

## Vocational Education

### What is Vocational Education?

Is a type of education that focuses on skills for the workplace – as opposed to “academic education”.

It will involve such areas as careers education, and technical education, especially where there is a focus on jobs which have a specifically technical or even manual component.

May have an impact in three main areas

1. **Educational Institutions** – e.g., Technical or Modern Schools (in the tripartite system), City Technology Colleges, a range of specific academies and Free Schools
2. **Credentials/qualifications** – e.g., CPVE, NVQ, GNVQ, BTEC, CTEC plus specifically vocational disciplines at degree level or the creation of modern apprenticeships, which leads to...
3. **Workplace based learning** – e.g., work experience programmes, YOP/YTS, etc  
This might also coincide with greater involvement of private companies within schools, as sponsors, providers of learning materials, etc. thus **servicing the specific needs of employers**

### New Right Policy:

The **New Right** introduced the so-called “**New Vocationalism**” in the 1980s.

They argued that Britain needed job related training in order to fight against high levels of unemployment of the time, and in order to prepare youngsters for a variety of new upcoming jobs within the technology industry. Existing academic education was not providing workplace skills that employers needed.

**Three** key policies from this time

1. **National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)** a framework for assessing and accrediting workplace and other training at all levels
2. **Youth Training Scheme (YTS)** requiring young people without work to train with employers to continue to be eligible for benefits
3. **City Technology Colleges** – new schools often with commercial sponsorship not bound by the National Curriculum but focusing on technical skills. These were removed from LA control and given enhanced budgets

### **Key Policy Aims**

- To enable school leavers to become more attractive to employers and improve the skill base of the workforce
- To achieve “**parity of esteem**” between academic and vocational routes
- To provide new skills for a restructuring British economy stripping away outmoded or outsourced industries

Why might this be even more important now?

### More recent initiatives

**BTEC** has emerged from GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualifications) via so-called “Vocational A levels” Each of these qualifications has attempted to further enforce parity of esteem

The most recent attempt to do this by establishing greater rigour in BTECs has been to increase **examined content** to 50% of the whole

CTCs and similar institutions have often morphed into **academies** – again without LA control, with enhanced funding and freed from the National Curriculum

**Work experience** has become reinforced through new Careers guidelines (**Gatsby** criteria) for those in school and college

New Labour’s **Raising of the School Leaving Age** actually excused 16-19 year olds who were already in employment or training (NEETs)

Coalition and Conservative policies have sought to reinforce work experience even to the extent of enabling 15-16 year olds to work in supermarkets

## Key perspectives on education and work?

### Functionalists

**Durkheim** – felt that a key function of a mass education system was to provide discipline and skills for the workplace

**Parsons** – emphasised values of competition necessary to the workplace

Meritocratic element in the allocation of job roles

**Davis & Moore** – the education exists as the proving ground for job allocation sifting and sorting for vocational roles

**Schultz** – investment in education is investment in Human Capital – improving the skill base and the health of the economy

### Liberal Theory

**Ilich** – distinguished between schooling (what happens in schools) and education (learning and developing skills) – they may not always complement each other!

Schools are focused on credentials, not on learning actual relevant skills

### Marxists

Vocational courses can be used as a form of social reproduction – putting the w/c into the vocational schools and courses and reserving the academic courses and schools for the m/c

**Bowles and Gintis** – mug and jug theory of education – withholding knowledge and skills is as important as disseminating them?

Meritocracy is a myth – schools do not sort and sift fairly

Over-education – schools exist to produce a surplus of skills in some areas, driving down possible wages and increasing profit. The training facility of schools is to relieve capitalism of the cost of training on the job.

**Willis** – schools help the working class to make the choice for social reproduction

Lads learnt the ability in school to cope with the boredom of low skill low paid jobs

(Willis believed that they still do, even though those jobs are disappearing)

**Rikowski** – education itself is a commodity in a marketised economy

The so-called “business takeover of schools” further reinforces the control of capitalist business over the educational process.

## Key Criticisms

### **Reinforcing social class and ethnic divisions** – social and cultural reproduction

Good students have been cream-skimmed for academic courses, less promising ones put on vocational ones (**Paul Willis, Gillborn and Youdell?**)

### YTS and other work experience schemes simply to **massage unemployment statistics**

Removal from the UB/JSA register makes it appear that unemployment is reduced Phil Cohen - he argued that Youth Training Schemes serve capitalism by not teaching young workers genuine job skills but rather attitudes and values needed in a subordinate labour force.

### **Gendered stereotyping** affects the types of courses taken by students

Hair and Beauty, Health and Social Care as predominantly female subjects?

### **The skills that are required are still not really there**

Employers still complain that school leavers lack the skills that are specifically required (IoD, CBI and other reports)

### **Parity of esteem has never been achieved** with pupils, parents, employers

Recent developments in exam accreditation lessen the focus on skills, and simply make BTECs one more exam based subject

### **Resourcing is uneven**

**Birdwell** suggests that secondary schools in England and Wales often neglects pupils with vocational aspirations, and instead focus on educating the brighter students, who are destined to pursue higher education – Marketization and League Tables often reinforce this – and this in turn is driven by media and government policy and policy makers