



# **GOOD PEOPLE IN A FLAWED SYSTEM:**

**THE CHALLENGES OF  
MAINSTREAMING EXCELLENCE  
IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION**



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I am grateful to colleagues at WorldSkills UK, particularly Ben Blackledge, who put me in contact with the Training Managers, and to Ben, Neil Bentley-Gockmann and Emma Roberts who provided essential feedback on earlier drafts. Their support in preparing this report was invaluable.

## FOREWORD

WorldSkills UK exists to accelerate the development of young people's skills from national to world-class standards through UK-wide and international skills competitions. From our experience of maintaining our position in the top 10 of the WorldSkills medal tables we have learnt that achieving excellence means developing resilience and a creative mindset as well as a higher technical skill-set. This is as true for delivering high performance at work as it is for winning competition



**Ben Blackledge**  
Deputy CEO  
Worldskills UK

Although we have been benchmarking internationally and honing our training methods for many years we have not yet systematically transferred this knowledge outside the competition setting. This must change, and we are excited by the potential to add value right across UK skills systems.

To do this we have created a Productivity Lab, within WorldSkills UK, which is undertaking research to help mainstream world-class excellence in skills across the UK. This will enable us to share both our methodology on what it takes to become world-class and our insights into how other countries in the WorldSkills global network are developing their skills systems to meet their economic needs and boost their competitiveness.

We're delighted to be working with Dr Susan James Relly on this project, drawing on her expertise on TVET systems and knowledge of skills competitions, to explore in more detail than ever before the role of our Training Managers. These are often the unsung heroes of our skills competition success so it is vital that we understand the unique role they play and how this expertise and experience can be used across skills systems in the UK. We are very grateful to Susan for

the time she has dedicated to this important topic and the independent analysis and insights she has brought to this research. We are also grateful to the Training Managers who gave up their time to be interviewed.

This report paints a picture of a Training Manager community which is at the top of its game and which shares a passion for pushing the boundaries of skills training. Within this community Training Managers are all individuals with different day jobs who approach their dual identity in a variety of ways. Some are driven to pass on as much of their WorldSkills knowledge and experience as possible to their colleagues and students while others don't feel able to do so for a variety of reasons. The result is small pockets of excellence that could be limited to individual departments or institutions.

This report highlights the missed opportunity to spread the learnings that Training Managers accrue from international competitions to help achieve world-class standards so often talked about and expected in UK skills systems.

We know that world-class skills are vital for the UK, in terms of competitiveness, productivity and living standards, and we

know through WorldSkills experience and knowledge how to achieve this excellence. However, this report argues that the system as a whole is still geared towards competence rather than excellence and there isn't yet a roadmap for bridging the gap, despite widespread agreement that it needs to happen.

The report is clear that there are many factors involved in maximising the impact that international experience and expertise have on world-class skills in the UK, from leadership buy-in and knowledge transfer to qualification levels and utilising current infrastructure. This all points to the need for a holistic mechanism, involving all partners in skills delivery, to embed this knowledge back into the system to help achieve world-class standards in skills.

WorldSkills UK is determined to play its part in making this happen and we are exploring ways to transfer the knowledge and expertise that we and our Training Managers have built up over many years of international competition success. We look forward to working with our Training Managers, and our partners across education, industry and governments on this important task.

## INTRODUCTION

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*"I WAS AT AN EVENT IN SCOTLAND. LORD COE WAS SPEAKING; HE WAS TRYING TO LEARN FROM THE PREPARATION OF WORLDSKILLS LONDON 2011. HE SAID, 'YOU COULD HAVE A WORLDSKILLS COMPETITION WITHOUT SPORTS, BUT YOU CANNOT HAVE AN OLYMPIC SPORTS COMPETITION WITHOUT WORLDSKILLS.'"*

TM16

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The first Skill Olympics<sup>1</sup> were held between Portugal and Spain in 1950. The UK, along with five other European countries, joined this competition in 1953. These events became known as the WorldSkills Competition (WSC). The WSC is organised by WorldSkills International (WSI). WSI is a non-profit association that promotes Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) internationally in traditional trades and crafts as well as in multi-skilled vocations, such as Manufacturing Team Challenge, and those utilising newer technologies and innovative services. Currently, the competition – the 45th WSC is being held in Kazan in 2019; the 46th will be held in Shanghai in 2021 – brings together around 1600 contestants mostly aged 16-22<sup>2</sup> from more than 60 countries, who gather every two years to compete publicly and demonstrate excellence in 56 skill areas.<sup>3</sup> The skill areas are grouped into six skills sectors: Construction and Building Technology; Creative Arts and Fashion; Information and Communication Technology; Manufacturing and Engineering Technology; Social and Personal Services; and Transportation and Logistics.

Team UK is managed by WorldSkills UK (WSUK; formerly UK Skills).<sup>4</sup> WSUK is a partnership between business, education and governments, which unites experts from across the UK to run skills competitions for thousands of young people every year in key economic skills areas. They champion young people's training achievements and success at the annual National Finals and the top achievers, Team UK, then undergo further intense technical and mindset training to prepare them for international competition.

WSUK has the remit for the overall competitions, and support the 35 WSUK Training Managers' who are responsible for ensuring the WorldSkills International standards translate into a learning programme for each competitor. While the WorldSkills Standards Specifications for each skill are given by WSI, the means by which they are achieved are entrusted to the professional interpretation of the Training Manager. The Training Managers learn to turn standards into a curriculum and programme of learning that is relevant, high quality and stretching; they are given the professional autonomy to design a curriculum that best suits the needs of the learner. Yet we know very little about this process of curriculum development and delivery and even less about how, if at all, the Training Managers transfer this experience into their day-to-day teaching for their FE College or Private Training Provider. That is the purpose of this research.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.worldskills.org/>

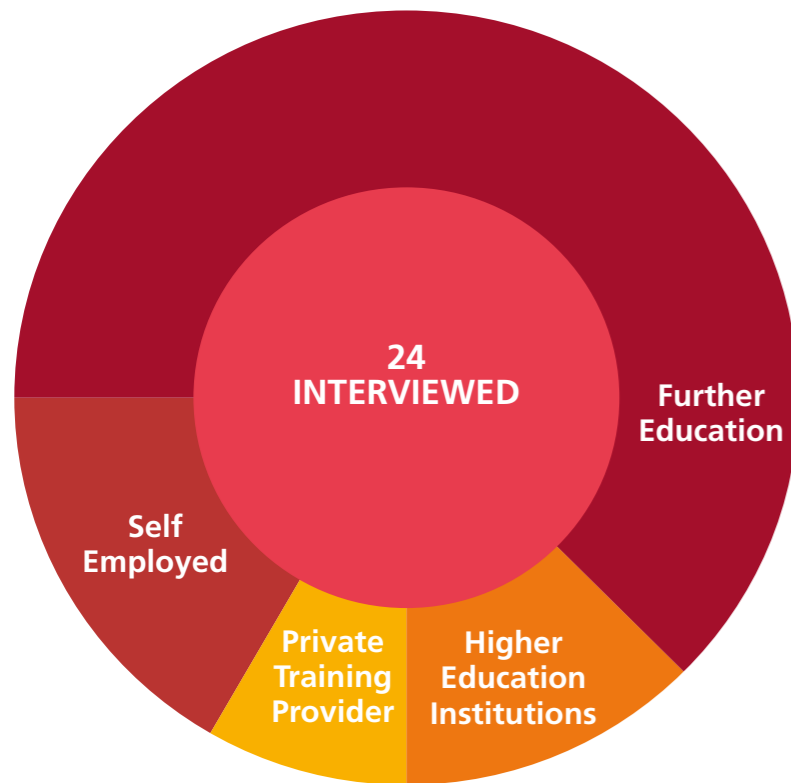
<sup>2</sup> Competitors must have been at least 16 years of age on 1st September 2013 to be eligible to compete during the 2013/14 competition cycle. Some skill areas such as Manufacturing Team Challenge have an upper age limit of 25.

<sup>3</sup> TeamUK does not compete in every skill area.

<sup>4</sup> <http://worldskillsuk.org/>

## **THE OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTION IS:**

**HOW, IF AT ALL, DOES THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS DEVELOPED BY TRAINING MANAGERS DURING THEIR WORLDSKILLS UK EXPERIENCE TRANSFER TO PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY TEACHING ROLES?**



## THE RESEARCH

Between early November 2018 and mid-February 2019, semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 24 of the 35 WSUK Training Managers.

Of the 24 Training Managers, 15 work in an Further Education (FE) college, three work in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), two work for a Private Training Provider (PTP), three are self-employed, and one is self-employed working for a few different FE colleges and PTPs. The period they have been in the role ranges from 12 months to 13 years. The interviews consisted of a series of questions about their roles, curriculum development activities, their work environments, their students, and the challenges they faced. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed, and lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. Anonymity is provided so each Training Manager has been labelled with a number .ie. TM1, TM2 and so on.

## TRAINING MANAGERS: BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Often the skills system in England is seen as the inferior route, a poor cousin to schools and higher education (Wolf, 2011).

Moreover, further education has been described as being in the midst of a perfect storm (Keep, 2018a). Yet, 'the effectiveness of all education systems depends critically on the quality of teaching and learning in the classrooms, workshops, laboratories and other spaces in which the education takes place' (Lucas et al., 2012, p. 12). Skills competitions are increasingly being added to the list of locations where education and training takes place. For example, Bentley (2018) explains how competitions were mentioned in 60% of college Ofsted reports; in addition, from September 2019 competitions will appear in the Ofsted Common Inspections Framework. Slowly but surely competitions are becoming less 'of the world's best kept secret' (Chankseliani et al, 2015) and they begin to highlight the ways in which quality can be

developed among the turmoil (Shafique and Dent, 2019).

WorldSkills Training Managers participate in the development of the 18-21 year olds vying initially for a place in Squad UK, and then work extensively with the competitors chosen to represent Team UK. In numbers, this means that the team of Training Managers impact on the knowledge and skill development of approximately 4,000 young people in each two-year cycle of skills competitions (this includes WSC, WorldSkills UK LIVE, and national, regional and local competitions), in addition to the young people in the classes in their FE colleges, universities or PTPs; Training Managers thus have significant potential to support the raising of skill standards. The WorldSkills Competitions provide a quality benchmark for what constitutes high performance and an objective way to assess vocational excellence (James, 2016); the level of skill required to participate in international competitions sets a new standard for achievement in technical vocational education and training. It is the Training Manager's role to help ensure the competitor has been trained so that they can compete and perform at this level. As such the Training Managers have multi-faceted roles in the WorldSkills arena, and through their duties in education institutions and firms that train in the skills systems in the UK.

## TRAINING MANAGERS AND WORLDSKILLS

The Training Manager role is complex and intense and involves the following responsibilities:

- To act as an ambassador for the work of WorldSkills UK;
- To generate through partnership and collaboration, investment from education and/or industry to secure the UK's participation in a given skill;
- To work with WorldSkills UK and its partners to enhance the benefits of the preparation programme;
- To make a major contribution to the design, development and delivery of an enhanced training programme to secure world-beating performances in skills competitions for the UK;
- To support and foster individual learning progress of young people in training and assessment activity, progressing to european and/or international competition;
- To support the transfer of global best practice across education and industry within the UK;
- To participate in the WorldSkills Competition as the UK's designated Expert;
- To take opportunities to demonstrate a welcome and openness to other nations, cultures and social groups; and
- To help develop and maintain the WorldSkills Competition in a particular skill.

Across the two-year cycle there is a total commitment of up to 91 days to attend technical meetings, boot camps and to plan and deliver training activity, in addition to attending the competition(s). These days are split across weekdays and weekends, with a combination of fixed days and days that can be organised and planned at the discretion of the Training Manager although all of them do many more days than this requirement. Hodkinson et al. (2005, p.2) refer to this as 'underground working, whereby tutors routinely engaged in working well beyond their job descriptions'. They do this to ensure the training best fits the needs and timetable of the competitor they are supporting:

*I'd say the most important bit ... is adapting that training plan for that particular competitor, getting to really know them and making sure that everything is completely tailored to them and how they work. They're so different each person that you work with. I think that's the most important job. Then after that comes all the logistics, planning the training plan, how they're getting there, where they're staying, all the paperwork. And then also wanting to develop yourself, so you're constantly improving to make that experience for that competitor better, that learning experience better. TM8*

Coffield et al. (2007) show how the centrality of the tutor-learner relationship is paramount to quality learning – being treated as adults in a safe learning environment was key. However, the Training Manager and competitors form a relationship that differs from the usual teacher-student interaction. The balance of power in terms of knowledge shifts over time from it being an unequal relationship in the beginning in favour of the Training Manager, to moving toward a more equal relationship, and then later the balance of knowledge tipping in the complete other direction toward the competitor. This is especially important and was identified by a number of the Training Managers as contributing to a successful performance at the WSC because the competitor is in the spotlight making decisions and driving forward their knowledge and skill to achieve excellence.

Given the way the relationships evolve, and the standard that is being aimed for, the Training Managers are given complete freedom as to how they organise the teaching and learning – they are entrusted to turn the WorldSkills Standards Specification for each skill into a curriculum that is relevant, high quality and stretching; and they are given the professional autonomy to design a curriculum that best suits the needs of the learner – which is very different to the experience of teaching in FE or at a PTP (Burnell, 2017).

**"I'D SAY THE MOST IMPORTANT BIT ... IS ADAPTING THAT TRAINING PLAN FOR THAT PARTICULAR COMPETITOR, GETTING TO REALLY KNOW THEM"**

**£1,000**

Funding spent on teaching a 19+ student in FE per year

**£9,400**

Funding a university receives to teach an undergraduate per year

**FUNDING: FE vs UNIVERSITY**

## TEACHING IN FE

In an age of education marketisation (Keep and Mayhew, 2010), where the classroom and teaching are measured and judged by a set of more and more quantifiable tasks, such as Ofsted Inspection and via lesson observation (O'Leary, 2015), the freedom to develop and deliver the curriculum in a way that is meaningful to students becomes particularly difficult as Gleeson et al (2015, p. 92) recognise:

*While welcoming the recent focus on vocational pedagogy in FE, we are concerned that the emphasis on 'how to teach', learning styles and skills remains more closely tied to surface knowledge and inspection criteria than engaging critically with building capability that supports the needs and expertise of learners and teachers on the ground.*

Skills training in the UK, particularly in further education, is coming under more and more tight control as budgets are cut. Indeed, further education is not well-funded. Shafique and Dent (2019, p. 49) illustrate how approximately £1,000 a year is spent on teaching a 19+ student in FE compared to the (on average) £9,400 that a university receives to teach an undergraduate per year. This lack of funding, combined with lack of time, provides limited opportunities for Training Managers to incorporate the WS knowledge and skill into their day-to-day practice:

*It's a slog if I'm honest because you are time limited in FE I think. It doesn't have a lot of money, it's not well funded and there's now even more to get through.*

*It's very, very difficult. It's very difficult. Wherever possible, if I'm doing some WorldSkills training I will ask for other students to come in and watch just for a bit of a master class, anything to get their adrenaline going and show them something different. But unless you're doing that you can't build that in because it's very tricky and FE is a very difficult place to be at the moment. TM7*

And yet, where they can, most of the Training Managers introduce small elements of their WorldSkills approach into their teaching to make the learning experience for the student not only more challenging but enjoyable for both parties (see next section on stretch and challenge). There were, however, a few Training Managers who did not apply any of the WorldSkills knowledge to their 'day jobs'; they treated their two worlds as entirely separate entities because they believed the standards were so vastly different from those normally experienced or expected in the classroom. The environments in their colleges or HEI, they believed, were not conducive to any form of implementation so they simply did not endeavour to try to transfer practice from one setting to the other (see also section on Senior Management). The vast majority though tried to incorporate at least some aspects, given the restricted environment outlined above, into their teaching and learning. The most common way they did this was through stretch and challenge as the main curriculum content was very tightly bound by awarding body criteria.



## WORLDSKILLS IN SKILLS TRAINING – STRETCH AND CHALLENGE

One the one hand, it is impossible for all further education students to reach the highest standards – similar to not every A-Level student achieving an A. On the other, using WorldSkills standards, regarded as the benchmark to which all further education should aspire (Messenger et al, 2017), begins a subtle move to building world-class skills. As pressure on tutors' time ratchets up, and expectations to deliver the curriculum as set by awarding bodies increases (Keep, 2018a), the type of teaching and skills development processes utilised at WS could not be more different from this more standardised form of skill formation in further education. Yet, these innovative teachers are finding ways and means to stretch and challenge their students.

There are many strategies adopted by most Training Managers to help bring WorldSkills into skills training. Where an awarding body criteria might allow for a four millimetre tolerance, tutors will show students what it takes to achieve a two millimetre tolerance or time-test students, as happens in WorldSkills. The tutors recognise that not all students can achieve that standard, nonetheless they believe exposure to such benchmarks provides a potentially valuable learning experience. They use drawings and other resources such

as test projects and modules from WorldSkills colleagues, sometimes from other countries, to encourage their students. Some other examples include:

- Peer assessment;
- Self-assessment;
- Shows and exhibitions within a department in the college;
- Showcasing work by setting up a work station in a public place in the college;
- Using regional Skill Build projects as assessment projects for Level 2 qualification courses;
- Using WorldSkills projects in groups for Level 3 students;
- Use of the traffic lights system utilised by WorldSkills with students in order for them to be able to understand their skill gap analysis;
- Introducing WorldSkills standards for employability skills, such as organisation, cleanliness, and housekeeping.

The Training Managers who worked in higher education found it easier to incorporate the WS standards into the exam criteria. This was because they felt the WS standards were more aligned to teaching at Levels 4 and 5, 'although there were still differences' (TM21). Similar comments about alignment were made by FE College tutors who taught a range of levels from 2 through to 4.

## COLLEAGUES AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

Teachers' influence on the quality of students' learning and achievement is well researched. Teacher quality has a stronger effect on pupil learning than other in-school factors like learning environment, resources, or leadership (Aaronson et al., 2007; Nye et al., 2004; Rivkin et al., 2005) and effective continuing professional development (CPD) is the principal strategy for improving teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices. Lloyd et al (2012) show how access to appropriate CPD is important, as well as how having time, resources and support allows colleagues to work with each other. Whilst it may not always be easy to transfer WorldSkills knowledge and skill into the curriculum (see previous section), some Training Managers are finding that introducing CPD for colleagues based on the WorldSkills experience is proving fruitful:

*With CPD I get my colleagues involved so they can see all the tools and machinery and jobs being done, and they can have a go at doing some of the work as well because ideally I'd like another colleague sort of to take this on in a few years' time from me. TM20*

*We've done a few videos that we share with colleges, and we do CPD events to the colleges where they come to us [PTP working with industry]. We always talk about WorldSkills and we give like Train the Trainer classes. And we're trying to get colleges more involved with that. TM5*

'FE teachers' backgrounds, qualifications and experience are as diverse as the broad ranging curriculum might indicate' (Clow, 2001, p. 409). As a means to draw the diversity together the call for professionalism in the further education sector continues unabated, with one attempt being the formation of the Institute for Learning (IfL), which now in a revised form exists as the Society for Education and Training,<sup>5</sup> who advocate continuing professional development. CPD was also a major feature of the CAVTL report (2013), which made a strong case for well-trained teachers and trainers: the best of whom should have a dual identity, as occupational specialists and pedagogical experts. Their sector-specific skills and knowledge must be cutting edge to compete with the best in the world. They also have to employ individualised teaching programmes taking into account different

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**"WE GIVE LIKE TRAIN THE TRAINER CLASSES. AND WE'RE TRYING TO GET COLLEGES MORE INVOLVED WITH THAT."**

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environments and learning styles to get the best out of each young person; they embody the best in vocational teaching and learning. Approximately half of the Training Managers in this study are implementing CPD with their teams or colleagues in wider parts of their institution, which is resulting in a growing sense of what international standards are and how competitions can be used in the classroom:

*I've been doing some work with my [skill] team on that. So looking at past projects that you could see from National Finals and WorldSkills finals and say look, these are the skills that they're using in these competition test pieces, can you build in some of these [skill element] or some of these angles into actually what you deliver, which will put you in good stead when it comes to doing competition pieces in the future. So a lot of my lecturers are looking at that. We're going across campus as well; it's not just in the construction team. We're spreading out towards beauty therapy, hairdressing and all the computing competitions too, so we're starting to get a very, very, very enthusiastic group of competition drivers. TM16*

Moreover, one Training Manager convinced his college to support his department to go to WorldSkills London 2011. In this way, his colleagues were able to see the international competitions, and understand better how the standards worked in practice. This form of CPD had the knock-on effect of motivating colleagues, and also the practicality of emphasising international standards. The entire team, when curriculum planning, now incorporate these standards as much as possible, and are using the international standards to drive CPD in other areas of their college.

<sup>5</sup> <https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/about-us/>

## COMPETING DEMANDS

The CAVTL report (2013, p. 20) makes a strong case for well-trained teachers and trainers. Yet, a dual role is complex and executing it well takes time and commitment. Interestingly, the main issue around the Training Managers' dual identity was not developing knowledge and skill, it was having the time to do both to the high standards they were setting themselves given the competing demands they faced:

*Time. Time, without a shadow of a doubt that's the biggest challenge that I have ... what I do for my Training Manager role has to sort of squeeze and find the time for me to do it, because the day job is so demanding that's why it's done on an evening or it's done on weekends, and you do it for the love of it because the competitions are brilliant and to see what they're capable of and their development, their journey, that's the bit that keeps you coming back time and time again. It's one of the hardest jobs but it's one of the best jobs as well in that it's so rewarding. I absolutely love it, I like the challenge myself, because you're dealing with individuals at the top of their skill, their craft, and they're asking really pointed questions, why does this, what about that, and you're discovering things yourself all the time and from a teaching point of view and a coaching point of view you're trying to see what makes that individual tick and what works for them and putting them ... giving them information and letting them explore that information to see what works for them. TM15*

However, not all agree in the pursuit of dual identities as a way of promoting professionalism in the further education sector. Shain and Gleeson (1999, p. 449) are of the opinion that reinforcing dual identities feeds into the tensions already inherent in many further education workplaces. Instead, Plowright and Barr (2012, p. 1) argue for a more holistic approach and promote the practice of 'phronesis: wise practical reasoning based on judgement and wisdom, and that accords with the centrality of context and the reflective nature of the activity of teaching'. It is the process of phronesis that allows the Training Managers to train their competitors to high international standards rather than the time-constrained, tick-box teaching they have become accustomed to in further education; it is the difference between competence and excellence.



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*"WORLDSKILLS UK  
YOU'RE LOOKING AT  
EXCELLENCE...YOU'RE  
TRYING TO GET  
WITHIN A MILLIMETRE  
PERFECT"*

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## COMPETENCE VERSUS EXCELLENCE

During the last five to ten years increasing attention has been focused on the broader impact of WSC and Team UK. Further education, higher education and private training provider participation in skills competitions has grown whether through a student becoming a member of Squad UK and/or Team UK, or their involvement in local, regional and national competitions, and the number of colleges hosting these competitions at various levels has also increased. Yet, the further education sector is in the midst of a massive series of reforms (Keep, 2018b) around governance, funding, vocational qualification structure and programmes of learning, particularly apprenticeship, and an increasing focus on specialisation and higher level technical skills development, particularly standards and assessment regimes. The Training Managers who work in FE colleges were the most vociferous about the difference between competence and excellence. The Training Managers who work for a PTP were critical but seemed to be supported more closely through industry so while they saw less of a disparity with their students/apprentices, they still commented on the expectation of competence as opposed to excellence:

*I think when you're talking about FE you're looking at getting people to be able to do the job and you're looking at competence. Whereas WorldSkills you're looking at excellence, which I am talking about something that you're trying to get within a millimetre perfect with things that are maybe two to three millimetres out in*

*timing dimensions and then trying to get them to within the millimetre accuracy there. Whereas in the FE, and industry you're talking a long way away from that. Some of the things I have transferred across into my teaching and my every day sort of work, to try and enhance the quality of what students are doing but sadly the qualification structure in the UK recognises competence and not really excellence. TM14*

The Training Managers acknowledged the 'big step up' between working toward the awarding body descriptors and tolerances, and what was required by the WorldSkills standards. Interestingly, a few were quite supportive of the end point assessments used to test the new apprenticeship standards and they believed these were a step closer, and in the right direction to achieving excellence, to mirror or at least attempt to parallel WSCs or a competition specification. A number of the Training Managers were extremely critical of payments linked to college success in qualification achievement as they believed this drove the quality and standards down to ensure that 'somehow' everyone gets through:

*'So actually the drive to really succeed is almost gone' (TM3).*



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"THAT JUST SHOWS THE HUGE STEP OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT WE'RE TEACHING AT FE AND WHERE WORLDSKILLS IS TODAY"

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Many of the Training Managers recognised and spoke about the issue of competence versus excellence as a double-edged sword. For example:

*The problem with that was at the FE end of the scale. We then found that the number of people that were entering skills competitions fell drastically. Because we'd raised the standard of the competitions, we then didn't have students in FE colleges that had sufficient knowledge to enter the competitions. So, it was a double-edged sword. We raised the standard of the competitions to align more with what was needed for WorldSkills at the international side of things, but then that had a trade-off – we weren't then getting enough colleges entering because they felt that their students weren't of a sufficient calibre to enter the competitions. So, we've had to kind of make a little bit of a backwards step on that because we've had to sort of slightly take it down again because it's got to be a balance between getting the right calibre of student to come forward to WorldSkills but without sort of cutting off your feed from the FE colleges by making*

*it too difficult to them. But that just shows the huge step of difference between what we're teaching at FE and where WorldSkills is today. TM13*

There is much agreement from stakeholders – tutors, students, senior management teams, college governing bodies, parents, awarding bodies, WSUK, government bodies and institutions, policy makers and politicians, that we should be aiming for excellence in further education (Augar, 2019). And there are clearly many examples of best practice in the skills systems, in particular the way that WorldSkills standards can be used in further education to achieve excellence. Yet, these examples – those outlined in this report and that of Shafique and Dent (2019) – are not (yet) the norm. To move from competence to excellence, a structural approach is required. An approach that allows the mainstreaming of WorldSkills standards into further education in a measured, coherent and achievable strategy that benefits the many, rather than relying on the dedication of a few.

## STANDARDS

Many of the Training Managers spoke of the constraints they felt around standards and the widening gulf between their two roles in WorldSkills and skills development in the UK system more broadly. Many felt that exposing students to a higher standard was a positive for teaching and learning so long as the students were aware of what they were expected to achieve for their qualification. They also recognised some of the constraints that awarding bodies face. There was a general feeling from Training Managers in colleges and PTPs that the awarding bodies are 'always a few years behind', and there will be a lag due to the approval and ratification process of the qualifications, but also that the standards aimed for in some qualifications are not commensurate with most of what industry needs and wants. There was broad recognition that the qualifications were not fit for purpose and the process by which the qualifications were developed needed improving and updating. One of the Training Managers also made the point that an issue with the standards is the involvement of bigger companies in their development rather than SMEs who deliver a lot of apprenticeships, and have very different requirements, resources and human capital. This contradiction has been pointed out elsewhere (James, 2006).

To try to align their teaching more closely with WorldSkills standards a few of the Training Managers changed the qualifications they offer to another awarding body, with the new qualifications graded pass, merit and distinction. The Training Managers felt these different levels allowed them to show the students how to raise standards to achieve the different grades, rather than a simple pass/fail criteria, and

while still constrained by awarding body requirements, could introduce stretch and challenge at each level in a very clear and systematic way:

*Not all of them achieve it because the standard is quite difficult to do, but the exposure to that learning experience for them is fabulous; it just gives them a chance to see where they're at. We do get feedback from our EVs and what have you, and they look at the work that we do, and often ... the problem with the awarding bodies is that they're not current, that they're always a few years behind, which I understand because they have to get things approved and ratified and get it out into the marketplace of course, you know. And they do ask us how developments are going on and how things are moving forward, and I think actually it's probably good timing because we've got all the new standard frameworks coming out and things like that at the moment. But the big problem for awarding bodies is that it would be really difficult for them to adopt say a WorldSkills project because not all centres would have the tools and equipment to do the tasks. TM1*




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*"IT WAS A STRATEGIC GOAL OF MY BOSS ACTUALLY TO GET ALL THREE [SKILL] TRAINING MANAGERS WHERE POSSIBLE BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT WOULD BUILD THE BRAND INTO SOMETHING AS UNSEEN AROUND THE WORLD."*

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## **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CLUSTERS**

The leadership of pedagogical thinking within skills development has been significantly constrained in recent years by the specific assessment requirements of publicly-funded vocational qualifications.

Tutor and organisational success has been measured in terms of qualification achievements, which in turn have been directly linked to the public funding institutions are allocated.

In contrast, the Training Manager has 'pedagogical freedom' and is recruited for their skills mastery and ability to lead the development of skills excellence in competitors. The success of the Training Manager is measured in terms of their ability to identify and develop potential, and support WSC success. The Training Manager is trusted, encouraged, and supported

by WorldSkills UK, and in the best instances in their FE or PTP institution also, to lead on pedagogical thinking. The Training Manager is, in effect, the 'master' and carries the status of a skills leader on the WSC stage, a role not dissimilar to that which has been consistently embedded within international apprenticeship models for a number of years. To that end, a number of colleges and PTPs have recognised this and are developing clusters of expertise in their colleges:

*Now I came as the WorldSkills Training Manager into my college and there was already the [skill] Training Manager at our college so we fitted perfectly. It was a strategic goal of my boss actually to get all three [skill] training managers where possible because he knew that would build the brand into something as unseen around the world. So it's fully supported at my college. I've actually been lucky enough to employ one of my ex-competitors who works with me on the [business] development side as well. TM7*

In addition, in some geographic regions groups of colleges, or college clusters, are forming. With a history of involvement in WSC one can see how it is easy to build upon that legacy, to plan for resources – staffing and financial – to ensure that participation for a few becomes a part of the development and marketing of a skills strategy in a particular geographical region. One such example is in the West Midlands, although not specifically WorldSkills. Twenty-one colleges in the region formed the Further Education Skills and Productivity Group (FESPG) to develop skills strategies and policies more generally, in particular promoting productivity and greater inclusion (Shafique and Dent, 2019, p. 38). A few of these colleges are leaders in WSC and it is through vehicles such as FESPG that skills competitions could be brought into colleges in a systematic way to embed the knowledge, skills and experiences of the Training Managers:

*You'll get what I call good stables or good colleges that are quite strong because of their ... it's probably down to they've got experienced, knowledgeable tutors that are there and you see the same sort of colleges performing through competitions that regularly get students there and then you then get the odd one or two coming through which is probably more down to*

*individual talent. But it's a difficult thing but there are certain colleges you expect to see every year, every other year, at the national finals because of the experience in their area. I think they're producing good quality apprentices and good quality students that are competing at regional and national level. TM15*

It was recognised that the clustering of the colleges involved in WSC helped in terms of succession planning and providing CPD for colleges in the wider area but that without some type of more formal arrangement the skills and knowledge that are developed could be lost. This was an area that a number of Training Managers mentioned and found quite difficult to implement, particularly if they were not part of a strong college cluster.

They also recognised that a cluster of providers became quite formidable and unintentionally created a hierarchy of colleges. A number of the Training Managers believed this contributed to keeping WorldSkills a secret as it became a club that was difficult for individual colleges, or even individuals, to break into (Wilde et al, 2015). A system-wide approach to mainstreaming WorldSkills into further education would help to breakdown these barriers.



## SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Unsurprisingly, support from senior management, whether it be FE, HE or a PTP is a large contributing factor to success in the Training Manager role and also in their ability to manoeuvre between their two roles. It helps to ensure they have the space, time and confidence to implement WS initiatives and elements into a restricted curriculum. And of course this support has multiple benefits for their institution (Allen et al, 2015) and for wider society (Mayhew et al, 2013):

*Well the college I'm at now promotes it really, really well; they're backing it 100%. I do all of my squad training at my new college so it's visible and people can see what's going on. TM1*

*I think I was very lucky to have supportive Heads of School and Principals that championed WorldSkills in my institution. I mean I was bringing in funding, bringing in expertise, drawing attention internationally to the college. Yeah, I think I was pretty well supported by the college. Absolutely, and I think that the onus is on the Training Manager to set that culture within the college. You've got to be able to sell it to your teams and to your Managers. TM16*

The senior management support of the Training Managers in this study falls along a spectrum with three main points. At one end are the supportive Senior Management Teams (SMTs) providing budgets, time and resources to ensure the Training Managers can incorporate the international standards into their teaching and learning as much as

possible. By drawing attention to WorldSkills throughout the college they are showing a strategic intent for WS implementation. The mid-way point on the spectrum are the senior managers who are aware of and are content with the Training Managers' participation in WS but do not provide any support above and beyond approval to participate, and do not think about using WS as a lever for their college or system more broadly. At the other end of the spectrum are the senior managers who are not even aware, or choose not to be aware, of the Training Managers' involvement in WorldSkills. These Training Managers feel isolated within their tutor teams, departments and colleges and more often than not see WorldSkills participation as their mechanism for survival in a turbulent FE world; they are the ones least likely, primarily due to lack of incentive in the wider college or HEI, to embed their WS expertise into their teaching and learning in further education. Interestingly, the PTP Training Managers felt supported.

A supportive Principal, Vice-Principal and Head of Department with vision is imperative to allow for the mainstreaming of the Training Managers' knowledge and skill, particularly with mergers, funding, or the introduction of new systems (Drew et al., 2019). Thoonen et al. (2011, p. 508) noted that a strong whole institution vision results in staff being able to 'internalise organisational goals as their own personal goals' because it 'generates excitement, builds emotional attachment, reinforces the personal and social identification of followers with the organisation, and thus increases collective cohesion.' These senior managers' are the ones who ensure there is a cluster of Training Managers in their colleges. They recognise the business purpose for involvement in WS, believe that involvement generates new business and raises college profiles nationally and internationally, while also raising standards in their institutions. Importantly, they recognise that for the Training Managers to successfully embed their WorldSkills knowledge they need the autonomy of a separate budget to spend how they see fit; a recognition of their phronesis.

## CONCLUSION

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**"IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT SUPPORT FROM THOSE AROUND YOU IT BECOMES MUCH MORE DIFFICULT, NOT IMPOSSIBLE, BUT MORE DIFFICULT BECAUSE I KNOW THERE ARE OTHER TRAINING MANAGERS WHO AREN'T AS LUCKY TO HAVE THE TEAM THAT I HAVE BEHIND ME. I COULD, IF I WANTED TO GET MY TIMETABLE HEAVILY REDUCED AND DO THE TASKS IN THE NORMAL WEEK BUT THIS ROLE DOESN'T WORK LIKE THAT. IF I DO THAT I'M **NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO CASCADE MY KNOWLEDGE IN THE CLASSROOM.**" TM23**

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The main aim of this project was to understand the impact Training Managers from WorldSkills UK have on the pedagogical leadership in their further education college, private trainer provider or higher education institution.

Understanding better the pivotal role Training Managers play in the development of young people is important if the considerable resource put into their WS development is not to be of limited value to skills training.

Moreover, the potential role for Training Managers to lead thinking across the sector and ensure it does not suffer the deficit identified by FETL<sup>6</sup> – under researched, under conceptualised and under understood – is imperative. The results achieved by Team UK (consistently appearing in the top 10 countries performance at the last five WSC) already demonstrate that these skills work and this report evidences much good practice.

But more needs to be done. If ‘parity of esteem’, as wished for by many policy makers and politicians (see speeches by successive Ministers for Education of all persuasions going back at least 30 years), then achieving esteem for technical and vocational education is where to start. This does not imply starting from the beginning, or reinventing the (FE) wheel as so often seems to be the belief (see also successive new policy and assessment initiatives as outlined in Baird et al., 2019). Quality teaching and learning underpins good education and training, and building upon the WorldSkills expertise of Training Managers is key to ensuring international standards are mainstreamed, helping to raise standards overall. In turn, this will help to raise the esteem of vocational qualifications. There is much potential already built into the system but it lacks a strategy to drive it forward. This structural approach is especially important if some of the recommendations in the Augar Report (2019) have any chance of coming to fruition.

Capturing the essence, as the examples in this report illustrate, of how Training Managers mainstream their knowledge and skills shows how important further education can be in influencing and developing teaching and learning policy. Contingent on this is the support of Senior Management Teams. Previous research revealed the ‘blockages’ individual tutors felt with regard to the leadership and transfer of pedagogical thinking for the development of high level skills within their organisations (Messenger et al, 2014). The research also identified the professional development required to grow and support tutors, many of whom had personally experienced the competence-based, pass/fail assessment model of UK VET.

During this period pedagogical leadership had been placed on the ‘back burner’ for tutors in technical vocational education and training, as one Training Manager succinctly says:

*If I look back at what I was teaching when I started 20 years ago versus what I’m teaching now, there’s a massive drop, because there’s a been a massive funding cut, and a massive amount of time cut out of the curriculum for a lot of students, so there’s no way you can take things as far as you used to be able to. I know people spout modern teaching methods left, right and centre when you say things like that, but it’s absolute crap. I don’t feel that we’re preparing people enough for the workplace. But at the same time, I do feel that with what we’ve got, which we have to live with because we’ve got no choice, I think we’re doing quite well. So it’s kind of that balance ... because I’m sat on a knife edge most of the time with it. TM6*

And time is a key factor. It takes time to develop a system-wide strategy that allows curriculum initiatives to embed, to allow for relationships to develop, college clusters to grow and for trust to be built into a system where trust has been eroded through marketisation. In turn, this allows for better succession planning. In developing their knowledge, skill and understanding of WSI standards the Training Managers work in a number of communities: the community of competitors, the community of Training Managers, the WorldSkills UK community, the WSI community, and the FE College, PTP or HE community. Each of these communities has similar and competing demands but the common factor is the Training Managers. They provide quality teaching and learning to their competitors. They need to be given the opportunity to mainstream their expertise into the wider system. This report spotlights the Training Managers’ pivotal role and the challenges they face in embedding excellence into their further education communities; moreover, it shows how the Training Managers and Worldskills practice and standards offer helpful models to emulate to improve the esteem of technical and vocational education. This matters because our young people taking the vocational route matter.

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*"YEAH, IT [THE OLYMPICS] USED TO BE A COMPLETE JOKE IN THE SEVENTIES AND THE EIGHTIES AND YOU OCCASIONALLY GOT ONE OR TWO MEDALLISTS, AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED? THEY STARTED PUTTING MONEY INTO IT, THEY STARTED INVESTING IN IT AND THEY REALISED THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORTS AND HOW IT CAN BENEFIT THE WHOLE COUNTRY, AND **IF THEY REALISED THE SAME THING WITH TRAINING AND COMPETITIONS** AND THINGS LIKE THAT, YOU NEVER KNOW, **THEY MIGHT START PUTTING THE MONEY IN THERE.**" TM 17*

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

This piece of research work on mainstreaming excellence from WorldSkills to further education environments brings to the fore a number of issues. The following recommendations are offered as a way to better marry the different environments to develop a system-wide approach:

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### 1. TIME

It takes time for any new initiative in curriculum development to embed. Allowing the Training Managers time in their college to write curricula which incorporates WS standards is imperative.

**RECOMMENDATION: INCORPORATE SOME WS SPECIFIC TIME TO CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT AND TEAM PLANNING TO UTILISE THEIR EXPERTISE.**

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### 2. RESOURCES

Funding and physical resources are fundamental to ensuring the mainstreaming of WS knowledge and expertise into the day-to-day teaching and learning in further education.

**RECOMMENDATION: FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ALLOCATE WS SPECIFIC BUDGETS FOR TRAINING MANAGERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION TO ALLOW THEM TO EXERCISE THEIR EXPERTISE AND PHRONESIS.**

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### 3. SUPPORT OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Senior Management support is critical to the successful implementation of WS pedagogical leadership.

**RECOMMENDATION: WSUK WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAMS AT EACH OF THE INSTITUTIONS WHERE A TRAINING MANAGER IS EMPLOYED TO ENSURE THE SMT UNDERSTAND THE TRAINING MANAGER JOB ROLE AND WS REQUIREMENTS.**

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### 4. MAKE BETTER USE OF COLLEGE CLUSTERS

College clusters are proving to be clusters of excellence.

**RECOMMENDATION: ENSURE THAT COLLEGES AND PTPS (WHERE SUITABLE), ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT ARE NOT CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN WS, ARE PART OF A REGIONAL CLUSTER TO PROMOTE AND DEVELOP WS OPPORTUNITIES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF DEVELOPING CURRICULA AND CPD OPPORTUNITIES TO BE USED ACROSS ALL COLLEGES AND PTPS TO DISSEMINATE BEST PRACTICE, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL.**

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### 5. USE TRAINING MANAGER KNOWLEDGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AWARDING BODY CURRICULA

The wealth of knowledge and experience of Training Managers is vital to the development of awarding body curricula to ensure it is relevant to the student body and industry.

**RECOMMENDATION: WSUK WORKS WITH THE AWARDING BODIES TO ENSURE TRAINING MANAGERS, GIVEN THEIR UNIQUE POSITIONS, ARE INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AWARDING BODY QUALIFICATIONS.**

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### 6 FORMAL ARRANGEMENT FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING

The reproduction of quality vocational knowledge and expertise is vital. Formal succession planning is necessary to ensure the progress made in pedagogical leadership is not lost.

**RECOMMENDATION: WSUK AND TRAINING MANAGERS WORK WITH THEIR INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS AND COLLEGE (AND PTP) CLUSTERS TO DEVELOP FORMAL STRATEGIES AND METHODS FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING.**

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### 7. STRUCTURE/ FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINING MANAGERS

Too much of the good practice of mainstreaming WorldSkills standards relies on the dedication of a few. The expertise of Training Managers needs to be utilised better to allow the development of a mainstreaming strategy, which includes a knowledge transfer process from global best practice into the skills systems of the UK.

**RECOMMENDATION: BUILDING ON THE TRAINING MANAGER SUCCESS AND WORKING WITH THEM, WSUK NEEDS TO DEVELOP AN APPROACH AND STRATEGY THAT ALLOWS FOR MORE READY MAINSTREAMING OF WORLDSKILLS EXCELLENCE INTO FURTHER EDUCATION.**

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### 8. INVESTMENT

Following the Augar report, investment in further education is necessary; increasing resources to further education, rather than decreasing investment, is imperative.

**RECOMMENDATION: WSUK PROMOTES THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE AUGAR REPORT WHEREVER POSSIBLE.**

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**‘YOU COULD HAVE  
A WORLDSKILLS  
COMPETITION WITHOUT  
SPORTS, BUT YOU CANNOT  
HAVE AN OLYMPIC SPORTS  
COMPETITION WITHOUT  
WORLDSKILLS.’**

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