

**Moving from competence to excellence: the role of training managers in providing pedagogical leadership in UK further education**

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# Moving from competence to excellence: the role of training managers in providing pedagogical leadership in UK further education

## Abstract

The quality of provision in the further education sector in the United Kingdom has long been contested. An ongoing issue in further education colleges has been the focus upon minimum competence in qualifications. Yet, there are examples of high standards in teaching and learning. Drawing on interview data with 24 WorldSkills Training Managers working in the vocational education and training system in the UK, the potential contributions of their expertise is examined. Many well-documented pressures exist in further education which counteract an approach to teaching and learning aimed at excellence rather than competence and the Training Managers articulated these. However, a supportive senior management team and continuing professional development was cited as an enabling factor allowing these teaching professionals to draw on the expert practice and flourish. Building on the experience of Training Managers, could be a fruitful avenue for the pursuit of vocational excellence in further education when few other such drivers are currently available in the system.

Key words: further education; pedagogical leadership; phronesis; excellence; vocational education and training; skills competitions

## Introduction

Often, the vocational skills development system in the UK is seen as the inferior route, a poor cousin to schools and higher education. Moreover, in this age of education marketisation, teaching in further education has become untenable with reduced funding, and with the classroom and teaching measured and judged by a set of more and more quantifiable tasks, underlined by more stringent Ofsted Inspection frameworks (O’Leary, 2015). A consequence is that the freedom to develop and deliver the curriculum in a way that is meaningful to students becomes particularly difficult:

*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 (Gleeson et al, 2015, p. 92)*

The FE sector has been heavily criticised for its variability of standards in learning and teaching and this is long-standing. As far back as 2002, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in *Success for All*, stated,

*While there is some excellent quality provision, this coexists with too much poor provision. Across the system as a whole, insufficient attention has been given to improving teaching, training and learning ... For too long, further education and training has been the forgotten sector in education (DfES 2002, p. 10).*

In the intervening years, a number of policy papers, initiatives and directives have resulted from various governments’ intentions to boost the sector. Most recently, the Augar Report (DfE, 2019) recommended (4.8, p. 136) increased funding to FE Colleges to increase their ability to recruit and retain a high-quality workforce, although the Report did not specify what this would look like. However, this argument about a high-quality workforce is not

new; the requirement to gain a formal teaching qualification to teach in FE was introduced for new entrants into the profession in 2001 because, '[I]t was believed that with more control over the processes involved in teacher training, and an emphasis on subject specificity, standards would strengthen and improve performance in the classroom (Lawy and Tedder, 2011)'. However, following recommendations in the Lingfield Review (BIS, 2012) the Coalition Government ended the statutory requirement to hold a teaching qualification in FE in 2013 (Avis et al, 2019). Even so, some employers require the attainment of the teaching qualification and lecturers, tutors and teachers undertake the qualification through in-service training. It is worthwhile noting that Smithers (2018) found this route to be more desirable allowing autonomy and agency (as opposed to initial teacher training (ITT) which was believed to be constraining and focussed on compliance). This qualifying process is in stark contrast, though, to teachers in primary and secondary school who are required to undertake ITT qualifications at university before entering the teaching profession (for an overview of ITT in England see Whiting et al, 2018). Ultimately though, this difference perpetuates a sense of disparity among the teaching workforces of the different institutions, and creates a sense of tension in professionalism (Best et al, 2019).

Some of this disparity can be found in the way that teaching qualifications were designed in the lifelong learning sector. With the creation of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the early 1990's, which were specific competence-based awards, vocational teachers' roles became more one of trainer or assessor. In turn, a number of competence-based teaching qualifications were borne. While these morphed into the Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) this change still resulted in a lower uptake of teaching qualifications in FE (Best et al, 2019, pp.20-21). In addition, much uncertainty around a professional organisation for FE teachers meant that recognition of teaching as a professional activity was slow. Moreover, FE teachers' backgrounds, qualifications and experience are as diverse as the broad ranging curriculum might indicate (Clow, 2001, p. 409) and as such the call for professionalism in the further education sector continues unabated. One noteworthy attempt was the formation of the Institute for Learning (IfL), which now in a revised form exists as the Society for Education and Training (SET). SET has been in operation, under the umbrella of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), since 2015 involving a range of functions including maintaining a code of practice, promoting continuing professional development (CPD) and responsibility for administering the award of QTLS (Avis et al, 2019, p. 26).

The policy development ultimately leading to the formation of SET, was the *New Challenges, New Chances* paper (BIS, 2011) setting out the Government's plan for reforming the FE sector. It was the precursor to the *Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning* (CAVTL, 2013). The CAVTL report (ibid, p. 20) made a strong case for well-trained teachers and trainers in FE, with a particular focus on developing and fostering dual identities. Dual professionals, that is those teachers and trainers with dual identities, are defined in the CAVTL report (2013, p. 8) as, 'teachers and trainers with occupational expertise and experience, who can combine this with excellent teaching and learning practice'. However, not all agree with the pursuit of dual identities as a way of promoting professionalism in the FE sector. Shain and Gleeson (1999, p. 449) are of the opinion that reinforcing dual identities feeds into the tensions already inherent in many FE workplaces. Instead, Plowright and Barr (2012) argued for a more holistic approach to professionalism and promoted 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' (ibid, p. 1.).

The use of the term *phronesis* in education, particularly with regard to teaching, is not new; Green (1976) proposed the term to guide teachers to understand the thinking processes

of their students. Moreover, Noel (1999, p 274) believed, ‘that phronesis can be useful beyond the individual teacher level, by studying the social processes of teaching and learning within the institutional and moral contexts of teaching.’ In so doing, he indicated that while the literature is extensive, there is a lack of consensus of a definition or meaning of phronesis, and a particular critique is that of aligning phronesis purely with practical wisdom (Burbules, 2019). However, in discussing the phronesis of school leadership, Halverson (2004, p. 93) adopted a more exhaustive approach to understanding phronesis and it is this explanation that guides this study:

*The aim of phronesis is not to develop rules or techniques true for all circumstances, but to adjust knowledge to the peculiarity of local circumstance ... Phronesis is as much a way of knowing as a kind of knowledge. Embodied in character and developed through habit, it is expressed through particular actions as how individuals “size up” a situation and develop and execute an appropriate plan of action. Phronesis is, above all, a form of moral knowledge that guides us in selecting the features of situations that we choose to act upon (Gadamer 1989, pp. 316–20).*

Phronesis was one of Aristotle’s virtues; another was flourishing (Aristotle and Brown, 2009). These are intertwined. In fact, MacIntyre, a self-proclaimed Aristotelian, argued that virtues: a) secure excellence in the practice; b) allow those members of the practice to flourish; and c) concern themselves with the good for society (Rodriguez Leal, 2016, p. 32). He believed that while contexts varied, there is always one condition – the exercise of practical reasoning – for flourishing to occur:

*It is as someone exercises in a relevant way the capacities of an independent practical reasoner that her or his personalities for flourishing in a specifically human way are developed. So if we want to understand how it is good for humans to live, we need to know what it is to be excellent as an independent practical reasoner (Macintyre, 1999, p. 77).*

In a sector that is suffering from genericised or standardised ideas of pedagogy, which really deforms or inhibits practice, the notion of FE tutors and lecturers having the opportunity to exercise their phronesis through practical reasoning, ‘size up’ a situation and develop and execute an appropriate plan of action, and ultimately flourish in the teaching profession may seem an anomaly. However, it is precisely these virtues that are the starting point for this article.

Drawing on interviews with 24 FE lecturers and tutors, who are also Training Managers (TMs) for Team UK in WorldSkills Competitions (WSC) allows the opportunity to understand their phronesis and flourishing in their roles and profession. The practice of phronesis allowed the TMs to train their competitors to high international standards rather than the time-constrained, tick-box teaching they are accustomed to in FE. The findings show that the criterion-referencing approach to standards that underlies many vocational qualifications need not specify only minimal competence. Since the 1980s, criterion-referencing has been adopted in academic qualifications, in which discrimination between the quality of performances is also required. Excellence in performance is not only demonstrated in WorldSkills competitions, but the criteria are explicitly defined (discussed further below). Consequently, TMs exposure to these criteria through WSC become part of their tacit knowledge of standards that they can draw on in their teaching practice in FE. Lucas et al (2012, p. 12) pointed out that, ‘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’. Skills competitions are increasingly being added

to the list of locations where education and training occurs. For example, Bentley (2018) explained how competitions were mentioned in 60% of college Ofsted reports; in addition, from September 2019 competitions have appeared in the Ofsted Common Inspections Framework. During the last five to ten years, further education, higher education and private training provider participation in skills competitions has grown whether it is a student becoming a member of Squad UK or Team UK, to involvement in local, regional and national competitions, and the number of colleges hosting these competitions at various levels has also increased. Over time skills competitions have become less of a niche issue and have begun to highlight the ways in which quality can be developed among the turmoil in FE (Shafique and Dent, 2019).

Thus, although WorldSkills Competitions are not well known outside FE in the UK, they have mainstream effects upon inspection outcomes. Little is known about how participation in these competitions affects teaching and learning in further education, so the purpose of this research with WorldSkills Training Managers was to investigate whether, and if so how, their WorldSkills experiences translated into their teaching practice. Given the problems with professional development in FE and expectations of minimal competence for learners outlined above, this is a potentially fruitful avenue for research and practice.

### **WorldSkills Competitions**

The first *Skill Olympics*<sup>i</sup> were held between Portugal and Spain in 1950. The UK, along with five other European countries, joined this competition in 1953 with these events becoming 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. The competition brings together around 1600 contestants mostly aged 16-22<sup>ii</sup> from more than 60 countries, who gather every two years to compete publicly and demonstrate excellence in 56 skill areas.<sup>iii</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.

TeamUK is managed by WorldSkills UK (WSUK; formerly UK Skills),<sup>iv</sup> a partnership between business, education and governments. WSUK 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 have the remit for the overall competitions, and support the 35 WSUK Training Managers' (TMs') who are responsible for ensuring the WorldSkills International (WSI) standards translate into a learning programme for each competitor in each cycle. 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 TM. Using their phronesis, the TMs turn the 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.

### **The research**

One research question guided this study:

*How, if at all, does the knowledge and skills developed by TMs during their WorldSkills UK experience transfer to pedagogical leadership in their day-to-day teaching roles?*

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 24 of the 35 WSUK Training Managers. Of the 24 TMs, 15 worked in FE colleges, three work in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), two work for a Private Training Provider (PTP), four are self-employed, and one is self-employed working for a few different FE colleges and PTPs. The period they were in the roles ranges from 12 months to 13 years. The interviews were conducted by telephone due to the participants' geographical dispersion throughout the four countries of the UK, and 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 recorded and transcribed, and lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. Anonymity was assured; each TM has been labelled with a number, i.e. TM1, TM2 and so on. The interviews with the 15 FE lecturers are mainly drawn on for the current article.

### **Training Managers: Bridging the divide**

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 order to help them flourish and reach excellence. In numbers, this means that the team of training managers impacted 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; TMs thus had significant potential to support the raising of skill standards. The WorldSkills competitions provided 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 TVET. It was the TM's role to ensure the competitor was prepared to compete at this level. As such the TMs 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.

The TM role is complex and intense, involving the following responsibilities:

1. To make a major contribution to the enhanced performance and wellbeing of Team UK at the WorldSkills Competition.
2. To help develop and maintain the WorldSkills Competition in a particular area of skill.
3. To oversee and participate in the training of competitors for the WorldSkills Competition.
4. To participate in the WorldSkills Competition as the UK's designated expert.
5. To support the development of WorldSkills UK National Competitions in the alignment of standards to Squad UK selection and training.

The Training Managers are contractually obliged to spend 70 days over a two-year cycle on WSC development, although all of them worked many more days than this requirement. Hodkinson et al (2005, p.2) referred to this as 'underground working, whereby tutors routinely engaged in working well beyond their job descriptions'. Within this 70 days, the WSC takes up approximately 20 days over two-three weeks, a commitment to attend WorldSkills UK Live (four days), and the equivalent of up to 15 of the 70 days will include evening and weekend commitments to ensure the training best fits the needs and timetable of the competitor they are supporting.



Coffield et al (2007) showed how the centrality of the tutor-learner relationship is paramount to quality learning – being treated as adults in a safe learning environment was key. Given the international standard that was being aimed for, the TMs were given complete freedom as to how they organised the teaching and learning – they were entrusted to turn the WorldSkills Standards Specification for each skill into a curriculum that is relevant, high quality and stretching; and they were given the professional autonomy drawing on their phronesis to design a curriculum that best suited the needs of the learner – which was very different to the broader experience of teaching in FE (Burnell, 2017).

### **Competence versus Excellence**

The FE sector is in the midst of a massive series of reforms (Keep, 2018a) around governance, funding, vocational qualification structure and programmes of learning, particularly apprenticeship, and an increasing focus on specialisation and higher-level technical skills development. A lot of these discussions revolve around standards and assessment regimes and the development of competence. Competence, particularly in England, is ‘understood as the performance of a narrow set of tasks to a defined standard’ (Brockmann, 2009, p. 790) as evidenced by National Vocational qualifications (NVQs). The focus is on the outputs of particular tasks rather than a competent performance as a whole endeavour. In addition to marginalising individual characteristics, this definition of competence means that an apprentice is classified as either competent or incompetent. This binary understanding of competence can be juxtaposed with the more nuanced concept whereby a worker may be judged competent on a scale befitting the circumstances:

*An ambitious company would not employ an architect to design its new headquarters building who was described as ‘competent’, and a rich woman might look for rather more than competence in her tax adviser. Where there is a need for extra quality or expertise the description ‘competent’ is tantamount to damning with faint praise; but for routine tasks competence might be preferred to excellence if it resulted in quicker and cheaper service. This difference in connotation stems from whether the judgment is being made on a binary scale, where a person is judged to be either competent or not competent, or on a graduated scale where ‘competent’ is a position on a continuum from ‘novice’ to ‘expert’.* (Eraut, 1994, pp. 166-167)

Eraut’s concept is in line with the ‘capacity’ sense of competence, referring to a person as ‘competent’, rather than the ‘competent’ performance of certain tasks. The capacity sense of competence implies the possibility for improvement and refinement of performance through personal construction of knowledge and skill in an occupation as opposed to what a job requires, aligning with European definitions: ‘competence in this continental sense is a multi-dimensional concept, relying on the integration of a person’s occupational knowledge, practical know-how and social and personal qualities, such as the ability to take responsibility for and reflect upon one’s own actions’ (Brockmann et al, 2009, p. 709).

It is this capacity sense of competence that is used to judge whether a competitor performs at the international standards in the Worldskills Competitions. These international standards provide criteria for judging the competitor’s performance that ‘set out what a capable practitioner must know, understand and do’ (WS, 2020). In the WSC, the judges apply a set of grades against specific criteria. If a competitor is awarded 500 points or more they receive a Medallion of Excellence; 500 points is considered the benchmark of excellence. The highest score receives gold, and then silver and then bronze. A score of at least 500 must be achieved to be awarded gold, silver or bronze.

Through their work training the competitors, the TMs use the specifications to understand the required level of performance and use previous test projects to develop their training programme for the competitor. As such, they have a clear understanding of the difference between competence and 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 World Skills you're looking at excellence, which is, 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 FE, and industry you're talking a long way away from that. Some of these 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 TMs 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 mirror or at least attempt to parallel WSC's or a competition specification. Many of the TMs 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 ... 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, government bodies and institutions, policy makers and politicians not least WSUK – that we should be aiming for excellence in further education (DfE, 2019). 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. Importantly, this approach needs to allow flexibility in curriculum development so the lecturers and tutors can exercise their phronesis in the teaching and learning for their students to flourish.

### *Standards*

The WorldSkills Standards Specifications (WS, 2020) provide a framework that:

- Cover the specialist, technical and generic skills that comprise intermediate work roles across the world
- Set out what a capable practitioner must know, understand, and do
- Are prepared, with guidance, by technical and vocational WorldSkills Experts
- Are consulted upon and updated biennially with industry and business worldwide
- Indicate the relative importance of each section of the standards, as advised by industry and business.



These specifications act a reference point to ‘establish the baseline from which to grow and reward authentic vocational performance’ (WS, 2020). This baseline was very different to the baseline many of the TMs were working with in FE and 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 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 TMs 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 were 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 TMs pointed to the issue of the development of standards and the involvement of bigger companies rather than SME’s who deliver a lot of apprenticeships, and have very different requirements, resources and human capital; this contradiction has been pointed out elsewhere (James, 2006).

By aligning their teaching more closely with WorldSkills standards a few of the TMs changed the qualifications they offered to another Awarding Body, with the new qualifications graded pass, merit and distinction. The TMs felt these different levels allowed them to exercise their phronesis showing the students how to raise standards to achieve the different grades, rather than a simple pass/fail criterion. Even though they were still constrained by Awarding Body requirements, the TMs introduced stretch and challenge at each level in a very clear and systematic way to aid the students’ flourishing.

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, 2014; Messenger et al, 2017) begins a subtle move from competence to excellence. As pressure on tutors’ time ratchets up, and expectations to deliver the curriculum as set by Awarding Bodies increases (Keep, 2018b), the type of teaching and skills development processes utilised at WS could not be more different from the more standardised form of skill formation in FE. Yet, these innovative teachers are finding ways and means to stretch and challenge their students drawing on their phronesis in an almost artistic endeavour (Eisner, 2002) through adopting strategies that helped to bring the high level of WorldSkills excellence into skills training. Where an Awarding Body criterion might allow for a four-millimetre tolerance, tutors showed students how to achieve a two-millimetre tolerance or time-test students, as happens in WorldSkills. The tutors recognised that not all students can achieve that standard of excellence, nonetheless they believe exposure to such benchmarks provided a potentially valuable learning experience. Moreover, the TM’s used drawings and other resources such as test projects and modules from WorldSkills colleagues, sometimes from other countries, to encourage their students to move beyond competence. It is worth noting that the training managers who taught at Level 4 found it easier to incorporate the WS standards into the exam criteria because they believed the WS standards were more aligned to teaching at Levels 4 and 5, ‘although there were still differences’ (TM21).

### *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) showed how access to appropriate CPD is important, as well as how having time, resources and support allowed colleagues to work with each other. A variety of constraints have already been acknowledged for the transfer of WorldSkills knowledge and skill into the curriculum, not least standards, yet some TMs introduced CPD for colleagues based on the WorldSkills experience that proved 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 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*

CPD was also a major feature of the CAVTL report (2013), which made a strong case for well-trained teachers and trainers. The TMs sector-specific skills and knowledge needed to be cutting edge to compete with the best in the world. They employed individualised teaching programmes taking into account different environments and learning styles, drawing on their phronesis, allowing each young person to flourish. Approximately half of the TMs in this study implemented CPD with their teams or colleagues in wider parts of their institution, which resulted in a growing sense of what international standards were and the potential of competitions for raising standards 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 World Skills 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 attend the WorldSkills event when it was in London. In that 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 incorporated these standards as much as possible, and were using the international standards to drive CPD in other areas of their college.

### *Senior Management*

Unsurprisingly, support from senior management in a skills development organisation, whether it be FE, HE or a PTP was a large contributing factor to TMs successfully flourishing in both roles and also in their ability to manoeuvre between the roles. This support allowed for space, time and confidence to implement WS standards into their lessons drawing on their phronesis to select and refine projects to incorporate into the curriculum. In addition, there were multiple benefits for their institution (Allen et al, 2015) and for wider society (Mayhew et al, 2013):

*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*

Steyn and Sewchurran (2019, p. 2) argued that, '[A] structured understanding of managerial *phronesis* will enable educators to transcend the focus on how we teach general knowledge and develop the technical acumen of students.' In terms of this study, the Senior Management support fell along a managerial *phronesis* spectrum with three main points. At one end were the supportive Senior Management Teams (SMTs) providing budgets, time and resources ensuring TMs incorporated the international standards into their teaching and learning as much as possible, drawing attention to it throughout the college, showing a strategic intent for WS implementation. The mid-way point on the spectrum were the senior management who were aware of and were content with the TMs participation in WS but provided little support above and beyond approval to participate, and did not think about using WS as a lever for their college or system more broadly. At the other end of the spectrum were the Senior Management who were not even aware, or chose not to be aware, of the TMs involvement in WorldSkills. These TMs felt isolated within their tutor teams, departments and colleges and more often than not saw WorldSkills participation as their mechanism for survival in a turbulent FE world; they were the ones least likely, primarily due to lack of incentive in the wider college, to draw on their *phronesis* to embed their WS expertise into their teaching and learning in further education, and were the least likely to think they were flourishing instead using language like 'surviving' or 'treading water'.

A supportive Principal, Vice-Principal and Head of Department with vision was imperative to allow for the mainstreaming of the TMs knowledge and skill, particularly with mergers, funding, and/or the introduction of new systems (O'Leary et al, 2019). Thoonen et al (2011, p. 508) noted that a strong, whole institution vision causes staff 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 visionary Senior Managers' were the ones who ensured there were a cluster of TMs in their colleges. They recognised the business purpose for involvement in WS, believed that involvement generated new business and raised college profiles nationally and internationally, while also raising standards in their institutions:

*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 TMs 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 (emphasis added)*

## Conclusion

Moving from competence to excellence within skills development has been significantly constrained in recent years by the specific assessment requirements of publicly-funded vocational qualifications which see standards through a criterion-referenced, competence lens. Through education marketisation and managerialism, tutor and organisational success have been more and more measured in a variety of different, constricting ways including qualification achievements, retention and funding (Illsey and Waller, 2017). In contrast, the TM has 'pedagogical freedom' and is recruited for their skills mastery and ability to lead the

development of skills excellence in competitors. They do so through exercising their phronesis. The success of the TM is measured in terms of their ability to identify and develop potential, and encourage and support it to flourish. All the while, the TM is trusted and encouraged by WorldSkills UK to use their phronesis and develop their pedagogical strategies allowing them to flourish on the world stage, and in the best instances in their FE college also, to lead on pedagogical thinking. The TM 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 (Brockmann et al, 2008). In the words of Florian and Graham (2014, p. 475), ‘phronesis frames the role of the teacher as a thinker, interpreter of social norms and decision-maker, someone who can sensitively exercise professional judgements while simultaneously making sense of complex social and practical situations.’

Capturing the essence of how TMs mainstream their knowledge and skill through their phronesis 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 of pedagogical thinking for the development of high-level skills within their organisations (Messenger et al, 2014). This support allowed for the tutors and lecturers to flourish, identifying the importance of professional development for growth and support, 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 TM 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*

It takes time to develop a system-wide strategy that allows curriculum initiatives to embed, to allow for relationships to develop, and for trust to be built into a system where trust has been eroded through marketisation (Donovan, 2019). In developing their knowledge, skill and understanding of WSI standards the TMs provide quality teaching and learning to their competitors, while at the same time giving them the opportunity to flourish in their professional life (MacIntyre, 1999; Rodriguez Leal, 2016). Moreover, working in both systems provided the TMs with the opportunity to mainstream their expertise into the wider system, allowing for the embedding of excellence into their further education communities. Quality teaching and learning underpins good education and training, and building upon the expertise of TMs 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 (Chankseliani et al, 2016). The Training Managers, WorldSkills community and the skills expert community more widely offer helpful models to emulate to improve the esteem of vocational and technical education. This matters because our young people taking the vocational route matter.

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i <http://www.worldskills.org/>

ii 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.

iii TeamUK does not compete in every skill area.

iv <http://worldskillsuk.org/>