

Changing vocational education and training

An international comparative perspective

Edited by Ian Finlay, Stuart Niven
and Stephanie Young

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CHANGING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Many developed and developing nations are looking to their vocational education and training (VET) systems to provide a response to changes in the global economy. Some countries are proactive with regard to these changes, adopting long-term strategies that could benefit their economies. These strategies include coordinating economic, industrial and VET policies and achieving consensus among the major stakeholders in the system.

Changing Vocational Education and Training attempts to identify how consensus on VET policy is sought in a number of countries, where interesting models of response have occurred. Based on the findings of a seminar organised by the University of Strathclyde and the Advisory Scottish Council for Education and Training Targets in 1996, the focus is on the principles of stakeholding, consensus, participation and democracy applied to policy formulation and implementation in VET. The international case studies, presented and discussed by experts from eight nations, provide sound examples of practical strategies which have been successfully implemented and will be of interest to policy-makers, practitioners and academics.

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Stuart Niven has just retired from the post of Director of the Scottish School of Further Education. He is President Emeritus of the International Vocational Education and Training Association.

Stephanie Young is Director of Lifelong Learning with Glasgow Development Agency.

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Ian Finlay
Stuart Niven
Stephanie Young

INTRODUCTION

Stephanie Young

Policies for vocational education are linked to national aspirations and achievements in economic growth. Thus they are influenced by past successes and failures as well as future hopes. There is an acknowledged strong statistical relationship between educational attainment and economic growth but the relationship is not the simple one of cause and effect. Although knowledge of the precise details of the connection remain imperfect, no political system nowadays can maintain itself long without giving due recognition to the notion that the provision of education services enriches the quality and capacity of labour and in the process improves employability and flexibility and thus the rationality of the labour market.

How the state organises this enrichment process varies throughout the world. The UK established a responsibility for general education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century but it was only in the 1960s that it extended its responsibility to include vocational training. The Singapore government also instituted vocational education policies during the 1960s but with a background colonial history, exclusion from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, multiple ethnic groups and an under-developed economy the shape of government intervention was distinctly different.

The intervention of the state in vocational education reflects its concern over the supply of labour within the typology of the reigning industrial policy. Russia before 1989 essentially typifies the command model where centralised, coercive state planning organises the vast bulk of economic activity. At the other end of the continuum is the neo-liberal model epitomised by the triumphalist economics of Reagan and Thatcher under whom state interference and intervention were radically attenuated and, on the basis of its alleged instrumental efficiency, the competitive market system was promoted as the prime mechanism for economic success. Lying somewhere in between are the developmental and corporatist models that reflect the economic mixture of 'private' and 'public' ownership. Institutions are created to cement state and industry in a common bond to produce policies that are directional and proactive. Each country devises its own collection of institutional practices with differing emphasis in such areas as industrial regulation, organised labour and health.

All vocational education policy development is underpinned by a particular model of industrial policy and requires some degree of consensus between the participant policy makers. This book is about the formulation of vocational education policy where the main theme is the achievement of consensus—denoting a judgement that reflects the

group solidarity of those involved. Who takes part in the process, their power and influence, is determined by that synthesis of ideology and action that defines the industrial policy of different political regimes. This is shown clearly in the chapters that describe how vocational education is organised within Finland and the United States.

The liberal democratic concern over who legitimately has a voice in the proceedings of policy development has given rise to the notion of the 'stakeholder'—defined for our purpose as an individual or group whose participation is critical to the long-term progressive development of an undertaking where diverse interests compete for advantage. Some argue that the consensus that emerges from such stakeholder policy developments is more likely to find a solution to the problem, apparent from Taiwan to the United States but less so in Finland, of undue preference for academic rather than vocational education. The stakeholder consensus thus may be more inclined to promote the equalisation of esteem that will realise the recognition, compliance, commitment and conformity of the individual learner in pursuit of long-term personal advantage.

These concerns led the Scottish School of Further Education (SSFE) in the University of Strathclyde and the Advisory Scottish Council for Education and Training Targets (ASCETT) to organise jointly a Glasgow seminar in February 1996, and it is our wish that contributions from around the world presented in this book assist those who have an interest or are actively engaged in the development of vocational education.

1

STAKEHOLDERS, CONSENSUS, PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY

Ian Finlay

In this book we attempt to identify how consensus on VET (vocational education and training) policy is sought in a number of countries where interesting models have emerged. The focus of the book is on the principles of stakeholding and consensus applied to policy formulation and implementation in vocational education and training. The international case studies provide sound examples of practical strategies which have been successfully implemented and will be of interest to policy-makers, practitioners and academics.

Why are some countries more successful than others at involving stakeholders, social partners or role players in the formulation and implementation of education and training policy? How do these countries achieve consensus among the stakeholders? To what extent is consensus desirable or achievable in pluralist societies? What factors need to be taken into account in the development of policy in education and training if consensus and participation are seen to be desirable? These are the questions that are addressed in this book through a series of international case studies on the process of change.

Many developed and developing nations are looking to their VET systems to provide a response to changes in the global economy. Our earlier research (Finlay and Niven 1996) indicated that some countries are proactive with respect to these changes, adopting long-term strategies that should benefit their economies. Of the countries covered in this book, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Singapore and Taiwan would fit into this proactive category. The strategies adopted by these countries include coordinating economic, industrial and VET policies. Some such countries have also developed strategies for achieving consensus among the major stakeholders in the VET system. For example, in Germany a high level of consensus towards economic, industrial and VET policy is achieved through meaningful involvement of all the social partners. These social partners include federal and state government, both sides of industry, and, educational interests. Relationships between the social partners are governed by both federal and state legislation. The German model is only one example of a consensus-seeking strategy. Other countries seem to succeed economically with limited consensual participation. In truth all systems attain some measure of consensus or they would be unable to operate; this book describes how consensus is achieved in a number of different countries.

The material for this book emerged from a seminar which was held in Glasgow in March 1996 and which was organised by the Advisory Scottish Council for Education and Training Targets and the University of Strathclyde. Expert witnesses from seven nations presented papers and then held discussions on the theme of consensus and stakeholding in policy making. The book is an edited collection of these topical papers, with an introductory chapter by one of the editors and the addition of a chapter on changes in VET in Scotland.

It is important at this stage to justify our selection of comparator nations. To some extent, the editors' selections for a book such as this will be influenced by their own network of contacts and their knowledge and experience of other educational systems. This was an influence in our selection: we wanted to use nations that demonstrated some of the characteristics we felt worthy of exploration and we also wanted to use authors in whom we had confidence. We also had other, more objective, criteria that we used in making our selection.

Some countries were selected because of their economic strength. The United States, Germany, Singapore and Taiwan are in this category. These four countries were also selected because their education and training systems have generated interest and have been reported upon in the United Kingdom (see, for example, Cantor 1989; Ainley 1990; HMI 1990, 1991; Felstead *et al.* 1994; Ashton and Sung 1994; OECD 1994). We have a particular national interest in Scotland, so we also selected countries that share common cultural, geographical and demographic characteristics with Scotland. Finland and Ireland were selected partly for this reason, but additionally because they appeared to offer models of the operation of stakeholder involvement and consensus-seeking in vocational education policy formulation and implementation that were worth exploring. South Africa offers a unique case study in political change because of its history. The change from the previous social structure to a democracy has amplified many of the tensions and paradoxes that normally surround political change. The South African government has recognised this and has set in place a number of systems and processes to deal with the changes. These systems and processes are of general interest.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first deals with the main issues that we are exploring in the book. These are the issues of stakeholding, consensus, participation and democracy in relation to the formulation and implementation of vocational education and training policy. It reviews the literature on these issues and sets out our stance. The next section summarises issues that were discussed at the expert seminar from which this book emerged. The final section summarises our current perspective.

Stakeholding, consensus, participation and democracy

The relationships between major stakeholder groups involved in VET policy are illustrated in Figure 1.1. These groups can be described in a number of ways. In the United Kingdom during the 1960s and early 1970s these groups would have been referred to as social partners. Partnership was part of the prevailing discourse with membership of bodies such as the National Economic Development Council, the Manpower Services Commission and Industry Training Boards comprising

representatives of both sides of industry, national and local government, and other key partners. Social partnership is still the prevailing discourse in European countries such as Germany and Sweden. In Germany all the groups outlined in Figure 1.1 are involved in the formulation and delivery of VET with federal government, state government, employers, (individually or through chambers of commerce or chambers of craft), education and individual learners each having clearly defined roles within the process. These roles are discussed by Willi Brand in Chapter 6.

In the middle of the 1970s, the social partnership discourse began to break down and was gradually replaced by the market discourse. In Britain the breaking point for education is often given as 1976 when the prime minister, James Callaghan, made his Ruskin College speech. In this speech Callaghan attacked the professional hegemony in education and suggested education should be more accountable to parents and employers. During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s the language of business and the market gradually permeated education. Students, pupils and employers became referred to as clients or customers; educational institutions were referred to as providers; and key-words in the discourse of VET became accountability, quality, efficiency and effectiveness. Market-based reforms in VET were also instituted in other countries, most notably in New Zealand, which had a Labour government that in many ways introduced market reforms with greater enthusiasm than the Conservative governments in Britain and the United States.

The potential for a new discourse entered British policy when Tony Blair, then leader of the Opposition, made a speech in Singapore in which he announced his intention to create a stakeholder society in Britain. This concept widens out the market discourse. Traditionally markets are conceived of as being a means of communication and exchange between the suppliers of a product or service and those who may wish to purchase that product or service. Recent works on strategic management (e.g. Johnson and Scholes 1997) have suggested that companies need to look beyond their customers and shareholders when making decisions, and must take account of the effects of their actions on all groups or individuals who can influence, or who are affected by, the organisation's actions. These groups or individuals are known as stakeholders. Blair extended the use of the concept of stakeholder from the commercial to the political arena. This call to create a stakeholder society is potentially a move towards the creation of a participative democracy in VET policy formulation and implementation, but there are also critics who have pointed out that it is a further extension of the discourse of business into education (e.g. Gleeson 1996).

A final discourse draws on sociology rather than business, and is the terminology used in South Africa. This discourse uses the concept of role-players in the VET system. This discourse has some attraction in that having a role to play suggests active rather than passive involvement in the process of policy formulation and implementation. Other countries in our study use other terms: Rau writes in Chapter 4 of policy makers and general participants, and the chapter on Finland uses the term 'process owners'.

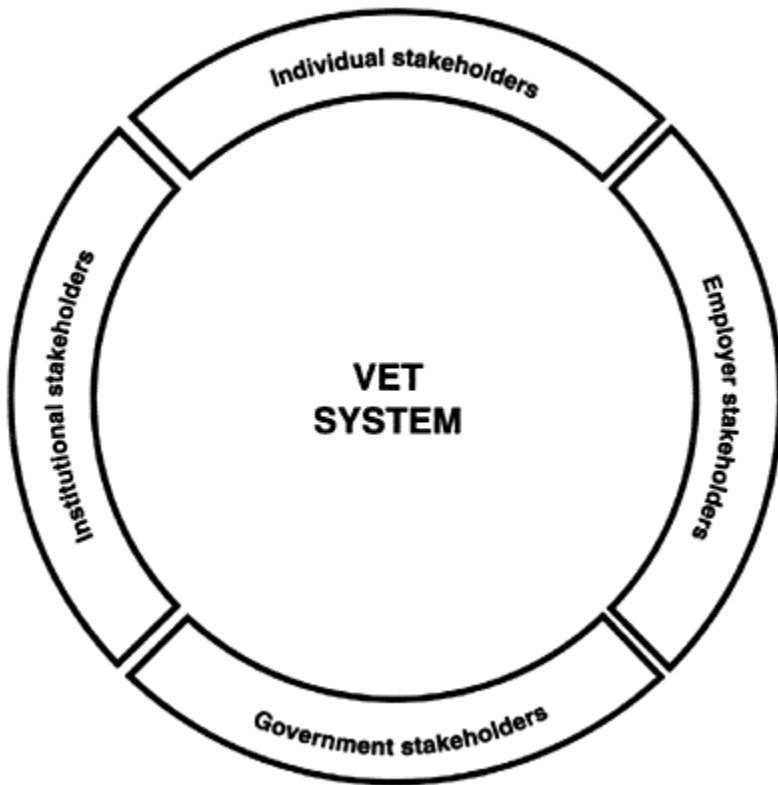


Figure 1.1 The relationships between major VET stakeholders

The groups illustrated in Figure 1.1 can be conceived of as social partners, as those with market-based relationships, as stakeholders, or as role-players, depending on the historical or national context being considered. In this chapter the term ‘stakeholder’ will be used to refer to those with an interest in VET policy. This term is also referred to by the authors of the other chapters, although they tend to use the terminology that is most frequently used in their own countries. The groups used in Figure 1.1 represent quite broad groupings and there is also likely to be some overlapping membership. Table 1.1 lists examples of individual stakeholders that could be included within each group.

There is no imputation in either Figure 1.1 or in Table 1.1 that power or influence is evenly distributed between either the four broad groupings of stakeholders or between individual stakeholders. At any time power or influence is likely to be unevenly distributed, and over time some stakeholders will increase in power or influence while others will see their position decline. In Britain the stakeholders that have suffered a long-term decline in influence have been professional educators, teaching unions (and unions in general) and local government, while employers and central government have seen major gains in power with respect to the VET system.

Our agenda is to promote the creation of participative, democratic processes in the formulation and implementation of VET policy. We see stakeholder involvement and consensus-seeking negotiation as being central to the creation of participative democracy. We agree that:

the challenge now is to remake the values, purposes and institutional forms of the public domain so as to enable this democratic citizenship to be realised. Education is central to this remaking, for the task of realising cooperative action will require learning to be placed at the centre of our experience...

(Ranson *et al.* 1997:117)

Table 1.1 Examples of stakeholders

<i>Individuals</i>	<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Employers</i>
Students	Universities	Central government	Multinationals
Pupils	Colleges	Local government	Small/medium enterprises
Trainees	Schools	Individual government departments	Public sector
Parents	Training organisations	Government sponsored administering bodies	Private sector
Lecturers	Trade unions	Political parties	Employers' federations
Teachers	Examining bodies Professional bodies		

Diani proposed both strong and weak definitions of participation. We would concur with his justification for a strong definition:

given the size and complexity of contemporary mass societies, the centralisation of political power, the growth of bureaucracy, and the concentration of economic power, the traditional guarantees of democracy need to be strengthened, protected and extended in order to counterbalance the tendency for an ever-increasing number of decisions affecting people's lives to be made by small groups; these groups are often remote and not easily identifiable or called to account, since they act in the name of the state, of a local authority, or of some large business organisation.

(Diani 1993:448)