of specific time allocated, when compared to the 3 hours remitted from time tables in College B.

“We don’t really get any time, it’s time that actually, out of term time, and so they’re coming in of their own accord, and obviously, we’re on the holidays, so we don’t give them extra time in classes”.

College A has the Competitions Club, mentioned above, provided for students as an extra-curricular activity and college's staff members who deliver training within the Competitions Club receive teaching credits for the work they do. Respondents from College B (R18, Construction and R21, Hairdressing) commented on their experience of visits to skills competitions and exhibitions as a consequence of becoming involved in this area of work, with this being recognised as Continuous Professional Development for which time and funds were allocated.

The findings from the research indicate how there is an inconsistency in the engagement of vocational teachers with this initiative in both Case studies. R9 (College A, Construction) illustrates above how some of his colleagues have a "glass half empty" approach to initiatives. The observations of R22 (College B, Hairdressing) show how some vocational teachers are resistant to engaging in skills competitions as a result of them being seen as an onerous addition to an already heavy work load. She believes skills competitions are:

"...another thing to do, basically...and weekend working and, you know, we're working full time and you haven't got time to do that".

Alternatively there are many examples provided by respondents of the commitment demonstrated by vocational teachers to skills competitions and of support they provide for students to enable their entries to events. R4 (College A, Hairdressing) illustrated how:

"... I went to Luton with a learner, and she was sort of texting and phoning her family, as [the competition] was developing. And I dropped her off at home, and there were about six cars on the drive, and I think they were going to have a party, because she came second, and it was sort of ..., you know, a really massive event."

The motivation for their role vocational teachers demonstrate through supporting their students is illustrated above, along with the ways in which students' self-esteem is enhanced through skills competitions. The illustration provided by R4 (College A, Hairdressing) shows how her engagement embodies her willingness to engage with skills competitions however, this is not a uniform position across the responses from interviewees in each of the case study colleges.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

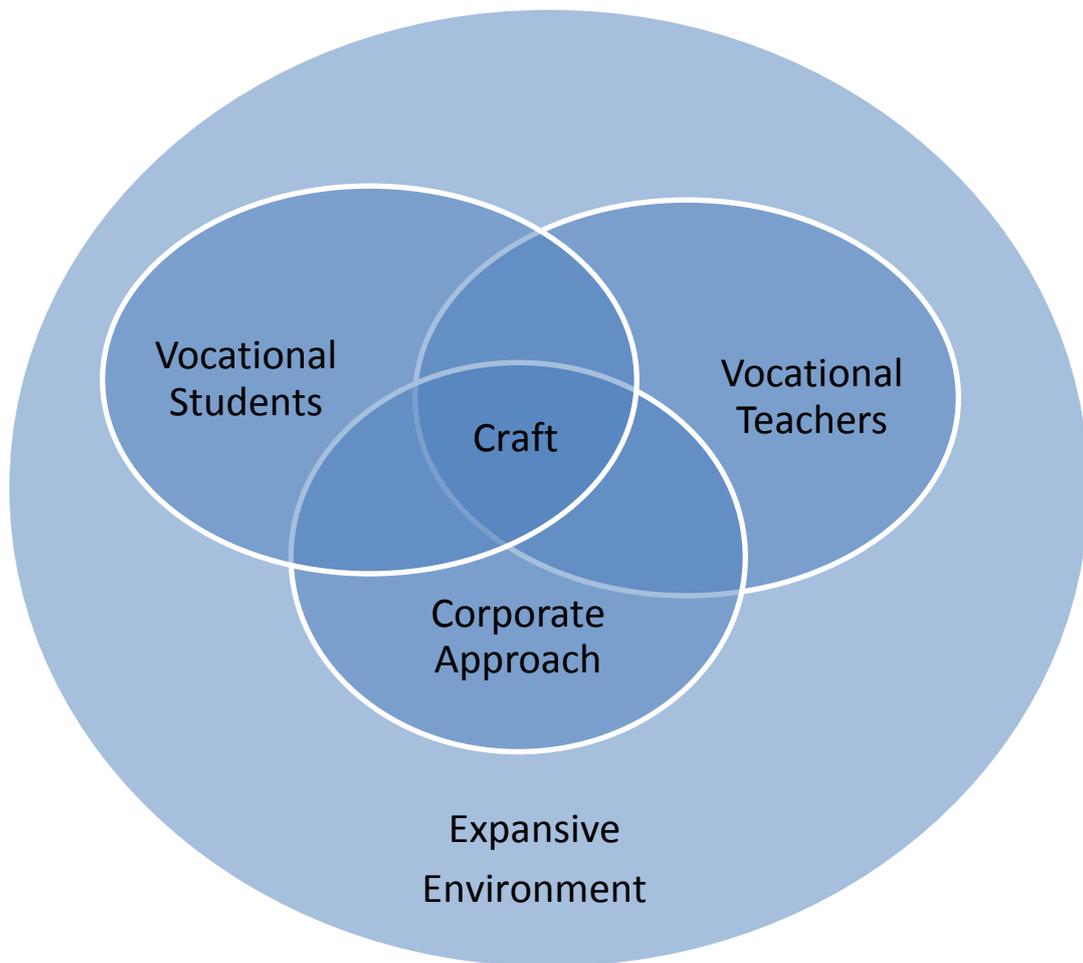
5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4, and is arranged to consider each of the three areas identified in the previous chapter of vocational teachers, vocational students and a corporate approach. The Research Questions are addressed sequentially within each theme. A critical discussion of the themes that arise in the two case study colleges, and illustrations from the on-line questionnaire, are considered against a backcloth of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and theoretical and methodological issues identified in Chapter 3, relating to research design.

The objective is that this discussion will indicate new knowledge gained from considering the research questions and that this will be used to address the question contained in the title of this thesis: Skills competitions in colleges: a winning formula for enhancing the quality of vocational education?

Further education colleges have been encouraged to engage in skills competitions, as is illustrated above. However, while this may appear relatively straightforward to accommodate, the changes this request represents are complex and far reaching. This research proposes a model to enable the use of skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education. The component parts of the model are illustrated in Figure 5a, below, with three partially overlapping circles of a Venn diagram, contained in the outer circle in this figure. The model illustrates the interdependence of the three themes identified by this research, and the commonality to each of “craft”. The backcloth required to enable the “incubation” of these themes to develop and sustain the use of skills competitions, is an “expansive” environment, as defined by Fuller and Unwin (2004a, 2004b and 2010).

Figure 5a



Where further education colleges are aware of, and consider the component parts of this model prior to, and during, the use of skills competitions, the potential they afford to enhance the quality of vocational education is increased.

Vocational Teachers

5.2 Research question 1: In what ways do skills competitions affect the practices of vocational teachers?

The first area to be discussed from the findings relating to Research Question 1 revolves around the role of vocational teachers as coaches. Respondents from both Case studies illustrated how competitions improved their relationship with their students supporting what Hughes et al (2004), consider to be an ingredient for the promotion of excellence in vocational education. Vocational teachers recognised that students engaged in skills competitions were often given more individual

attention and more time was allocated to them. However, beyond these practicalities the way in which vocational teachers perceived their approach to working with students training for competitions differed from the way that they worked with their peers and the opportunities skills competitions afford for this to occur are illustrated by R10 (College A, Construction) in relation to influencing the mind-set of vocational students, and benefitting from the Neuro-Linguistic Programme training he had attended. Support, such as this training, was different between the Case studies, with College A providing specific Continuous Professional Development opportunities exposing vocational teachers to methods that provided opportunities to inform both their approach to skills competitions and their practice more broadly.

Teaching techniques used in both Case studies related more to coaching than to teaching as the relationship with the vocational students entering skills competitions developed. Respondents during their interview claim that they “threw the rules away” for students training for competition and that these students are allegedly treated “more like an equal” (R16, College B, Construction). This difference in approach agrees with the research of Bowles and Gintis (1976) showing how more able students have greater autonomy within their learning when compared to students demonstrating less ability, who experienced increased levels of coercion in the classroom practices exercised by their teachers. They believed these variations “correspond” to the environments pupils would experience in their working lives and were implemented in anticipation of what they may expect to prepare them for work. The perception of the vocational teachers in differentiating students preparing for skills competitions “corresponds” to their enhanced opportunities for employment demonstrated, for example, by R6 (College A, Beauty Therapy).

Changes to the practice of vocational teachers when dealing with students entering skills competitions, illustrated by the respondents, agrees with one of the two metaphors for learning proposed by Sfard (1998). She believes that learning is perceived as either being “acquired” or occurs through “participation”. The “acquisition” metaphor is prevalent in the traditions of the formal education system where a learner acquires skills as a recipient from a knowledgeable “deliverer”. The “participation” metaphor, Sfard (1998) argues, leads to learning to support change in the identity of an individual within, what she refers to as, a “community of practice”, with the student as “apprentice” to the “expert” teacher. The “participation” metaphor

is more aligned to the “partnership” approach to learning illustrated by Silcock and Brundrett (2006). Fuller and Unwin (2004 a) believe that the “participation” metaphor may have a number of shortcomings and their view could be seen as combining the “participation” metaphor with that of the “partnership” model, containing a greater degree of tolerance between the teacher and student than is usually evident in the practice of vocational teachers. Their work is cited by Coffield (2008) who says:

“...nowadays young people take to their workplaces skills and knowledge, for example in ICT, which they pass on to their older colleagues; and so they are switching between the role of novice and expert rather than moving steadily from the role of newcomer to that of “master”.” (page 10).

The flexibility demonstrated by skills competition entrants of switching roles within the classroom or workshop, acting to support fellow vocational students, as illustrated by R20 (College B, Construction) supports vocational teachers preparing vocational students for employment.

The shortcomings of Sfard’s (1998) “participation” metaphor, as argued by Fuller and Unwin (2004a), include the failure of this metaphor to accommodate workplace power relationships. Skills competitions are perceived to address the extent of the power dividing vocational teachers from their students by influencing their practice, therefore reducing, whilst not eradicating, the concerns Fuller and Unwin (2004a) express with regard to the “participation” metaphor.

The apparent ease teachers described of working with motivated students, who create little classroom management difficulties, is not surprising but there may be a legacy of the previous vocational practice of a teacher more accustomed to dealing with, what were clients, on an individual basis. The ease for vocational teachers of “coaching”, as they claim to “throw away the rule book” is reflected by Bruner (1996) in how he interprets the minds of learners, in that they may “imitate” or “collaborate” with their learning. These views are also consistent with those of Pring et al (2009), who advocate “learning by doing” and “by looking over the shoulder of the carpenter”. This could reflect their experience of training with Master Craftspeople in the formation of their previous vocational identity. While this agrees with the concept of “homophily” referred to by Watts (1993) cited in Rhodes (2012), the shortcomings identified by Fuller and Unwin (2004a), need also to be recognised. Skills competitions may reduce the power relationship between vocational teacher and

vocational student, partly through using coaching, however it cannot be totally eradicated.

Frykholm and Nitzler (1993), illustrate how the role of a vocational teacher is characterised more by socialisation than by qualification and transmitting dispositions and attitudes more so than giving knowledge and skills for specific tasks. Interviewees from both case study colleges gave examples of socialising vocational students. R14 (College B, Hairdressing) spoke of “two pairs of shoes” as a metaphor to differentiate between the individual and the vocational practitioner. The role of socialising is reflected in the views of Sennett (2008) who illustrates how crafts people need to turn themselves “outwards” to “...make the particular knowledge we possess transparent in order that others can understand and respond to it” (page 289).

The “socialisation” of students by vocational teachers is supported by greater alignment to their craft and reflects the position of Sennett (2008). The use of craft within any initiative is significant for vocational teachers, as is illustrated below in relation to vocational identity, and is an element that acts to build the relationship between a vocational teacher and their student and to enlist their engagement in initiatives such as the use of skills competitions. The extension of seeing vocational teaching as a “craft” accords with Berger (2003) who advocates the use of “craft” to promote excellence within the curriculum in schools in the United States of America.

The review of literature in chapter 2, illustrates how the practice of vocational teachers reflects a predominately constructivist approach (Kerka 1997).

Observations from respondents interviewed included their perception of the “value” of applied learning within vocational education and second finding from the data of this research regarding how skills competitions are a useful means by which to integrate applied learning into the practice of vocational teachers. One interviewee (R4, College A, Hairdressing) saw her students “realise” that they had a skill from their exposure to vocational education. The integration of prior aptitude into the practice of vocational teachers reflects the model considered by Silcock and Brundrett (2006). They show how subject centred teaching may integrate with teaching centred approaches to produce a “partnership” for learning. This approach, they believe:

“...spring[s] both from pupils’ experientially based attitudes and capabilities and the special features of subjects being taught. Within this co-constructivist approach, all members of staff cooperate, negotiate, resolve differences, mediate between options, and generally act in a socially skilled manner to reach decisions that will enhance student learning.” (page 155).

Whilst recognising the transient nature of the views vocational teachers may have of vocational students, constructivist methods can contribute to the practice of vocational teachers. The evidence from the interviews illustrated how the Case studies varied in the uses of exposure to skills competitions, with College B yet to accommodate the potential for learning skills competitions afford. Examples from College A showed how teachers, for example R3 (College A, Beauty Therapy), took the assessment criteria from the competitions they had experienced and used them to plan for assignments or activities they would require students to complete for their qualifications in subsequent years. Skills competitions provide further opportunities for the use of feedback by vocational teachers and this was recognised as important by the respondents within this research, agreeing with the views of Rhodes and Brundrett (2010), although its use was integrated into practice in College A more so than College B.

The potential to motivate vocational teachers through the practices associated with skills competitions was another finding to emerge from the data. This is illustrated by R15 (College B, Construction), for example, who believed that a colleague of his had a “buzz” from skills competitions that had improved his practice as a teacher. Leithwood et al (2006) show that:

“...school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation...” (page 162).

Vocational students’ valuing an experience with vocational teachers, possibly acting as “coaches”, may motivate both students and vocational teachers, affecting the practice of the teacher and developing “partnership” models of learning. The learning experienced as a result of skills competitions and their influence on the development of the practices of vocational teachers, could provide an opportunity to adapt, what Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) refer to as “learning-centred leadership” and to introduce the concept of “fostering student leadership”. This approach to leadership could be argued to create the “scaffolding” with which to support the “partnership”

models of learning illustrated by Silcock and Brundrett (2006) and thereby processes that may lead to enhancing vocational education.

Coffield et al (2007) show how vocational students may support the practice of vocational teachers due to, what they refer to as, “the central importance of the tutor-learner relationship”. They illustrate how:

“Learners, for example, valued an experience of learning that was different from that which they had had at school, in which there was a relaxed and safe atmosphere, a culture of mutual respect, more one to one attention and (for younger learners in particular) a relationship in which the students were treated as adults”. (page 739).

Both “partners” in the relationship have their motivation for learning increased and skills competitions are an effective initiative affecting the practices of vocational teachers in what can be seen as “fostering student leadership”. Where students are exposed to skills competitions they act to address prior negative educational experiences and create what Coffield (2008) refers to as a “virtuous spiral” for both vocational teachers and students of steady improvement in the quality of the professional relationship, saying:

“...both respond to the positive suggestions and reactions of the other in order to make a success of the joint task of teaching and learning.” (page 36).

The use of skills competitions is an initiative that affects the practice of vocational teachers to produce the “virtuous spiral” referred to by Coffield (2008). However the time allowed enabling vocational teachers to engage in these opportunities was recognised as a tension that existed in the case study colleges and is considered in the discussion below.

5.3 Research Question 2: To what extent do skills competitions use the vocational identity of teachers within vocational education?

Whether skills competitions are, or should be, integrated into the practice of vocational teachers may be determined by a number of contextual factors. One of the findings from the data collected for this research related to comments made by interviewees regarding the accommodation of skills competitions within time constraints and resources allocated for students to achieve their qualification. One respondent to the interview illustrated the view expressed by others of how skills

competitions create a tension between the principal requirement for teachers to ensure their student's succeed in obtaining their qualification and entering competitions (R2, College A, Hairdressing). Her opinion was expressed by differentiating the requirements of skills competitions from those of the students' qualifications as the former needing "artistic work" with the latter "commercial work".

These views were consistent with those of R9 (College A, Construction) who, while recognising the difference between the requirement of a qualification, felt that vocational qualifications have been "watered down", when compared to the needs of a skills competition. This reflects the research of Coffield et al (2005), cited in Gleeson and James (2007), and Berger (2003), who observe the deskilling of vocational teachers. However, in contrast to their views R9 (College A, Construction) believed the deskilling of vocational teachers could be reduced through the use of skills competitions as they maintained the vocational relevance of their work for vocational students through requiring skills for the "trade" that were no longer a part of qualifications. He felt that these requirements would "...benefit the trade, benefit the students and boost morale for some staff", in contrast to the demoralising experience suffered by vocational teachers in recent years, as illustrated by Gleeson and James (2007).

88% of the respondents to the on-line questionnaire felt the use of skills competitions strengthened the vocational identity of staff and students through enhancing pride in their vocational area. However, the interpretation of skills competitions as being additional to the required competencies of a course was the perception of the majority of the interviewees. Exceptions to this interpretation existed and were seen in College A, where interviewees had extensive experience of competitions and a high commitment to integrate them into their work. The support available to vocational teachers in College A appeared to reduce in the perceptions of interviewees from College B, for example R22, who saw them as "...another thing to do". The experience respondents had from College A had led to the incorporation of skills competitions into student visits within the courses they delivered (R1, College A, Hairdressing). The contextualising of their vocation was seen literally in relation to the geography of where the course was delivered and the wider horizons experienced through visits to skills competitions in other parts of the UK.

The findings from the data also illustrate how skills competitions influence the transition of vocational identities, or to “becoming”, a concept used by Colley et al (2003) for vocational teachers and their students. The transition to a new identity for a vocational teacher is similar to the experience of their students as they acquire their new vocational identity. While Colley et al (2003) argue the negative connotations of this transition for vocational students this process may be more complex for vocational teachers, who have an identity from their “trade”. For vocational teachers the period through their transition is supported by their “credibility” being maintained in relation to their experience of working in the vocation that they teach, as Robson et al (2004) point out. The observation that is made above, by R9 (College A, Construction) of maintaining links to the “trade” being a possible way in which morale of some staff could be enhanced, may aid the adoption of skills competitions to enhance vocational education, through strengthening links between former and current vocational identities. These views contrast with those of Robson et al (2004) who believe trade identities may prevent identity transformation. By embracing the prior trade identity of vocational teachers, through the use of skills competitions, the inclusion of their craft enables transition to “becoming” a vocational teacher, creating a positive process that contrasts with the views of Colley et al (2003).

However, the findings from this research do not suggest that skills competitions act as a panacea to avoid challenges facing vocational teachers in relation to the transition that they experience. This process may lead to potential alienation for some, as is illustrated by Mather and Worrall (2007) resulting in individuals with a “glass half empty” philosophy, having, as Gleeson cited in Crowley (2014), believe “slid” into vocational teaching through part-time work. Gleeson and James (2007) argue, specifically in relation to how models of professional practice operate within further education, that “tensions, contradictions and paradoxes” (page 465) facing vocational teachers need to be recognised when considering new initiatives.

The inclusion of elements of the prior “trade” may act as a catalyst to support the transition of “becoming” a vocational teacher. Holland et al (1998) refer to the possibility of a “legacy” identity that provides “sediment from past experiences...available in response...to the present”. The stage of transformation of vocational teachers is reflected by their “positional” identity along the “trajectory”

described by Wenger (1998) cited by Viskovic and Robson (2001). The respondents to the interview could be assigned different “trajectories”. Those most engaged in skills competitions being interpreted as having “insider” or “inbound” trajectories and those least engaged, “outbound” trajectories. However skills competitions may encourage vocational teachers to alter their trajectory if they act to motivate and engage their participation in vocational practice, as was illustrated by the response made by R15 (College B, Construction) of the experience of one of his colleagues appointed to the skills champion role.

Brown (1997) cites Lave (1991) whose view is supported by Wenger (1998) illustrating the dynamic nature of identity and how changes in identity are supported by “situated learning in communities of practice” (page 7). She is cited by Brown (1997) in illustrating how:

“...newcomers become old-timers as they develop a changing understanding of “practice” through participation in an ongoing community of practice” (page 7).

Interviewees from College A illustrate how a community of practice has evolved in relation to skills competitions, through roles within the organisation and the provision of training for vocational teachers, the establishing of a Competitions Club, in ways in which these are absent in College B.

Bathmaker (2005) identifies how vocational teachers new to the profession have difficulty engaging with existing communities of practice and how the changes that have been absorbed by further education have left many vocational teachers “burnt out”. The breadth of what constitutes a vocational teacher, their “position” within their “community”, is evident through contrasting the views of Bathmaker (2005) and those of Worldskills Training Managers cited below.

The professional identity of “experts” who, while often employed as vocational teachers, progress through the hierarchy of skills competitions to train competitors for WorldSkills events, is perceived to be strengthened. In a survey of Training Managers following WorldSkills London 2011 undertaken by Nokelainen et al (2012), they said how their engagement in this specific competition had altered their position in relation to possibly each of their identities, one within their “trade” and a second within their profession. A clear majority of their responses illustrated that:

“Since becoming involved in WorldSkills my commitment to my trade/profession has increased” (page 62).

Opportunities for vocational teachers to engage in experiences beyond the boundaries of their own institution can lead to the establishment of communities of practice which they are able to access. However, these opportunities represent change and ensuring the effective introduction of any change requires the complexities of the “emotional labour” extended by vocational teachers, as illustrated by Jephcote et al (2007), to be acknowledged.

The plethora of initiatives experienced by vocational teachers is illustrated by Orr and Simmons (2009) who demonstrates how targets for intervention may be achieved without any corresponding change in practice, thereby demonstrating the “gap” that they believes exists between government policy and practical application. The interviewees from College B gave examples of how an initiative, having been introduced, will be incorporated in to what exists, reducing its application.

A further finding from the data collected for this research considers the status of vocational education and how it may be enhanced through the use of skills competitions. CEDEFOP (2014) point out how within Finland they use skills competitions to raise the awareness and status of vocational education.

Illustrations were provided by interviewees from both case study colleges of how entering skills competitions enhanced the status of vocational education in relation to “external” and “internal” factors. These factors relate to the impact skills competitions have on the vocational area, the “external”, and for the individual vocational teacher or student, the “internal”. Respondents such as R3 (College A, Beauty Therapy) illustrate how a greater awareness of her vocational area address common perceptions of what is entailed, and the ignorance she had encountered through comments made by those unfamiliar with what she taught.

R4 (College A, Hairdressing) spoke of the pride felt by students, “internal” factors, following their success in skills competitions. This observation is aligned to those within the discussion relating to research question 3 regarding the enhanced self-esteem and confidence of students through engaging in skills competitions. The pride observed within their students by vocational teachers agrees with the views of Frykholm and Nitzler (1993), cited by Colley et al (2003) who illustrate how the role of

vocational teachers is to socialise their students in addition to delivering qualifications. Opportunities to “re-professionalise” vocational teachers’ are illustrated by Gleeson and Shain (1999) cited in Bathmaker (2005) through, what they refer to as, “strategic compliance”. This compliance is based on a commitment to students and to their learning agendas. The improved relationships between vocational teachers and their students enabled by skills competitions, identified in both case study colleges provides another avenue through which “re-professionisation” can take place.

The introduction of the Education and Training Foundation is another initiative aimed at supporting the professionalization of vocational teaching. However this has been criticised by Gleeson (2012) and his views agree with those of Coffield et al (2005) who believe there is a need to build the esteem in which vocational teachers are held and hold themselves, within a broader policy context than a specific initiative. Using skills competitions to contribute to the status of vocational education, and to “re-professionise” vocational teachers, needs similarly to be part of a broader policy context. The experience of skills competitions in raising the attractiveness of vocational training within Finland would appear to suggest, according to the research conducted by CEDEFOP (2014) that:

“Because competitions are viewed within a broad strategy, rather than as a stand-alone initiative, the activities associated with competitions can be integrated with other policies. For example, competitions are designed to align with the national curriculum and complement the mandated skills demonstrations which are part of the qualifications requirements...Skills Finland reaches out to stakeholders beyond the competitors in ways that can make a difference to them. For example, it has responsibility for ensuring that lessons learned through competitions are transferred to vocational education and training providers and to companies so that all can benefit”. (page 157).

The experience of vocational teachers within the case study colleges appears to differ when compared with the example provided from Finland. However, the establishment of the Skills Show, in 2012, may illustrate a greater integration of policy within the UK. The Skills Show was formed as a legacy of the UK hosting Worldskills 2011, in London and is the venue for the finals of 53 national skills competitions. This show attracted 88,000 visitors in 2013 and helps raise awareness of the vocational courses provided by further education, private training providers and universities. In 2014 Find a Future, a new organisation, was established bringing

together the responsibility to organise The Skills Show, UK Skills competitions and Continuous Professional Development for vocational teachers to support the use of skills competitions. The illustrations provided by College A reflect how this national policy agenda is being applied within a specific institution, although there are further considerations required to accommodate this initiative by other organisations and these are discussed below.

Illustrations of how policy in the UK may not be integrated are reflected in the Skills Show being established at a time when the funding for the provision of vocational education and the time allocated to deliver courses is reducing. The chronic tensions reflected in the introduction of this thesis, of competition between schools and colleges for the funding attracted by learners, may lessen their knowledge of opportunities that exist beyond the sixth form of their school, where A2 and AS subjects are taught. This problem is exacerbated by the removal of the Connexions service, with the responsibility for impartial Information, Advice and Guidance for school pupils passing to their school.

The positive contributions skills competitions make to the status of vocational education is evident from the findings of this research, however the opportunity to optimise the potential skills competitions may afford needs to be seen within the broader policy context of attempts to create a more integrated approach to skills policy.

Vocational Students

The findings from the data collected for this research in relation to the impact the use of skills competitions may have on the experience of vocational students are drawn from the perceptions of vocational teachers, as opposed to being derived from the comments of students. The time of the fieldwork within the academic year was the reason to omit students from this research, as is explained above.

5.4 Research Question 3: In what ways do skills competitions contribute to the experience of students on vocational courses?

One of the strongest responses given by respondents from both case study colleges with everyone (n = 22) in agreement, illustrated how skills competitions could be

aspirational for vocational students. The majority of interviewees also believed that they raised students' self-esteem and confidence, agreeing with the findings of Nokelainen et al (2012). Of the 28 responses to the on-line questionnaire asking if competitions raise student aspiration 62% strongly agreed and 32% agreed. The status of vocational education was thought by 89% of respondents to be enhanced by skills competitions, through raising the self-esteem of students.

Comments made by interviewees related to the increase of "focus" (R2, College A, Hairdressing) competitions provide for students and help to raise the standards at which they perform within an everyday classroom environment. One respondent commented on a specific student who was defined as a "low level learner" and the extent to which competitions motivate her to "practice day and night" to perfect the specific skills required (R4, College A, Hairdressing). This observation agrees with the research of Smeaton et al (2002) who believe:

"The whole selection and assessment process, culminating in the competitions prove[d] to be strongly motivational" (page 26).

The aspiration of students to succeed on their chosen course of study influences the quality performance of colleges of further education, as this is partly determined by an evaluation of the number of students retained throughout their programme and of those retained, the number achieving the qualification. The outcomes achieved by learners from their college courses are an area evaluated by Ofsted within their Common Inspection Framework (2012).

The work of Colley et al (2003) illustrates how the prior educational experience of students studying vocational education courses has often diminished their aspiration. The perception of students having low aspiration is compounded, as Jephcote et al (2007) point out, by the views of vocational teachers of students experience of compulsory education and from the complexities within their personal circumstances. While Colley et al (2003) acknowledge how learning cultures transform those who enter them, they perceive this acts to reinforce social inequality, through the "pull" of a vocational culture for people from certain social groupings, expressing a "sense of one's proper place". The comments made by R14 (College B, Hairdressing) of students needing "two pairs of shoes", arguably reflect, what Colley et al (2003) refer

to as, a “sensibility” contained in the “hidden curriculum” of learning environments. Colley et al (2003) argue that:

“...initiatives which reflect dominant concepts of learning, and which fail to account for learning as becoming, appear least likely to impact beneficially on learning cultures” (page 18).

However, the comments of the respondents R2 and R4 (both from College A, Hairdressing) illustrate how the perceptions of vocational teachers toward the aspirations of their students may change through their engagement in skills competitions, a position adopted by LSIS (2012) who show how managers in colleges use skills competitions to raise student aspiration. The additional opportunities skills competitions provide, when contained within the new model illustrated as Figure 5a, above, help to contextualise the preconceptions of vocational teachers and support changes in the experience of students in vocational education. The potential to change the predispositions of vocational teachers, when combined with increased aspiration and self-belief of their students enables the “homophily”, the term used by Watts (1999) existing between the vocational teacher and student to develop through skills competitions.

The potential for skills competitions to support the transition of students towards their chosen vocational identity, while addressing their negative experience from formal education brings together previously unrelated research to produce a new approach to this area of student experience. The transformation from a “lay person” to a vocational practitioner, a process that students experience and Colley et al (2003) refer to as “becoming”, through which social inequality is replicated, is contrasted to the findings of this research which illustrates how skills competitions enhance the aspiration of vocational students, helping to build the confidence to support their transition to a new identity and towards employment. This research agrees with Nokelienan et al (2012) with regard to the contribution skills competitions make to the process towards employment for young people and of “belonging”. As is mentioned above, R14 (College B, Hairdressing) used the analogy of students having “two pairs of shoes”, a pair for their everyday life and a pair for the salon she used to metaphorically distinguish the professional requirements of their working environment. Her observations extended to the need for students to build their confidence due to the need that they will have to “sell themselves” in a highly

competitive employment market. The skills developed through skills competitions were seen by several respondents as supporting those needed for employment and that evidence of taking part in competitions would potentially bolster the contents of student curriculum vitae. An illustration of a student gaining employment having been able to evidence participation in skills competitions was provided by one of the respondents (R6, College A, Beauty Therapy).

The findings of this research illustrate how the learning environment acts in part to deny the transmission of all elements contained in a “trade” through the narrowing of the criteria for vocational qualifications while promoting the transmission of, what Colley et al (2003) refer to as the “hidden curriculum”. However, skills competitions elevate the “craft” of the vocational teacher and student, focusing on the essence of the skills required to achieve a “job well done”. If incorporated within the model contained within Figure 5a, skills competitions can act as a catalyst for learning in spite of the funding and qualification considerations existing, and the constraints within which, Colley et al (2003) point out, vocational education operates.

However, another of the findings of this research illustrates how managing learning environments is complex as the experience of entering skills competitions may differentiate students within groups. 65% of respondents to the on-line questionnaire indicated that skills competitions enable opportunities for student differentiation. The management of these differences has to be considered carefully by vocational teachers and, where possible, harnessed to creative effect. It has been illustrated above how a level of differentiation exists “within” the learner, as often their aspiration has been lowered following their experience within compulsory education and as a result of experiences outside of education. Vondracek and Skorikov (1997) believe some students in the United States of America have correspondingly higher aspirations than their abilities and experience would indicate. They argue that the more exposure students have to realistic work environments the better they are aligned to work that is attainable, or as Colley et al (2003) point out to “know their place”.

Helakorpi (2010), identifies what he perceives as the need to differentiate students appropriately for the employment market so that their competencies can be matched to employment vacancies and the value of their potential contribution recognised.

Vocational education often contains work simulation in realistic work environments and, increasingly; following the introduction of Study Programmes for 16 to 18 year olds within further education colleges by the Department for Education in 2013, periods of work experience, where students spend time away from their college. Skills competitions provide further opportunities for work simulation although these may be available to some but not all students. The allocation of more time and attention to some but not all students was mentioned by respondents to the interview, along with different approaches to coaching as opposed to teaching and students who engage in skills competitions having exposure to higher quality equipment and resources. 53% of those answering the on-line questionnaire felt that students had equal access to staff and resources but 35% believed that more one to one teaching was provided for competition students and 10% said that more resources were available to them.

The aggregation of these differences could present challenges to managing learners. Respondents to the interview spoke of their awareness of the potential for skills competitions to create an “elite” group of students, although this was a by-product that was sought to be avoided (R15, College B, Construction). College A’s Competitions Club, whilst being supported with college resources, removed the differentiation of students from within the time allocated for their course. The perception of the interviewees of the creative opportunities flowing from skills competitions within the classroom or workshop revolved around the “use” of the more able students as role models or competition work being peer assessed and used as a part of students learning (R20, College B, Construction). It could be argued that this practice creates what Sfard (1998) refers to as “communities of practice” within groups of students. Opportunities for students to work collaboratively reflect the constructivist model of learning and support the acquisition of vocational skills, while providing ways for the aggregate performance of learners to develop. The potential for groups to work together to achieve specific outcomes is desirable and contributes to the development of the holistic skills required for work and provides opportunities for colleges to demonstrate good practice in teaching, learning and assessment for external inspection.

Respondents differentiated between skills competitions that were used within a college, as opposed to those organised across a region or nationally by an external

body, such as WorldSkills. An illustration was provided by R4 (College A, Hairdressing) of a level one learner entering an external competition and learning specific skills through repetition. Both internal and external competitions in each case study were open to all students, although selection processes sometimes were concentrated identification of potential entrants by vocational teachers. However, vocational teachers recognised the contribution skills competitions could make for learning at all levels. The research of Helakorpi (2010) emphasises the need for inclusivity in strategies that use skills competitions by illustrating how in Finland the competition element is secondary in their approach to the dissemination of good practice in learning.

Staff responding to the interview said they had been exposed, through engaging in skills competitions, with managing student disappointment. Not all students can succeed in skills competitions, as is recognised in the LSIS guidance (2012), and teachers with experience of students entering competitions are shown in this research to use the “failure” of the student to generate a learning opportunity. (R7, College A, Floristry). The introduction and use of competitions within colleges may need to consider the experience of teachers to deal with the disappointment of students, prior to this materialising. The guidance provided by Williams and Sheridan (2010) cited in Lucas et al (2012) may mitigate the potentially damaging results flowing from the disappointment of students who perceive that they have “failed” in skills competitions that could contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities. The findings of this research extend those identified by Colley et al (2003) by recognising the potential reproduction of inequalities that may result from the use of skills competitions through the disappointment of some students. However, the improved relationships between vocational teachers and students, identified above, while increasing the disappointment felt by some vocational teachers where their students do not succeed in skills competitions, reveals their care existing within the relationship. The care felt by vocational teachers towards their students is often suppressed to create a “critical distance” to insulate them from the demands of the emotional labour expended within their role (Avis and Bathmaker, 2004). Support and training for vocational teachers is required as different skills are used to extend the experience of students engaging in skills competitions. However, this research indicates that an opportunity exists to re-engage vocational teachers with traits they

felt constituted being a “good lecturer” at the commencement of their careers, and engenders the space within caring professions that Himmelweit (1999), cited in Avis and Bathmaker (2004), believes cannot be “commodified”. The challenge for vocational teachers is to avoid the creation of elites within groups of vocational students, as mentioned by R15 (College B, Construction) above, and to use skills competitions to generate learning, in line with the model employed in Finland, as Helakorpi (2010). The need to implement this initiative within the broader context represented in Figure 5a, should mitigate against using skills competitions to emphasize the social inequality referred to by Colley et al (2003) and to provide a mechanism through which to promote learning.

A Corporate Approach

5.5 Research Question 4: In what ways can an initiative such as skills competitions contribute to quality assurance processes in colleges of further education?

Both case study colleges use skills competitions in different ways with differing levels of support available for vocational teachers. The model contained in Figure 5a recognises how “craft” is central to vocational education. To enhance vocational education therefore this model draws skills competitions as the means through which to use this “basic human impulse”. The outer circle within Figure 5a reflects the prevailing organisational culture required to sustain this initiative, and uses the term devised by Fuller and Unwin (2004) of an “expansive” environment, that is discussed in more detail below. All elements contained in Figure 5a need to combine to optimise the use of skills competitions, or many of the challenges illustrated by respondents within this research will frustrate absorbing and sustaining the change this initiative represents. The comments made by interviewees from College A were indicative of employees working within an “expansive” environment, where there was a corporate approach to their development in the use of skills competitions and evidence of incremental change. The observations made by vocational teachers from College B were more reflective of a “restrictive” environment with an approach to workplace learning reflecting short-term business strategies.

The guidance provided by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2012), illustrates how a corporate approach to the use of skills competitions can be achieved within colleges of further education. An area they consider important in establishing a corporate approach is that:

“There is leadership and active commitment from the Chief Executive and governors.” (page 28).

The majority (n =13) of respondents to the interview identified the Principal of their college as the key driver of the use of skills competitions but that managers throughout the organisations were seen as supportive of the initiative. This observation of congruence between the priorities of leaders and their managers illustrates the compliance of managers and is demonstrated through the comments of R2 (College A, Hairdressing) and R15 (College B, Construction) who are both middle managers. In College B there were views expressed that if everyone were involved the work load associated with skills competitions would be more equally shared and that greater engagement may be achieved through the introduction of this initiative at the beginning of each academic year during staff development events and on-going continuous professional development (R12, College B, Beauty Therapy). These observations contrast the experience of vocational teachers in College B with the characteristics identified by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2012), of further education colleges who have embedded skills competitions. They advocate “Staff development and training...linked to competition activity both for the development of vocational specialisms and pedagogical expertise [and] cross-fertilisation of practice across vocational areas.” (page 28).

However the advocacy of LSIS (2012) fails to recognise the competing demands vocational teachers have to accommodate, particularly at the commencement of an academic year. In the same way in which my experience from conducting the pilot study for this research determined that students would not contribute due to the planned timing of the field work, the schedule and extent of the staff development required to accommodate skills competitions are important factors.

A finding associated with the comments above emerged from the interviewees concerning the need for planning to allow the inclusion of skills competitions within

an annual academic calendar. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2012) guidance illustrates how colleges where skills competitions are totally embedded and well established have characteristics that include a recognition of the need for the college to plan, saying:

“Competition activity is planned and formal competition work is aligned with major competition cycles, such as Worldskills”. (page 28).

Within the findings of this research there was difference between the case study colleges with regard to the interviewees’ interpretation of the planning, or lack of planning that had taken place to introduce skills competitions to their organisation. Planning is required to allow any initiative to embed within colleges and to contribute to quality improvement processes, as is illustrated by Hughes et al (2004) but they indicate how inadequate planning can give the appearance of an initiative being “bolted on” and may, as LSIS (2012) illustrate, represent a potential risk to the organisation. College B had recently introduced this initiative without consulting vocational teachers, as indicated in interviewee comments such as those of R21 (College B, Hairdressing) who said the approach of the college management had been, “Take it. Now run with it”. Another response from an interviewee from College B illustrated how they had experience “teething problems” with the introduction of the initiative but she felt sure that these would be addressed next year (R12 College B, Beauty Therapy).

Of the quality assurance processes where skills competitions were used some require planning, such as schemes of work, although their use was evident only where vocational teachers were experienced with skills competitions and they integrated them into their annual plans independent of the corporate requirements of the case study college, for example R3 (College A, Beauty Therapy).

The corporate evaluation of colleges of further education is carried out internally via self-assessment and, although administered through quality departments, the processes used to produce an annual self-assessment report involve all stakeholders, including, governors, students, employers of students trained by the college, and staff. The findings of the research indicate that most interviewees (n = 17) knew of the use of skills competitions within the quality assurance processes of their college. There was a difference between the case study colleges in relation to

the awareness of respondents of the use of skills competitions in quality improvement processes with more (n = 9) 90% of respondents from College A having a level of awareness, compared to (n = 8) 66% of interviewees from College B. Of those knowing of their use, most of the interviewees and 64% of on-line questionnaire respondents knew of their use in self-assessment. This level of awareness is consistent with that identified by Berry-Lound et al (2012) where 60% of questionnaire respondents knew of the integration of skills competitions in their organisations self-assessment. The LSIS (2012) guidance illustrates how in colleges where skills competitions are embedded:

“Quality improvement and self-assessment processes explicitly include competition activity.” (page 28).

The levels of staff awareness of the use of skills competitions within the quality assurance processes, including self-assessment, would indicate that College A has a more corporate approach to their use and, along with its acceptance of incremental improvements from using this initiative, is a reflection of a more “expansive” environment. These may also be interpreted as institutional factors from which excellence may be enabled in accordance with the views of Migler et al (1990). The research of Migler et al (1990) helps understanding of the significance of the organisation to quality improvement initiatives, as opposed to what are; “most frequently [focused on] programs, classrooms and individual student performance” (page 2).

The central element of Figure 5a, both literally and metaphorically is that of “craft”. The use of skills competitions locates “craft” at the centre of a drive to enhance quality within vocational education. “Craft” is defined by Sennett (1998) as:

“...an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake...craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself ” (page 9).

“Craft” contributes to each of the three overlapping circles contained in Figure 5a through the potential it provides to enhance vocational education for vocational teachers, vocational students and each of the case study colleges. Within each of the three areas illustrations are available of how this may be achieved. For

vocational teachers the opportunity to pass on to their students' knowledge of what respondents such as R9 (College A, Construction) referred to as his "trade" reflected the pride he felt for his "craft". Vocational students benefit from the motivation of vocational teachers to "socialise" students in what writers such as Gleeson (2014) consider to be a challenging policy era. Berger (2003) believes teachers should seek to constantly develop both their "craft" and their scholarship and that pride in "beautiful student work" can support a culture of excellence within an organisation. He goes on to say:

"Competing can also play a role when tied to an ethic of high levels of performance". (page 51).

The interviewees identified the pride their students felt from the "internal" association with skills competitions and how they helped to raise their confidence and self-esteem. They also spoke of the increased pride they had for their vocational area following their engaging in skills competitions

College A includes the use of skills competitions in corporate literature and planning documents. By doing this College A illustrated a characteristic identified by the LSIS (2012) as demonstrating embedded skills competitions: they say:

"Commitment to skills competition activity is visible in mission and strategic plan, all relevant policy documents and schemes of work, as well as promotional literature for learners, employers and the community". (page 28).

This illustration of the planning for skills competitions forms part of the model referred to above in Figure 5a, as a component of the corporate circle. College A's alignment to LSIS (2012) characteristics of colleges where skills competitions are embedded is acknowledged in the text of its most recent Ofsted report in 2012. The report says:

"Their entry to competitions is a strong feature of the college's work; inspectors observed that it raises learners' aspirations and help them to develop their self-confidence."(page 9).

College A produced marketing literature (Benefits of the UK Skills competitions 2012) claiming that skills competitions aid student retention and achievement, although these assertions are not supported by empirical research. An interview respondent commented on the improvement in standard of students' work as she observed a shift from an approach consistent with a "that'll do society" (R2, College

A, Hairdressing) and further illustrations were provided of lower ability level student “practicing and practicing” (R4, College A, Hairdressing) to raise the standard of their work as a result of their enjoyment of skills competitions. The research conducted by LSIS (2012) illustrates how skills competitions can challenge students and provide an advantage in the employment market place. The destination of students is an area considered within the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (2012) and is an area of concern identified by the position of the UK within the OECD international comparisons of vocational educational performance and by the Wolf Review (2011).

The work of Berry-Lound et al (2012) indicates that there are no criteria for skills competitions’ to contribute to Ofsted inspections. However, an alternative interpretation is provided by The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (2012) who illustrate a number of ways in which skills competitions may contribute to Ofsted inspections and how some college reports contain reference to the use of skills competitions, in a positive way, as is illustrated above.

The areas identified as contributing to the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (2012) include the three contributory areas graded to produce the grade for Overall Effectiveness. The areas inspected by Ofsted to produce an overall grade for a college are teaching, learning and assessment; outcomes for learners and leadership and management. Each of these areas are given an individual grade, with the grade for teaching, learning and assessment being the most influential as the overall grade cannot exceed the grade given for this element of the inspection.

A priority for all leaders in further education colleges is to ensure that any inspections undertaken by Ofsted result in their organisation being assessed as “good’ or “outstanding”. 89% of respondents to the on-line questionnaire indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed that skills competitions promote higher standards of learning and 98% of responses indicated that skills competitions were enjoyed by students as a part of their college course.

As a consequence the potential for skills competitions to contribute evidence for Ofsted inspections of teaching, learning and assessment that challenges students and raises their standard of work represents an opportunity to colleges.

5.6 Research Question 5: What approaches to change management processes appear to support, or have hindered, the use of new initiatives, such as skills competitions, in enhancing the quality of vocational teaching?

The case study colleges are at different stages of a change process, and their positions can be illustrated through the phases described by Fullan (2001). College A has passed through what Fullan (2001) refers to as the “initiation”, “implementation” and, to some extent “institutionalisation”. Respondents from College A were aware of their organisations engagement with skills competitions and of the main “sponsors” of this work. Those interviewed from College B were aware of the reputation of College A in promoting skills competitions. Responses from those interviewed at College A demonstrated that it will not discard this initiative and the attrition of some staff does not appear to be diminishing the integration into the practice of vocational teachers from the areas that were the focus of this research. Respondents, such as R7 (College A, Floristry) illustrate how she will continue to develop skills competitions within her work, navigating any barriers created by change management shortcomings or additional administrative requirements, agreeing with the views of Edwards et al (2007) who illustrate how, despite the plethora of changes experienced by vocational teachers they manage to respond to the needs of their students, often shielding them from the changes initiated to their own cost.

The perception of whether an initiative, such as skills competitions could enhance the quality of vocational teaching may rely not only on the longevity of a college’s use of competitions but also the extent to which they are adopted by teachers and this may be influenced by how they are introduced. The ability of teachers to plan the use of skills competitions within their work is mentioned above, for example by R7 (College A, Floristry) influencing the extent to which competitions form a basis of teachers’ practice. Respondents to the interview identified variations between their colleagues in relation to how any initiative was adopted, with R9 (College A, Construction) for example illustrating how some of his colleagues have a “glass half empty” approach to their role. Etherington (2009) echoes these views by illustrating

how initiatives within further education can seem “meaningless” to vocational teachers, due to the extent of the changes they have experienced in recent years.

The underlying purpose of this new initiative needed to have been communicated more effectively within College B, with the relatively hurried introduction commented on by R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy). This finding from this thesis develops the research of Edwards et al (2007) and Smyth et al (2000), as it appears that for an initiative such as skills competitions to be introduced successfully, the more closely it is aligned to the “lives of students” the more likely it is to be adopted by vocational teachers. This view echoes the observations of Avis and Bathmaker (2004) who illustrate that while the “care” that vocational teachers have for their students is often suppressed in an attempt to insulate them over a protracted period of time, there remains a desire to support vocational students.

The benefit an initiative such as the use of skills competitions may have in relation to being adopted by vocational teachers is its proximity to the lives of students. Fullan (2001) illustrates four phases of organisational change and it is illustrated above how College A has passed through, to some extent, three of these: “initiation”, “implementation” and “institutionalisation”. Both case study colleges have “initiated” the change required to introduce skills competitions. Their proximity to the lives of students is evident however the extent to which they have been adopted by vocational teachers varies between the case study colleges. The attrition of vocational teachers, or a decision to discard an initiative, may result where a change is not embedded into the future ways in which an organisation operates. The corporate support for skills competitions in College A has developed to sustain the initiative, as is illustrated by the training provided for vocational teachers, one of the characteristics of an “expansive” environment illustrated above. The quadrants in Figure 5b represent the four organisational change phases outlined by Fullan (2001). The case study colleges illustrate how movement from the “implementation” phase occurs as a result of many inter-related factors, and the potential to move in different directions depends on these factors. Where the characteristics of “expansive” environments are present change over time from “implementation” to “institutionalisation” are more likely to occur. However the least desired outcome for this or any initiative is “deinstitutionalisation” depicted in the lower right quadrant and

the likelihood of this occurring is higher in organisations with “restrictive” environments.

Figure 5b

Proximity to Student Experience

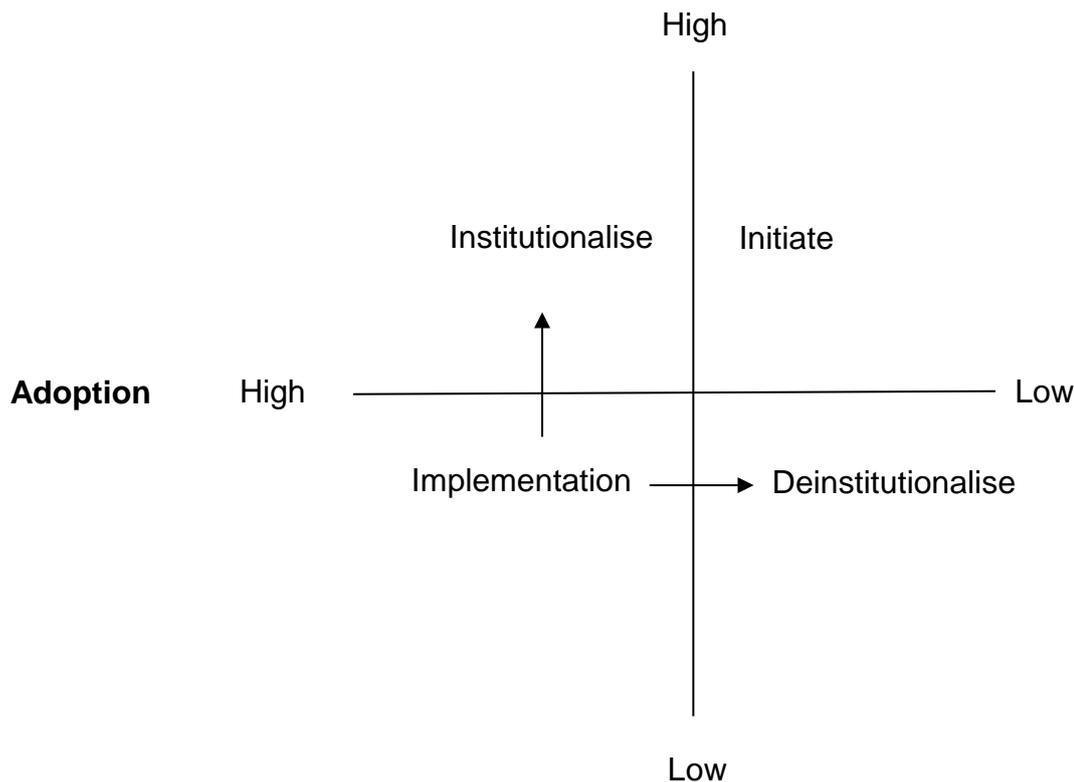


Figure 5b however, does not recognise the differing rates at which the transformations Fullan (2001) describes occur, as is illustrated by respondents in this research, such as R15 (College B, Construction) who believes a three year time period is required to embed the use of skills competitions into the ways of working in College B. The need to consider competing initiatives is significant however, the model contained in Figure 5a illustrates how using skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education needs the consideration of a range of inter-related factors, for this initiative to be sustained as a way of working that does not compete with priorities that arise.

The frequency and rapidity of the introduction of new policy initiatives represents significant change for vocational teachers and requires organisations to adopt

change management processes to enable their incorporation into their practice. An illustration of how a change in policy may “appear” to have been adopted is provided by Orr (2009) in relation to new requirements for vocational teachers to undertake thirty hours of continuous professional development each year. He refers to this as an illustration of “reform overload” saying:

“...”reform overload” is a risk recognised even by the government. Paradoxically those same initiatives may be reported as successful, even where little has changed. The trajectory of policy for CPD from voluntarism to statutory compulsion uncovers one instance of this process in action. In a symbiotic response to the government’s requirement to measure impact to report achievement of the numerical targets, college managers have pragmatically constructed systems to report achievement of the numerical targets attached to CPD, despite insignificant alteration in patterns of practice”. (page 487).

The relevance of a new initiative for the lives of students is a way of enhancing the adoption of change within a sector “overloaded” with reform. Change within further education is aimed at supporting improvement to enhance our position in the OECD comparisons with other countries. While Keep (2014) illustrates that this is a simplistic expectation, supporting changes in the lives of students, through the use of skills competition, led to improvements in the vocational education provided in College A.

However an area of tension that did exist within College A was associated with their hosting skills competition finals. The requirement to manage these events increased the demands placed on staff and the resources required to accommodate the needs of external agencies. The extent of engagement with skills competitions evident in College A appears to correspond with the need to “justify” their use to vocational teachers. Whilst the stages Fullan (2001) outlines through which changes processes may pass could be recognised in College A, the “dictats”, Edwards et al (2007) refer to from college managers, in this context regarding hosting skills competition finals, may blur the “clarity” required to justify the initiative. Where the agreement of vocational teachers is lost, the potential benefits of hosting competitions, as referred to by Hughes et al (2004) could be lost. The sustainability of the initiative may lessen and the direction of movement illustrated in diagram 5b above may change drifting towards “deinstitutionalisation”.

The role of the middle managers was seen by interviewees from both case study colleges as being important in relation to the use of skills competitions. Respondents commented on the sponsorship of the introduction of this initiative that was provided by the college Principal. Senior Managers were tasked with developing each of the case study colleges' engagement however it was the role of middle managers to encourage vocational teachers' and their students to become involved. The engagement of vocational teachers in the implementation of initiatives is significant and aligns with the views of Edwards et al (2007) cited above, who recognise the challenge this may present at a time when, as Avis et al (2002) point out, teachers feel a loss of control over teaching and learning.

The further education sector has experienced a number of initiatives aimed at increasing management capacity and introducing different approaches to management, for example, distributed leadership, as was mentioned above with the work of the Centre for Excellence in Learning and subsequently the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. The experience of the interviewees within College B, illustrate how these initiative has failed to develop some managers and their reflections align to those of Lumby et al (2005) who observe line managers using transactional approaches to enable operational tasks to be accomplished.

R13 (College B, Hairdressing) interpreted her role as a middle manager as being a "buffer" attempting to disseminate the instructions of Senior Managers "as rosily as I can". Etherington (2009) describes middle managers within further education as agents of "obligation or compliance" and reflect the "managerialism" described by Gleeson and Shain (1999). However, the comments made by R13 (College B, Hairdressing) are more illustrative of the views of Page (2011) who considers how middle managers enable the teams for who they are responsible to maintain their focus on vocational students and "shield" them from the excesses of "managerialism".

Coffield (2008) cites Thompson and William (2007) in considering how the central control of initiatives are more effectively implemented with a "tight but loose" formulation. He refers to the problems of national level design being implemented in classrooms across the country, however, within these case study colleges the need for "tight but loose" management may apply when we reflect on the role of middle

managers. A specific illustration of this concerns the allocation of resources and was provided by R1 (College A, Hairdressing) who pointed to the use of a colleagues own time given to support competitions and by R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) who referred to having to go “cap in hand” to ask for resources. Middle managers in the case study colleges did not allocate resources and more “local” involvement in determining budgets for skills competitions could enable a “tight but loose” formulation within an organisation to support the adoption of this, and other, initiatives.

Interviewees, such as R13 (College B, Hairdressing) commented on the need for greater support from Senior Managers for Middle Managers, illustrated, for example through an increase in their presence. The use of skills competitions is an initiative attempting to enhance teaching and learning, and which would be considered by Page (2011) as one which Middle Managers could “tolerate”. While he believes middle managers resist, to different extents, the instruction of Senior Managers within further education colleges, his observation that, “...greater direct and unfiltered interaction between senior and first tier managers may reduce the distance and, perhaps, allow resistance to become an act of participation rather than separation...” (page 10), is consistent with the request being made by R13 (College B, Hairdressing).

There is an inconsistency in both case study colleges between vocational areas and the extent to which they use skills competitions. The development of what Fielding and Eraut (2005) define as “joint practice development”, where transfer of good practice takes place between secondary schools. Transferring practice could be more effectively incorporated within the case study colleges to enhance the consistency, and engagement of vocational teachers with this and other initiatives.

5.7 Research Question 6: Can a specific initiative such as skills competitions act as an effective form of continuous professional development for vocational teachers?

Insufficient time for vocational teachers to use skills competitions to engage in continuous professional development was a finding from the data collected in this research from both case study colleges. The time available to vocational teachers is

required to address numerous demands. Lloyd et al (2012) illustrate how the perception of vocational teachers is that there is inadequate time to satisfy all of the demands required of them. However, respondents to the on-line questionnaire illustrate how training would support the use of skills competitions. The highest scoring answer related to 58% of respondents expressing a view that training in the criteria used in assessing competitions would support their use within their planning and day to day teaching. This response could be aligned with the second highest scoring answer which showed that 54% of respondents felt that further training in integrating competitions into course work would support quality improvement strategies. 46% of respondents felt that the provision of training on the “soft skills” required by competitors would transfer to benefit quality improvement strategies and 35% believed that training to improve their vocational skills would support the strategies for quality improvement. These answers were provided from a list of options that respondents could indicate several responses.

The two case study colleges are at different stages of their engagement with skills competitions. College A devotes resources, in the form of time and funding for staff training and remission. College B relied on remission from teaching for key individuals to enable them to support vocational students to qualify for the national finals of competitions held at the Skills Show. The motivation of the latter college emerged from its geographical proximity to the venue for the Skills Show and the marketing opportunity this created to attract potential new students.

The training required by teachers within further education to enable the use of skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education may need to commence prior to their use within a college, as was illustrated by R12 (College B, Beauty Therapy) and continue as they integrate and refine teachers’ professional practice, in accordance with the provisions in College A. Where training is implemented there may be a need for a differentiated approach due to the stages of transition of vocational teachers, as outlined above by Wenger (1998). The relative maturity of College A with regard to their use of skills competitions was evident through the provision and the nature of the training for teachers engaged with competitions. Whilst not all staff supported the use of skills competitions, most of those interviewed from College A were aware of the training that was available and some, for example R2 (College A, Hairdressing) and R10 (College A, Construction) were enthusiastic

about its possible impact on their professional practice. The coaching and Neuro-Linguistic Programme training delivered at College A supported the preference vocational teachers' exhibit dealing with individual students, possibly following their experience of working one to one with clients. R16 (College B, Construction) commented on his perception of "throwing away the rule book" when working with vocational students in preparation for skills competitions in College B. The provisions for training in College A, and of the Competitions Club for students, reflected, what is referred to above with the work of Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) as an "expansive" work environment. This contrasted with the relative immaturity of the approach of College B, where the environment reflected the other Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) category, a "restrictive" work environment. This research incorporates that of Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) by proposing that the application of an "expansive work environment" is required to enable vocational teachers, vocational students, and a Corporate Approach to the use of skills competitions to be sustained. This intention is reflected in Figure 5a and this thesis develops the "environments" proposed by Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) by recognising the inclusion of the "multiple" identities of vocational teachers, including the "dual" identities of vocational teachers as teacher and "craftsman" in addition to the "dual" identities Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) illustrate as teacher and learner. The accommodation of these "multiple" identities maintains the centrality of "craft" within Figure 5a, and enables the use of skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education.

The opportunities skills competitions afford for updating the vocational skills of teachers, as observed by R9 (College A, Construction) and R 14 (College B, Hairdressing) supporting the integration of their "craft" identity. Aligning the comfort vocational teachers have with one to one interaction with vocational students, may enable skills competitions to act as an effective form of Continuous Professional Development. The tension that exists between there being insufficient time for vocational teachers' Continuous Professional Development and the "time intensive" nature of acquiring the skills associated with a craft (Sennett, 2008) require reconciliation, against a backcloth of funding reducing the time available for qualifications.

Continuously developing the quality of vocational teachers, through innovative approaches, agrees with the position of Villeneuve-Smith et al (2009) and Thompson and William (2007) cited by Coffield (2008) who say that the quality of the teacher is more significant than all other elements that contribute to student achievement

The reluctance illustrated by R9 (College A, Construction) above, of colleagues becoming involved in skills competitions was also expressed in responses to the on-line questionnaire relating to the resistance to skills competitions within the Case studies. Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) agree with the work of Mather and Worrall (2007), who show how the range and extent of initiatives experienced by teachers within further education has led to increased workloads and feelings of alienation. Engaging with the “craft” central to vocational education and the “craft identities” of vocational teachers through skills competitions, acts to motivate them, and may potentially reduce their alienation. A specific example was provided illustrating how engagement with skills competitions helped re-vitalise the performance of a colleague in College B by R15 (Construction) observed that his colleague had a new “buzz” although his engagement in skills competitions had taken a considerable amount of encouragement following his initial reluctance to be involved.

Where interviewees indicated the inconsistency of the engagement of colleagues with skills competitions in both case study colleges, these views may reflect the different stages of identity transformation experienced by individual vocational teachers. This proposition agrees with the views of Viskovic and Robson (2001) that many identities exist within single organisations. R9 (College A, Construction) as is mentioned above, illustrated that some of his colleagues perceive any new initiatives through a “Glass half empty” perspective impeding their engagement. This view, of the position of his colleagues, may reflect how changes in work practices have reduced the work ethic of vocational teachers, agreeing with Sennett (1999) cited by Hughes (2005). The identities of vocational teachers are seen by Viskovic and Robson (2001) as “situated” and where inconsistencies occur between and within areas of their college, these may be further exacerbated and lead to a divergence between the rates of transition of identity for those engaged in skills competitions (R9, College A, Construction) and those who are not (R22 College B, Hairdressing).

The development of communities of practice may “incubate” the use of skills competitions and support vocational teachers’ engagement, agreeing with the position of Viskovic and Robson (2001). The use of applied learning within communities of practice is equally applicable for vocational teacher Continuous Professional Development, as it is for use with students and consistent with a constructivist approach to teaching, learning and assessment. Villeneuve-Smith et al (2009) and Petty (2014) recognise the benefits and appropriateness of using applied learning for the Continuous Professional Development of vocational teachers. If engaging students through applied learning practice is able to be transferred to engaging vocational teachers in Continuous Professional Development, thereby adding to the positive illustrations of participation in initiatives such as skills competitions (R4, College A, Hairdressing) the likelihood of the initiative becoming what Fullan (2001) referred to above as “institutionalised” is increased. Continuous Professional Development that focuses on enabling improvement in the classroom is required within the schools sector (Timperley, 2011) and is equally necessary in vocational education.

The model contained in Figure 5a has helped to illuminate the data collected during this research with the interrelated elements needing an “expansive” environment as a backcloth to enable the strengths of skills competitions to enhance vocational education. Without all elements contained in Figure 5a being present the limitations associated with the use of skills competitions, and any initiative requiring sustainable change, are more likely to emerge.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This research has used qualitative methods, although additional quantitative data has been drawn upon for illustrative purposes, to explore the question of whether the use of skills competitions is a winning formula for enhancing the quality of vocational education. The potential that skills competitions afford this endeavour is largely supported by the findings of this research however a number of conditions have been identified that influence the realisation of the potential contribution they may make.

This concluding chapter is structured to reflect the three themes discussed in Chapters 2, 4 and 5, with the six research questions considered within the most appropriate theme. Comments relating to the research questions are considered to address contributions to new knowledge; implications of the contributions to knowledge and for whom they may influence, along with areas for further research. This chapter concludes with recommendations from this research and concluding comments.

Vocational Teachers

6.2 Research question 1: In what ways do skills competitions affect the practices of vocational teachers?

The strengthening of the relationship between a vocational teacher and their students that resulted from engaging in skills competitions was identified within this research. These stronger relationships heighten opportunities to “socialise” students in accordance with the practice of vocational teachers identified by Frykholm and Nitzler (1993). This research identifies that through transposing the characteristics identified by Bruner (1996) to the practice of vocational teachers’, further enables one to one relationships with students to develop. The contribution this research makes to new knowledge is to extend the benefits that result from coaching students by vocational teachers by increasing the emphasis on “craft” knowledge through the use of skills competitions in their practice.

Bruner (1996) argues that learning is acquired through imitating a more experienced person; or through didactic teaching, through which learning is imparted “to” students “by” teachers, or where learners think and reflect to modify their understanding or practice, or by accommodating their personal, or prior knowledge, with knowledge accumulated over time by “experts”. The use of skills competitions supports each of these characteristics of learning, incorporated in the coaching of vocational students by their teachers. The use of “craft” knowledge in skills competitions enhances opportunities for learning and is also relevant to the identity of vocational teachers, discussed below, as their motivation towards teaching is increased through embracing their “legacy” identity in their practice.

Opportunities to provide additional student feedback are afforded by skills competitions within, what Coffield (2008) refers to as a “virtuous spiral” of a steadily improving relationships, acting to motivate both vocational teachers and their students. The importance of the iterative process of learning that occurs between vocational teachers and students is recognised by Coffield (2008). This research illustrates how skills competitions enable the development of an ongoing dialogue in which the role of master and apprentice can alter between both parties. However the allocation of time for vocational teachers’ and students to engage with these opportunities needs to be acknowledged and the costs associated with allocating this time considered by leaders of further education colleges.

The implications of this new knowledge may require further research to consider the initial and ongoing training for vocational teachers including an awareness of the nature and potential influence of the concept of “craft” within vocational education and the use of one to one coaching. It is important to conduct research into the current Initial Teacher Training curriculum and the contents of the Professional Standards for Teachers in Education and Training-England (2014), published by the Education and Training Foundation. Any research should provide empirical evidence to inform the knowledge base for training vocational teachers, adding to the recognition of the unusual nature of the experiences that new recruits to further education have as a result of their “legacy” identity, discussed below. This research may result in recommendations that have resources implications, particularly if

further education colleges are required to consider the potential benefits of one to one coaching.

Further research may support adoption of some of the implications of this study through the exploration of costs associated with engaging in using skills competitions within a further education college. This research did not attempt to evaluate the amount of the resources deployed by the case study colleges however this information would help contextualise recommending the initiative to the leaders of further education colleges. Empirical evidence from research conducted of the costs associated with full and partial implementation of engagement with this initiative would support further education colleges in deciding the benefits compared to the costs of this initiative. This research would enable leaders of further education colleges to make decisions from a more informed position providing evidence to support their accountabilities.

6.3 Research question 2: To what extent do skills competitions use the vocational identity of teachers within vocational education?

This research illustrates how the use of skills competitions incorporates the “legacy” identity of teachers acquired from their “trade” background. This is enabled by using their “craft”, which is disproportionately represented within skills competitions when compared to the qualifications they deliver, influencing, what is referred to by Wenger (1998) as the “trajectory” of transformation between identities. Parallels between the experiences of vocational teachers and their students, as each acquire new identities, are referred to in relation to research question 3.

The findings of this research illustrate how the use of skills competitions acts to maintain the “craft” of vocational teachers within their trade in relation to, what are perceived to be, “watered down” qualifications. Through maintaining more elements of a “trade” within qualifications, skills competitions support the meaning of vocational teaching and mitigate the potential alienation felt by some vocational teachers. Interviewees referred to the ways in which skills competitions, “...benefit the “trade”, benefit the students, and boost morale for some staff” (R9, College A,

Construction). The concerns raised by Robson et al (2004) of the barrier that a prior identity may represent for the transformation of identities for vocational teachers, could be addressed through the use of skills competitions as their prior identity becomes central to the practice of the teacher as opposed to being marginalised due to the demands to deliver qualifications in less time with lower levels of funding.

The pride generated from the use of skills competitions raises standards within vocational education and engages some, although not all, vocational teachers in ways the workforce reforms intend. This research provides new knowledge through demonstrating how the standards for vocational teachers need to recognise the opportunities skills competitions provide through adding the previous “crafts” of teachers to what could be recognised as the “craft” of teaching.

Research is required to extend this new knowledge into the requirements for policy makers to consider the time, resources and contents of qualifications and whether the accountabilities of vocational teachers require adjusting to incorporate the use of skills competitions. Research should be considered into the elements contained within Initial Teacher Training courses and if the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training-England (2014), as illustrated above, as to whether the use of skills competitions helps to sustain the transition of vocational identities.

Further research into the “iteration of identities” following transition from one identity to another, and a subsequent return to the characteristics of the prior identity, may inform the transitions and multi-memberships of communities of practice that form part of the experience of being a vocational teacher. The notion of the multiple-identities of vocational teachers is also considered later.

Vocational Students

6.4 Research question 3: In what ways do skills competitions contribute to the experience of learners on vocational courses?

The contribution to knowledge that this research provides is that by applying the use of skills competitions to vocational education the aspirations of vocational students are raised. The enhanced aspirations and self-esteem of Worldskills competitors is unsurprising. However opportunities to use skills competitions within further education colleges on a day to day basis, to help raise the self-esteem and confidence of students, and vocational teachers, is evident from the findings of this research.

The use of skills competitions enables the transformation of students to new vocational identities and addresses perceptions of vocational teachers and students that are “inherited” from previous experiences. The findings of this research illustrate how skills competitions provide an opportunity for vocational teachers and students to acquire new identities and for this process to be aspirational, and contrast the views expressed by Colley et al (2013) of vocational education accommodating low aspiration and replicating social inequalities. The importance of this is that skills competitions can redefine the “hidden curriculum” through the aspiration they introduce for vocational students, expanding their views of their vocation. This also creates an opportunity to enhance the relationships that exist between vocational teachers and vocational students, as referred to above, encouraging the concept of the term used by Watts (1999) of “homophily”.

This research recognises the need to differentiate students to optimise the potential of their contributions to the labour market, and while acknowledging that skills competitions are able to do this it also acknowledges that the use of skills competitions can create perceptions of elitism within groups of students. The findings of this research in relation to student differentiation are linked to those regarding managing student disappointment. The potential for skills competitions to be divisive is compounded for some students through their perception of their performance

representing “failure”. The contribution of this research is to recognise the need for vocational teachers to devise practice for vocational education that incorporates the findings from research in schools by Williams and Sheridan (2010) who show how competitions, “...can enhance learner’s abilities, develops their ambitions and encourage their learning...[they] can motivate individuals to stretch beyond their own expected abilities.” (page 81).

The implications of this new knowledge require leaders within further education to recognise the scope of influence the use of skills competitions has in enhancing the quality of vocational education. The benefits of building the self-esteem and confidence of students, and vocational teachers, through the use of skills competitions can enable the transition of student identity. However a fair allocation of resources and opportunities for all students is required and appropriate support to accommodate student disappointment is necessary.

Further research is required to investigate the inclusion of skills competitions within learning materials, specifications from awarding bodies and assessment methods, enable learning to develop. Implications for the inclusion of the use of skills competitions by further education colleges into future surveys of students and staff in vocational education, and within the Ofsted Common Inspection Frameworks should also be investigated.

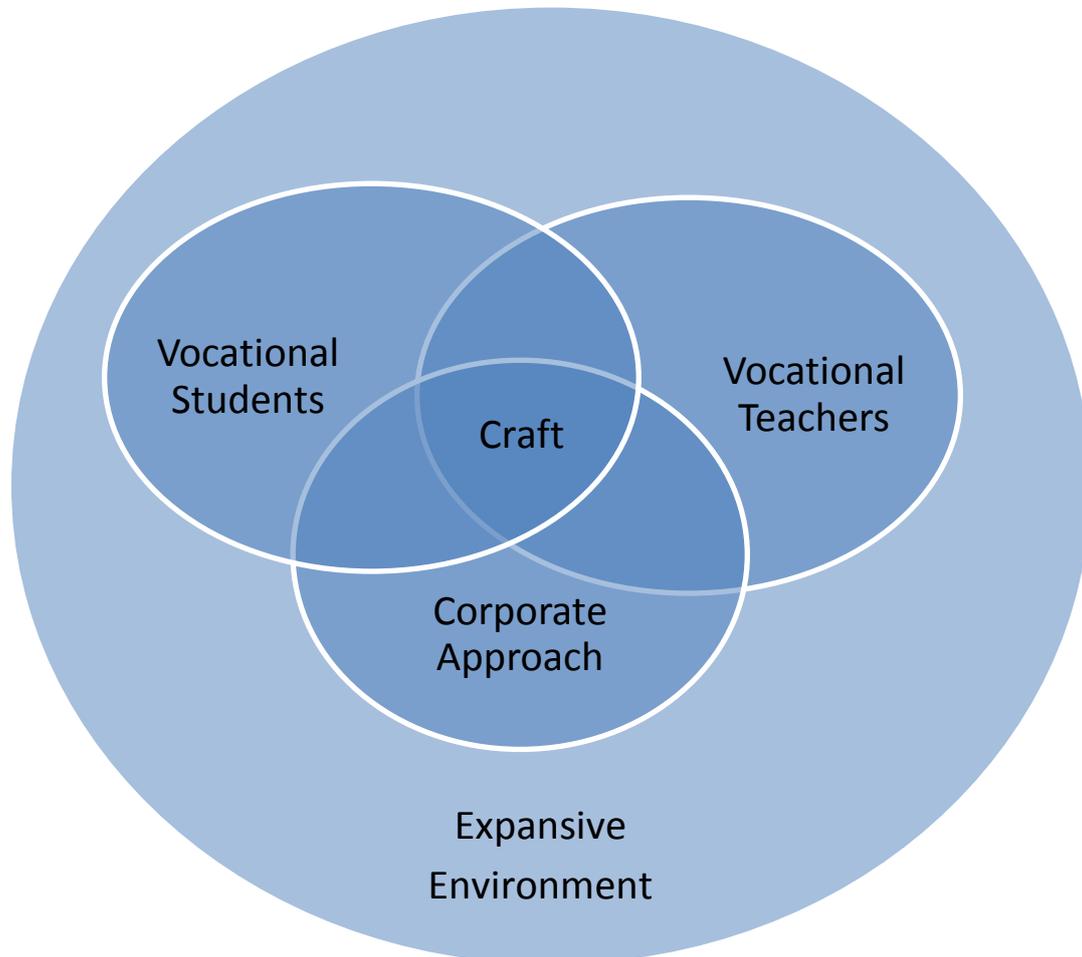
A Corporate Approach

6.5 Research question 4: In what ways can an initiative such as skills competitions contribute to quality assurance processes in colleges of further education?

The contribution to new knowledge that is provided by this research is the development of the proposition of Migler et al (1990) of “linking the research in vocational education with other efforts to understand and improve institutional improvement”(page 2). The model contained in Figure 5a combines previously unrelated research and provides the elements for further education colleges to adopt

to enable skills competitions to be used to enhance the quality of vocational education.

Figure 5a



The guidance produced by LSIS (2012) gives examples of characteristics of colleges with embedded skills competitions and refers to the need to plan for their use and of the potential benefits that may be secured in relation to Ofsted inspections. However, this research adds to their guidance of “how to go about it” (page 30) by providing a more holistic model, indicating elements to consider that are absent from their guidance. The specific component of the model produced by this research is the recognition of the influence of the “craft” of vocational teachers. The view of LSIS (2012) that “Once staff have “got it”, and have seen the benefits of competitions for their learners, they will not turn back” (page 34). This may be a simplistic interpretation reflecting their advocacy of skills competitions, and further analysis is required to consider how the use of “craft” acts to engage vocational teachers. The

entrenched position of some vocational teachers was acknowledged by interviewees and, whereas not turning back having “got it” may be one view, the use of their “craft” to encourage their engagement is considered here as a means to engage and sustain the commitment of vocational teachers, and should be a corporate priority for further education colleges. Figure 5a illustrates how an “expansive” environment is required to accommodate the inter-dependent elements contained in the Venn diagram. This research proposed that where the conditions contained in Figure 5a exist there is an opportunity to use skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education, and where they are not present the sustainability of this initiative may be difficult.

This new knowledge has implications for Senior Leaders within colleges of further education as the elements contained in the model reflect the extent and scope of factors that require consideration prior to, during and after the introduction of skills competitions, or to develop their use in colleges where they currently exist. There are also important considerations for the research community following the findings of this thesis. The model proposed for use requires testing to evaluate its potential effectiveness and to consider any possible modifications. Research should be undertaken to build a body of knowledge containing empirical evidence to support, or not to support the use of skills competitions by further education colleges and supplement a lack of current research available in this field.

An area in which further research may contribute to a greater understanding of the benefits produced by a corporate approach to the use of skills competitions could be to evaluate the effectiveness of how the strategic documents containing the intention to use skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education are translated into action via meetings structured throughout an organisation. The position of these meetings within the organisational hierarchy is designed to communicate messages relating to this, and other, initiatives. However the complexity and scale of introducing or developing the use of skills competitions within a college of further education requires effective and consistent two way communication. The findings of this research illustrate the variations that exist between the case study colleges for an appetite to accommodate new initiatives. These differences are mirrored in inconsistencies between the engagement of

colleges with the use of skills competitions across the learning and skills sector, and may result from too great an emphasis on “top down” communication and failing to incorporate the views of vocational teachers into the planning required for the introduction of initiatives.

6.6 Research question 5: What approaches to change management processes appear to support, or have hindered, the use of new initiatives, such as skills competitions, in enhancing the quality of vocational education?

The findings from this research apply the use of skills competitions within vocational education to the model created by Fullan (2001) of the stages organisations experience as they change to absorb new initiatives. Figure 5b illustrates how the more proximate initiatives are to the lives of students the greater their potential to become “institutionalised”. The closer the proximity of an initiative to the lives of students, there is more potential for vocational teachers to engage with the initiative and move it towards “institutionalisation”. This research recognises the extent of the changes that vocational teachers have absorbed within recent years and observes the care required in introducing or developing the use of skills competitions within the case study colleges.

This research also illustrates how the model created by Fullan (2001) could be further developed through recognising the enhanced need to “justify” initiatives the more they are likely to interrupt the day to day relationship between vocational teachers and students. Accommodating initiatives by vocational teachers mirrors the need for students to decide if actions are worth doing, as is reflected in the constructivism model of learning (ERIC Development Team 1997). Illustrations from College A of hosting skills competitions show the extent to which day to day teaching can be disrupted and acts to illustrate where a greater degree of “justification” may be required for vocational teachers and vocational students to absorb all aspects of this initiative.

Further research is required to produce empirical evidence illustrating whether support for middle managers, as enablers of this initiative, influences absorption of change. This research shows that practical help in availing budgets and resources to middle managers ensures that they are equipped to engage their colleagues in this initiative, however research into the risks associated with allocating budgets and the experience of colleges having done so, would provide empirical evidence on which Senior Management Teams could base decisions.

The possibilities for “joint practice development” that engaging vocational teachers from different vocational areas has positive implications for leaders in further education colleges through a reduction in any tendencies for “silos” to operate within these organisations.

Research into the change management processes employed to use skills competitions is required and should consider variables that are needed to reflect the context into which this initiative is being introduced. The evidence produced by this research illustrates the different positions of the two case study colleges and their progress through the stages referred to by Fullan (2001). The change management processes therefore required within each case study varied. Research considering different approaches to organisations at different stages of maturity in applying any initiative would be important and should include the context within which the further education sector is operating at any particular time. The competing priorities of further education require new initiatives to be evaluated against other initiatives and the introduction of new ways of working compelling colleges to change. Through research to evaluate the priorities for further education this initiative can be contextualised and empirical evidence produced informing the further education sector of its capacity to accommodate the use of skills competitions.

6.7 Research question 6: Can a specific initiative, such as skills competitions, act as an effective form of continuous professional development for vocational teachers?

The findings from this research adapt that of Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) by proposing that the application of an “expansive work environment” to the vocational education sector requires the accommodation of the identities of vocational teachers in order to encourage their engagement in the use of skills competitions. This inclusion would expand the “dual” identities considered by Fuller and Unwin (2004 a, 2004 b and 2010) who see these as employee as staff member and learner and enable the use of initiatives, such as skills competitions, to enhance the quality of vocational education through a closer alignment between the “legacy” identity of vocational teachers and their Continuous Professional Development. Incorporating “expansive work environments” within the model proposed in Figure 5, a, supports the accommodation of, the “multiple” identities of vocational teachers that are relevant within vocational education.

This research illustrates how skills competitions are used within the Continuous Professional Development of vocational teachers and support their capacity for stronger relationships with students. This may act as a catalyst to re-engage some vocational teachers, due to their remaining committed to supporting vocational students, and create Continuous Professional Development that can be applied across all vocational areas within further education colleges.

The implications of these findings for leaders of further education colleges are to incorporate the “multiple” identities of vocational teachers within their Continuous Professional Development, and to use skills competitions as a means to achieve this. It is acknowledged that there are time considerations for college leaders to accommodate and the tensions that exist between the time required by vocational teachers to pass on the skills of their “craft” to their students and the reduction in time and funding allocated for qualifications is acknowledged above. The implications of this for policy makers’ is to consider the need for the UK to remain competitive, while recognising the investment required to enable the leaders of

further education colleges to provide the “expansive work environments” needed to support the Continuous Professional Development of vocational teachers.

A further research project should consider the content of qualifications and whether the scope of what is contained has changed, as is the perception of interviewees in this research. This research may, or may not, confirm their concerns in relation to the time allocated to the range of competencies they see as constituting their “trade”. The vocational qualifications that are seen as having been “watered down” may omit elements of the “trade”. The scope of the qualifications has to consider the elements of what is required to “become” a specific vocational practitioner and to recognise and proportion, within limited time, new techniques when compared to older techniques. The “craft” within a “trade” may refer to older techniques and teaching these may be sacrificed to accommodate new methods. However older techniques may still be required to practice all elements of a trade. For example, the construction industry has new and existing housing stock requiring various skills using new and old techniques. Through evaluating the content of vocational qualifications and the inclusion of “craft” to maintain all areas of the “trade” may subsequently lead to a revision of vocational practice for vocational teachers and potentially a greater use of skills competitions.

6.8 Recommendations

There are important recommendations that are proposed following the findings of this research for leaders of further education colleges, for The Education and Training Foundation, for Awarding Bodies and there is a requirement for further research that would contribute to build a body of knowledge relating to this field of study. There are 7 recommendations listed below.

6.7.1 The scope of the requirements of skills competitions to a further education college, identified in Figure 5a above, need to be recognised and applied by leaders within the further education sector to their colleges, so as to optimise the potential impact of this initiative on enhancing the quality of vocational education.

6.7.2 Further education leaders and policy makers should use skills competitions to enable the “craft” of vocational teachers to transform their practice and enhance positive relationships with students.

6.7.3 Continuous Professional Development programmes for vocational teachers should include training to manage the disappointment of students who do not succeed in skills competitions, and training materials developed to support vocational teachers to use skills competitions in ways that accommodate the inevitability of students being unsuccessful.

6.7.4 The use of skills competitions within further education colleges should be implemented as a medium term initiative, aligned at all times to the experience of vocational students.

6.7.5 Further education college leaders should be aware of the resource implications of implementing this initiative and devolve sufficient resources to middle managers, including money and time, to enable the initiative of using skills competitions to be perceived as an alternative means of delivering vocational education, as opposed to an additional requirement of vocational teachers.

6.7.6 The Education and Training Foundation should incorporate the “craft” of vocational teachers, from their “legacy” identity into the Teaching Standards for Vocational Teachers-England, recognising their “multiple identities” within ongoing Continuous Professional Development and the need to sustain their new identity.

6.7.7 The inclusion of broader elements of “crafts” need to be accommodated within vocational qualifications, and for assessment criteria for qualifications to be derived from those used for skills competitions to generate a greater proximity between the day to day teaching of vocational competence and vocational excellence.

6.9 Concluding comments

This research has sought to examine the use of skills competitions as an initiative to enhance the quality of vocational education. In doing so it was necessary to look at a variety of influences on this initiative.

It is clear from this research that the scope of areas to consider when using this initiative are extensive and that the two case study colleges represented differing

levels of experience in engaging with skills competitions. However the use of skills competitions to enhance the quality of vocational education is supported by this research. The “craft” from the “legacy” identity of vocational teachers, supported in “expansive” environments, enables their engagement with this initiative and builds positive relationships with their students.

The need to enhance the quality of vocational education remains critical to the UK economy. During this research Worldskills Leipzig 2013 took place and the performance of the UK worsened when compared to Worldskills London 2011. The number of medals won reduced to 6 and the UK position in the medal table fell from 5th to 10th. This may be a reflection of the impact hosting a competition has on an individual nation, and whilst the performance of the UK Team is not representative of the quality of vocational education in the country, it is evident that more than the encouragement of Ministers is needed to promote this initiative. The structure required to enable skills competitions to enhance vocational education is illustrated in Figure 5, a, and its central element of using the “craft” of vocational teachers needs corporate endorsement, planning, appropriate and ongoing Continuous Professional Development for vocational teachers and effective change management processes.

Further research to strengthen the relatively porous empirical knowledge relating to the use of an initiative such as skills competitions is required. The individuals employed and studying in vocational education require this work to be undertaken to develop and support their practice.

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Pilot Study Staff Questionnaire

Years spent teaching in FE: _____

Years employed at the College: _____

Vocational area: _____

Level of engagement in competitions

	Please tick
Not at all	
Supporting students in college	
Supporting students in competitions external to college	
Acting as a training manager	

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Staff receive sufficient training to support students engaged in skills competitions.					
Skills competitions can be used as evidence for student assessments.					
Skills competitions support target setting for student's learning goals.					
The use of skills competitions is integrated into scheme of work and lesson plans.					
Skills competitions promote higher standards of learning.					
Skills competitions distract students from gaining their qualifications.					
Skills competitions build relationships between teachers and learners.					
Some students receive more attention than others due to their engagement in skills competitions.					
Skills competitions promote student progression to employment.					
Skills competitions promote higher standards of teaching.					

1.How are students selected to become competitors in skills competitions? (Please tick any that apply)

- a) From internal college competitions
- b) By a tutor identifying a talented student
- c) By a student requesting entry
- d) As a result of a request from Senior Managers
- e) Other _____

2.Are students who succeed in skills competitions treated differently by college staff to other students? If so, what are your views on this?

3.Do skills competitions form part of the college's quality improvement process? If so, this is by: (Please tick any that apply)

- a) Integration into the Self Assessment Report
- b) As a part of the classroom observation process
- c) Providing evidence in internal audits
- d) Providing evidence in peer reviews
- e) They do not form part of the College's quality improvement process
- f) Other _____

4.How do skills competitions raise the status of vocational education?
Through: (Please tick any that apply)

- a) A greater awareness in the media
- b) Improving students' self esteem
- c) Improving students' employability
- d) Not at all
- e) Other _____

5. Would additional staff training support the use of skills competitions in the College's teaching and learning strategies?

Such as: (Please tick any that apply)

- a) Training to improve staff vocational skills
- b) Training on 'soft' skills required by competitors
- c) Training in the criteria of the competitions
- d) Other training would I would identify would include:

6. Does the use of skills competitions feature in your lesson plans, schemes of work or your students' learning plans? (Please tick any that apply)

- a) Yes and all three are linked
- b) In some but not all
- c) Not at all
- d) Other _____

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

Pilot Study Staff Interview

Venue: _____

Name: _____

Years spent teaching in FE: _____

Years employed at the College: _____

Vocational area: _____

Level of engagement in competitions

	Please tick
Not at all	
Supporting students in college	
Supporting students in competitions external to college	
Acting as a training manager	

1. Are skills competitions aspirational for students from the area your college serves?

(Subsidiary question) Are they used with students on level 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 courses?

2. Do skills competitions strengthen your vocational identity and that of your students?

3. Are students treated differently to their peers if they succeed in competitions?

(Subsidiary question) What is the experience for those students who don't succeed?

4. Do you use evidence from skills competitions in your quality assurance processes?

5. Do you think that skills competitions help raise the status of vocational education?

6. What training is available or you think ought to be available to support staff to engage in skills competitions?

7. Do skills competitions use resources inappropriately?

8. Is your ability as a teacher altered by skills competitions?

9. Do skills competitions impede the main purpose of the College that of teaching and learning?

10. Who are the main advocates of the use of skills competitions in your college?

(Subsidiary question) How do the advocates support their use?

Thank you.



Skills Competitions Staff Quality Questionnaire

1. Please tell us how many years you have spent teaching in Further Education

2. How many years have you been employed at this college?

3. What is your vocational area?

4. What is your level of engagement in competitions?

- Not at all
- Supporting students in college
- Supporting students in competitions external to college
- Acting as a trainer manager

5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Staff receive sufficient training to support students engaged in skills competitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills competitions can be used as evidence for student assessments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills competitions support target setting for student's learning goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The use of skills competitions is integrated into scheme of work and lesson plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills competitions promote higher standards of learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills competitions distract students from gaining their qualifications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Skills competitions build relationships between teachers and learners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Some students receive more attention than others due to their engagement in skills competitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills competitions promote student progression to employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Skills competitions promote higher standards of teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. How are students selected to become competitors in skills competitions?
(Please tick any that apply)

- From internal college competitions
- By a tutor identifying a talented student
- By a student requesting entry
- As a result of a request from Senior Managers
- Other (please specify)

7. How do skills competitions strengthen the vocational identity of staff and/or students? Through: (please tick any that apply)

- An increased pride in the vocational area
- A greater recognition of the vocational area
- The celebration of achievements across the college
- They do not strengthen vocational identity

Other (please specify)

8. Are students who succeed in skills competitions treated differently by college staff to other students? If so, what are your views on this?

9. Do skills competitions form part of the college's quality improvement process? If so, this is by: (please tick any that apply)

- Integration in to the Self Assessment Report
- As a part of the classroom observation process
- Providing evidence in internal audits
- Providing evidence in peer reviews
- They do not form part of the College's quality improvement process
- Other (please specify)

10. How do skills competitions raise the status of vocational education? Is it through: (please tick any that apply)

- A greater awareness in the media
- Improving Students' self esteem
- Improving Students' employability
- Not at all
- Other (please specify)

11. Would additional staff training support the use of skills competitions in the College's quality improvement strategies? Such as: (please tick any that apply)

- Training to improve staff vocational skills
- Training on 'soft' skills required by competitors
- Training in the criteria of the competitions
- Other (please specify) training that I would identify would include:

12. Does the use of skills competitions feature in your lesson plans, schemes of work or your students' learning plans? (Please tick any that apply)

Yes and all three are linked

In some, but not all

Not at all

Other (please specify)

13. How does the College manage skills competitions? (Please tick any that apply)

The College manages the competition well across the organisation

The College manages competitions through the enthusiasm of departments

The College does not actively manage competitions

14. How would you manage competitions differently?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

INTERVIEWEE: R4

Tape 4 ('T4')

REF: WS650006

INSTITUTION:

DEPARTMENT: Beauty Therapy (Make-up Artistry)









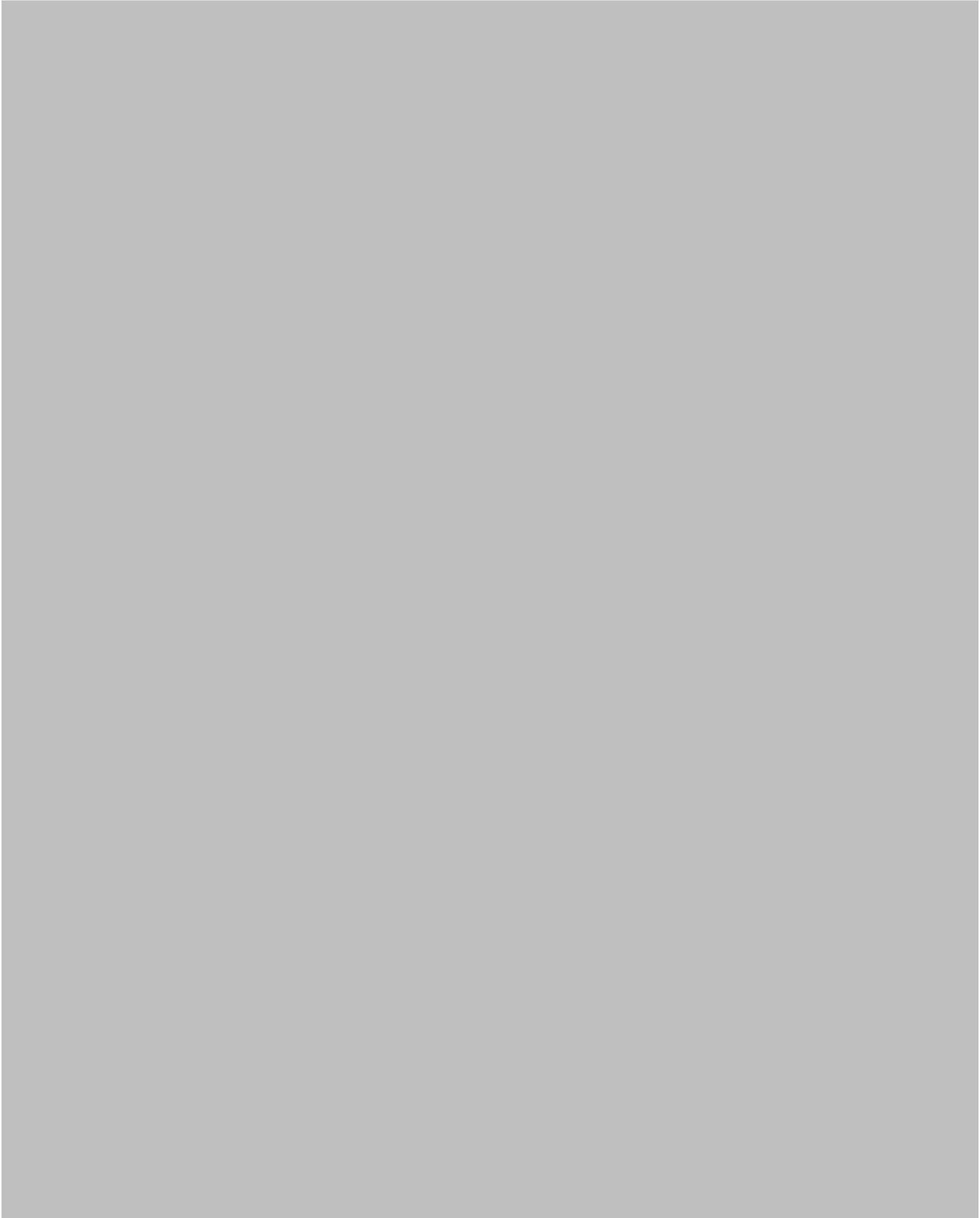














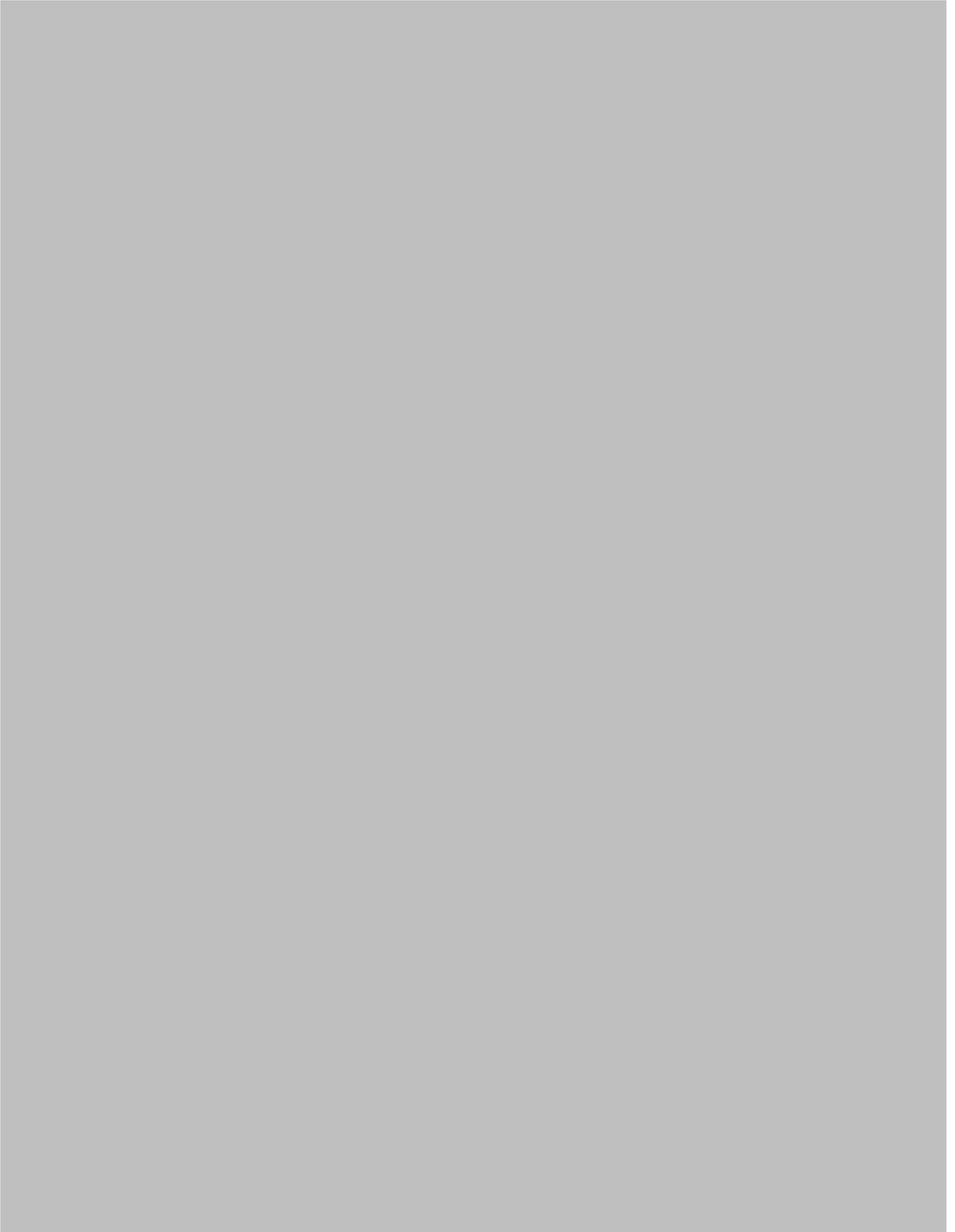
















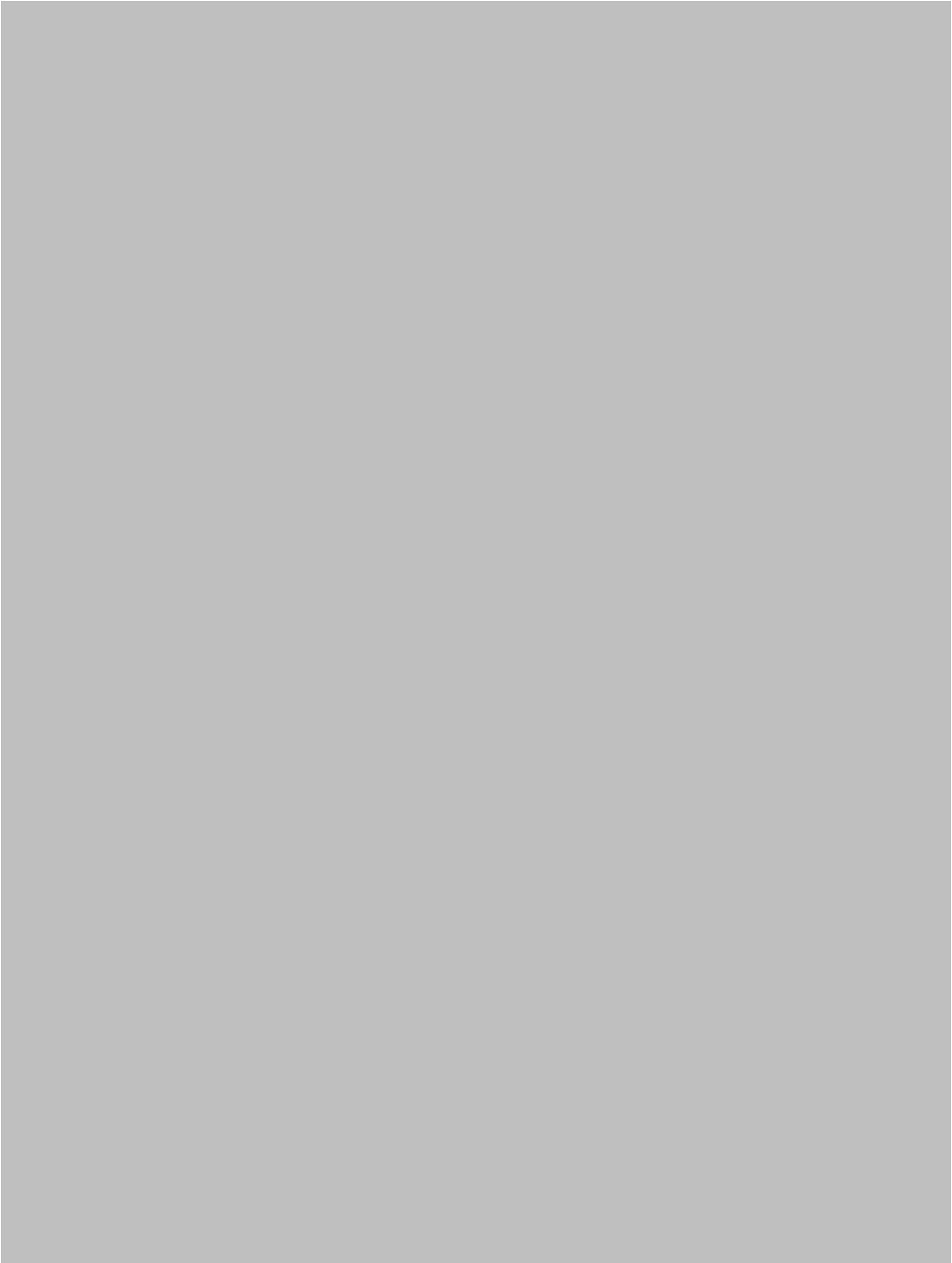




































- END OF INTERVIEW -

**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW**



**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW**

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