

Skills and Qualifications

SSDA Researching Skills Workshop

Relationships between skills and qualifications

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see: <http://www.tlrp.org/proj/workplace.html>

Skills and Qualifications

Some puzzles?

1980s: Engineering: relationship between A levels and completion of a degree:

- those with 4 or more A levels most likely to complete a degree
- then those with 3 A levels
- then those with 1 A level
- and those with 2 A levels were least likely to achieve a degree.

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Reasons?

- Appropriateness of approach to teaching and learning;
- how you are taught; extent of learning challenge etc.
- time taken to degree: enabled rebuilding of skills in critical areas.

Conclusion: Teaching matters

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2000s: Royal College of Music: A level score in music better predictor of performance in final degree musical performance than performance at audition.

Reasons?

- Advantages of broader ability to learn compared to narrower ability just to play?

Conclusion: Learning matters

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2000s: throughout FE: 'recovery' of those who did not perform well at school

Reasons?

- Rebuilding fragile 'learner identities'
- Quality of relationship between tutor and learner

Conclusion: Relationship between tutors and learners matters

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1990s: those assembling portfolio of evidence for Management NVQs reported that this as antithetical to learning and development

Reasons:

- time spent photocopying and assembling evidence of skills they already possessed

Conclusion: Qualifications may (not) be helpful to learning & development.

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- Focus on improving skills and performance
 - Focus on qualifications may underestimate current skill levels
 - Focus on aggregate skill levels also hides effect of compensatory strategies (e.g. apparent lack of adult basic skills not too harmful to performance: Wolf project evidence – spiky profiles)
 - Accountancy – value of approach to learning: learning from others built in
 - Engineering: sometimes not enough challenge

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Focus on improving skills and performance

- Importance of personal networks
- Airbus: competent performance of tasks is not enough – no driver for change and improvement: extra two levels: able to support the learning of others; able to change way of looking at work (world class performance)
- Do things differently: compare investment banking; Rolls Royce
- 'Key workers' - National Skills Task Force
- Focus upon performance can act as a driver for improvements in skills as well as the other way round (supply chains; Chester Asian restaurants network)

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Challenges for sector skills councils

- Sectoral focus welcome, but also need to support individual mobility
- Some level 2 and 3 qualifications more substantive than others – public support for horizontal progression into certain areas
- Music (sport): explicit focus upon improving performance as well as skills (different models – individual Master performance; collaborative performance)
- Sandwich company: drivers' skills key

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Challenges for sector skills councils

Inter-agency learning project:

- Inter-professional learning
- Organisational culture key to making a difference to service delivery
- Key issues are culture and collaboration not qualifications and individual development

Techno-mathematical literacies project:

- Qualified staff do not understand underlying processes: financial services and engineering

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Challenges for sector skills councils

- Mid-career redirection
- Newly qualified staff struggling in work
- Attribution of levels is a political process:
what to include – radiography
guidance – coaching
professional translators: academic v.
vocational
- What is needed to become more effective
might be very different from what is
needed to become more highly qualified

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Old model: Skills development – achievement of qualifications – possible performance improvement

Focus on performance improvement - learning while working - skill development – highly probable performance improvement. Qualifications may or may not have an important role to play depending on context.

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The SSC Standard (August 2006)

The four key goals of the Skills for Business network are to:

- improve productivity and business and/or public service performance;
- reduce skills gaps and shortages;
- increase opportunities for the workforce;
- and improve learning supply.

Not primarily about qualifications – good!

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Qualifications plus recent performance or application of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; even then someone can be overwhelmed by amount of work / time to do it / their own satisfaction with doing a 'good enough' job or the 'best possible' job.

- Airline lost baggage: queue of 120 people? 'Best possible' job for each customer?
- Team leader – aircraft design working on 14 projects? 'Good enough' job?
- Nurses? real challenge: best possible or good enough?

Skills and Qualifications

- Employer engagement – fine
but target of ‘employer use of skills and
qualifications frameworks and standards’?
- Residential care: diversity v. NVQ
 - Supply chains: real improvements but no
desire for lifelong ‘homework’!
 - Desire for understanding
 - Danger of complacency: qualification
achieved – skill development achieved!
 - Importance of support for qualified workers