

Bridget Smith
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Dear Bridget

KS4 Initial Vocational Education and Training Consultation

1. The University and College Union (UCU Wales) represents more than 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians, and postgraduates in universities, colleges, adult education and training organisations across Wales.
2. UCU was formed on the 1st June 2006 by the amalgamation of two strong partners – the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) – who shared a long history of defending and advancing educators' employment and professional interests. UCU Wales is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU.
3. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the KS4 IVET project.
4. UCU are keen to ensure that the system of qualifications for 14-19 year olds provides a real choice and balance between academic and vocational options. We are concerned that current systems encourage students to choose either a vocational or academic path too early, which can restrict career options later on.
5. We see that IVET's can provide a useful broad based introduction to vocational routes and qualifications. Broad based being preferable, so as not to limit horizons for young people at too early a stage in their development. IVET's can provide useful 'tasters' which can lead to more specialised vocational qualifications at post 16.
6. IVET's at KS4 should include introductory concepts which can be applied to several vocational areas, to allow greater flexibility and choice for students at post 16. They should also include broad based skills for employment, so as to provide a useful qualification for those not wishing to pursue education immediately after leaving school. Although of course it is desirable that education should continue and be encouraged where appropriate.
7. Broad based IVET's may also alleviate the difficulties face by some schools, where staff may find themselves delivering outside of their area of expertise. This is obviously not a good experience for either staff or students. They should provide a pathway to accessing

a more specialised vocational qualification at post 16. It would also help to reduce the situation where students below the age of 16 can only access partial qualifications, as they do not satisfy the age requirement for the 'license to practice' element of some current vocational qualifications, leading to the frustration of having to repeat elements of the qualification if they wish to continue at post 16.

8. The distinction between IVET's delivered at KS4 and further vocational qualifications offered at post 16 would help to alleviate the confusion for students, parents and staff, created by the 'cross-over' which currently occurs. It would also help to encourage collaboration between schools and colleges and reduce the competitiveness that can sometimes take place.

9. A broad based IVET, at for example L2, should not be seen as a replacement for specialist vocational provision at L2, post 16. It may be necessary for some students to have this type of 'sideways' progression, before they have the necessary, specific skills and understanding to allow them to progress to a L3 specialist Vocational Qualification. Whilst it is agreed that students should not be placed on courses that will not stretch and develop them, there is sometimes pressure for teaching staff to automatically place students on the next highest level, simply because the 'number' represents progression, when in fact, professional opinion recognises that the content of the course requires a specific underpinning knowledge.

10. Consideration needs to be given to the perceived status of the IVET qualifications and work needs to continue in promoting their worth as a robust addition to the qualifications available at KS4, as opposed to an inferior alternative. This is particularly important in terms of engaging and motivating. We need to promote the benefit and value to society of vocational routes. If we continue to market vocational qualifications as only suitable for the less academically gifted, whilst promoting the traditional academic route as 'better', it is not surprising that many young people are made to feel inferior in terms of education and end up disengaging completely. Maybe there is merit to using the term "Applied GCSE's"?

11. Any IVET's that are introduced in Wales need to be seen as credible outside of Wales. Qualifications must be 'portable' It would make sense to align IVET's with NOS, not only to make them more credible but also to align them with post 16 vocational qualifications. However it is agreed that IVET's should not lead to occupational competence, but could be used as a vehicle to provide qualifications such as First Aid or Food Hygiene, which could assist students into employment or voluntary work. Occupational competence would be awarded at post 16, thorough specialised vocational qualifications.

12. Much of what is said here has been raised in previous reports and reviews, however we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of IVET's as a means to promoting the validity of vocational qualifications and engaging young people in education.

Lisa Edwards
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