

# **OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT TECHNICAL SKILLS NATIONAL PROGRAMME**

**Case study by: John Ruskin College  
Created by: Kevin Watson**

Managed by



In partnership with

**emfec**

# Contents

---

## Careers in Health and Science: preparing the way

---

Overview	2
Composition and structure	3
Reach of project	5
Aims, means and outcomes for institutions	6
Outputs	8
Employers, technical skills and the skills plan	9
Summary of achievements	10
The future	11

---

## Tables and graphs

---

Table 1: Numbers of participants engaged in or benefitting from project activity	6
Figure 1: Hierarchy of Impact	7
Figure 2: Reach and Influence	8



# Careers in Health and Science: preparing the way

## Overview

This project began life with a relatively wide focus - to improve the overall experience of students on vocational health and science programmes whilst taking cognisance, at all times, of the proposed introduction of T Levels and their possible impact on the vocational/technical education landscape. In practice, when the eight participating colleges began to take ownership of the project each came to identify a contributing initiative, three principal areas of concern became evident, namely:

- Enhancement of the work placement component of the T Levels to ensure that it will provide a valued and meaningful insight into working life, whilst furnishing opportunities for the exercise and development of a range of relevant skills and personal qualities.
- Provision of comprehensive and up-to-date careers education, information, advice and guidance such as to reinforce students' belief in the capacity of vocational programmes to provide access to a wide range of careers including many not previously contemplated by them.
- The planning of high quality learning opportunities which combine elements of theory and practice, classroom and workplace, and which might bring employers into colleges and take teachers, as well as students, out into industry.

The unique nature of the project, within the Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) framework, is the constituency it represents within the education and skills system. With one exception, a general Further Education College (FE), the partners were all sixth form colleges i.e. institutions more usually associated with the provision of 'academic' study, and therefore perhaps expected to be largely untroubled by the proposed changes to technical education. In fact, all participating institutions have a significant, and growing, vocational curriculum and, over and above the three specific pre-occupations of the project listed above, questions of significant strategic impact were regularly addressed. The project thereby became a vehicle for raising, and bringing to the attention of senior leaders and managers, issues such as:

- The perceived status of vocational/technical education in sixth form colleges and the existence, or otherwise, of any coherent sense of vocational pedagogy
- How well vocational courses are centrally coordinated and the means by which any examples of effective practice arising out of this project would be conveyed more widely



"I was pleased to take on the Project Manager role and greatly enjoyed interacting with colleagues across eight different colleges. Although each partner pursued its own chosen path, it quickly became clear that there were enough overlaps and shared routes to promote collaboration and professional dialogue. By the end of the project the fruits of that collaboration and dialogue were being shared by other subject teams and by senior managers to a degree beyond that which could have been envisaged at the start of the venture".

KEVIN WATSON, PROJECT MANAGER

- The future role and purpose of sixth form colleges faced with ever-increasing competition from school sixth forms for GCE 'A' Level students and what might well be the greater readiness and expertise of general FE colleges to respond to the introduction of T Levels.

Put simply, whilst the outputs of the project would reflect the immediate attempts to add value to an existing product – vocational health and science programmes – the wider and more fundamental outcomes and impact of the project have the potential to be far reaching and profound. The hope is that at least some of the outputs will merit the epithet 'outstanding' and that all will, to a greater or lesser extent, bring appreciable and often immediate benefits to students at the eight London colleges. How well those colleges respond to the imperative to have in place mechanisms for the transfer of ideas, materials and expertise to other parts of the curriculum should become clear in the near future. How successfully each sixth form college consolidates its place in the post linear A Level, post T Level firmament will take a little longer to ascertain.

### **Composition and structure**

The successful OTLA bid was submitted by John Ruskin College, perhaps one of the least typical of sixth form colleges (SFC) in that it had already established a distinct vocational character, including a substantial apprenticeship arm. In seeking potential collaborators and a Project Manager, the college approached the Principal of another sixth form college who also operates as the director of a well-established partnership of five colleges which work together on a series of quality improvement and professional development schemes. He duly accepted the role of Project Manager and the five members of the London Sixth Form Partnership (BSix, Havering SFC, Leyton SFC, NewVIc and St. Francis Xavier) joined ranks with John Ruskin. When to this alliance were added Shooters Hill College and the FE contributor, Epping Forest College, the project team was complete. The involvement of the partnership also secured the direct involvement of senior college leaders in the implementation and review of the project.

Because it took time both to assemble the group and to allow each college to locate a suitable lead player, the project was slower than anticipated in getting underway. However, once a degree of momentum was generated, adopting a Joint Practice Development (JPD) model, each institution proposed a specific initiative. Planning and training sessions then provided a forum for periodic comparison of progress, for the giving of constructively critical advice to one another and for the exploration of some of the 'big themes' alluded to in the previous section. The Project Manager remained in communication with partner leads throughout, both in the scheduled gatherings and via telephone calls, as well as through individual consultation. He also liaised closely with John Ruskin College (as the lead partner) and with the project's Association of College's (AOC) Peer Advisor. The focus was very clearly on developing the technical teaching skills of the participants in preparing practitioners in the implementation of the outcomes of the Sainsbury review of technical education.

It was agreed from the outset, as a condition of involvement, that each initiative must have input from at least one employer. In the event, the roll call of participating establishments was as follows:

- Involved with Leyton Sixth Form College, in the creation and launch of a Care Academy, conceived as a means of facilitating the entry into nursing of students from across the health and science disciplines, were:
  - Twin Globes Care Home
  - NHS Waltham Forest
  - Albany Nursing Home
  - University of East London.
- Working with NewVIc on a multi-disciplinary initiative tracing the links between science and business via the manufacture, branding, marketing and selling of a laboratory produced substance (soap) were:
  - London Metropolitan University
  - Plaistow Youth Market
  - Money A and E
  - J's Dance Factory.
- Providing work placements not only for students but, importantly, also for those members of the Havering teaching team keen to demonstrate their professional willingness to retain a 'hands on' understanding of the application of their teaching in relevant contemporary work settings were:
  - Emerson Court Nursing Home
  - Hopwa House Day Centre
  - Ravensbourne (Special) School.
- Central to BSix's initiative was the organisation and running of a careers information event when employers would add their voices to those of teachers and give accounts of their respective entries into a variety of science-based posts. Those employers who advised on the format of, and give talks at, the 'Careers Beyond Medicine' venture, and who may well now extend on the connections made with the college as a result were:
  - Thames Water
  - Reckett Beckinser
  - NHS
  - Marriage Millers.
- The Saint Francis Xavier (SFX) investigation into student perceptions of the 'ten most important features' of work placements was very much a co-operative enterprise dependent on the support of the following institutions which offer periods of work experience to SFX students:
  - Imperial College Hospital

- Croydon University Hospital
  - BEC Family Practice
  - Riverhouse Medical Practice
  - Balham Park Surgery
  - Day Lewis Pharmacy
  - Boots the Chemist
  - Clapham Leisure Centre
  - Randall Close Resource Centre
  - Springfield Leisure Centre
  - Bed head Football Club
  - Balham Leisure Centre.
- John Ruskin College took as its topic the devising of teaching materials which consider the kinds of ethical issues frequently encountered by health professionals. Two employers were enlisted to help achieve this, firstly by each leading a teaching session with students and secondly by advising on the authenticity of the resources created by the John Ruskin College teachers. The employers were:
    - Avicenna
    - Let Me Play.
- In an effort to add structure and depth to the work placement experience, Shooters Hill set about creating a work book containing not only basic information but also a range of suggested activities and exercises (including a number of contextualised mathematical activities) requiring students to evaluate their own conduct and performance and to highlight nature of the learning taking place. The employer asked to critique the workbook during its formative stages and to assess its value when in use was:
    - Thames Tiddlers.
- On similar lines to Shooters Hill, but aiming to avail students of opportunities to shadow health professionals going about their daily business, the project lead at Epping Forest set out to find employers prepared to go beyond the usual bounds of work experience and to offer shadowing arrangements. The employers willing to comply were:
    - Princess Alexander Hospital
    - Chrysalis Day Nursery and Pre-School
    - Little Treasures Pre-School.

## **Reach of project**

As well as engaging the employers identified above, the eight partner leads were encouraged to bring their work to the attention of other vocational teams and of influential figures within the leadership of their respective colleges. To support that process, senior managers from six of the eight partners attended one of the training and development meetings when the wider ramifications of the project were made evident. The Project Manager was also able to report regularly on

progress to representatives of the five college members of the London Sixth Form Partnership (the Steering Group representatives all sit on their senior management teams), whilst keeping the three non-members of that Partnership abreast of key issues. By dint of these different approaches, the tentacles of the project were able to spread beyond the immediate initiatives and to touch significant numbers of students and staff, both directly and indirectly.

The table below extracted from the final report indicates the extent of the project's reach.

**Table 1 Numbers of participants engaged in or benefitting from project activity**

	<b>Actual</b>		<b>Target</b>	
	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Indirect</b>	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Indirect</b>
<b>Managers and senior leaders</b>	16	28	20	30
<b>Practitioners</b> (teachers, trainers, tutors...)	35	38	36	46
<b>Learners</b>	275	290	260	274
<b>Providers</b>	10	15	14	16
<b>Employers</b>	36	24	28	22

### **Aims, means and outcomes for institutions**

The aims outlined in the overview – to enhance various aspects of the vocational health and science learning experience whilst recognising and reacting to the wider post 16 educational environment (particularly sixth form college) – remained constant throughout. The precise nature of two of the initiatives altered radically over time – the product, of changes in lead personnel. These changes, together with the fact that three of the eight partners underwent inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) during the lifespan of the project, and taking account of the stop-start influence of the summer vacation and busy enrolment/induction period, made it difficult to ensure the attendance of all major players at all meetings and training sessions. Nonetheless, all partners stayed in the venture to its conclusion. In the end, as well as the two initiatives re-visited more or less completely, two others were subject to considerable modification. These movements from the initially nominated path were not deemed problematic but, rather, reasonable adjustments in the light of events which remained over time within the spirit and objectives of the project.

In simple terms, each strand of the project had impact at up to five organisational levels. All succeeded in effecting desirable innovations in the programme(s) managed and/or delivered by the partner lead. Accomplishing this first step invariably required a seeking of the support of other practitioners within programme teams. All initiatives also reached level two, the point at which teachers operating in the same curriculum area(s) were made conscious of the OTLA inspired work

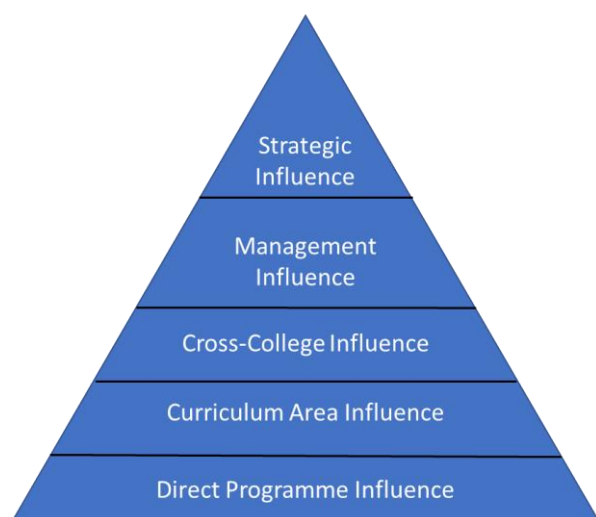
going on and became professionally challenged to embrace at least some of the practice inspired thereby. Several partner leads have reported on growing amounts of interest and expressions of approval for follow-up activity which might allow for wider participation.

Attainment of levels three to five varies from college to college. Level three is the grasping of OTLA implications by vocational teaching teams across whole institutions. Most initiatives have been able to pose, implicitly or explicitly, questions as to why a Care Academy might not spawn a Travel Academy; why, for example, better quality careers advice is any more necessary for health and science students than for their business or IT colleagues; why the adoption of a particular style of placement workbook might not become a minimum expectation for all vocational programmes; why the apparent need for health teachers to undergo work placements is any less relevant for sport or media staff. Failure to reach level three is a feature only of that minority of institutions which lack any obvious forum to ensure such exchanges.

Levels four and five depend on senior leadership involvement. The former has been satisfied when managers have accepted the need for more fulsome coordination of vocational programmes across their colleges. Several have acknowledged the desirability of implementing a more coherent set of quality assurance procedures than that which currently exists and of identifying some minimum expectations for all vocational and technical disciplines. Level five moves from improving what is there at present and making adequate preparations for what is to come. During the course of this OTLA project the rationale for T Levels and their likely influence have on several occasions been discussed and the future of applied general education - as opposed to the more purely academic or more overtly technical - speculated upon. At least some of the eight colleges in the 'Ruskin group' have been prompted by such debates to begin to delineate their approach to T Levels and to agree the kind of curriculum most appropriate for sixth form colleges to be offering in the years to come.

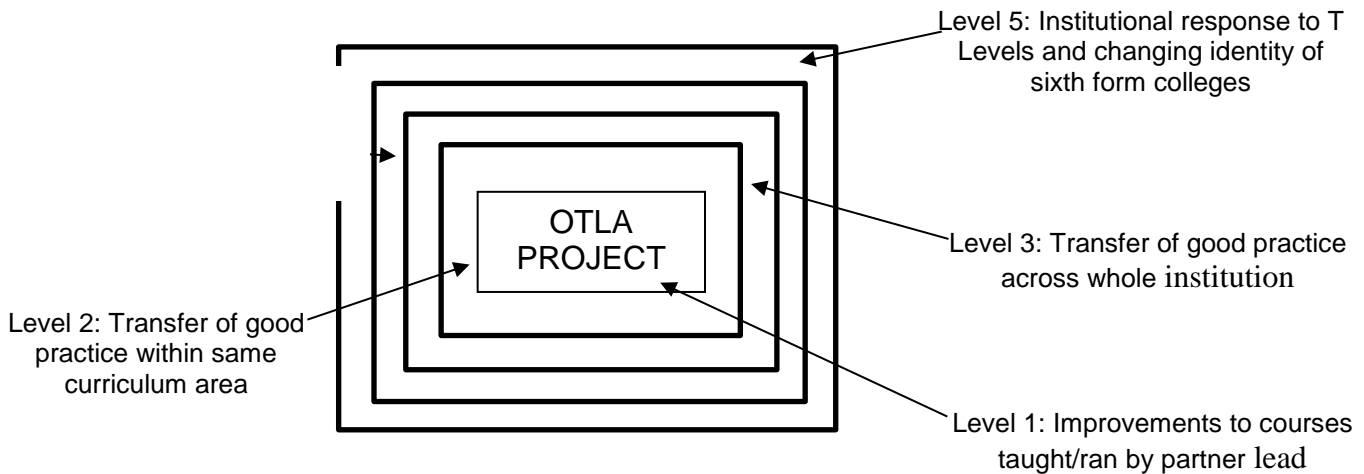
The following diagrams reflect the above in visual terms.

**Figure 1: OTLA project – Hierarchy of impact**





**Figure 2: OTLA project – Reach and influence**



## Outputs

If the level of institutional impact exerted by the project has differed across the eight partners, the quality of discernible products has also proved variable. Referring back to the three areas of focus explained in the introductory overview, the outputs are, in essence, associated with one or other of these priorities. With regard to the enhancement of the experience of work placement, three colleges have produced placement workbooks. Each has its own distinct emphasis and flavour, but common features include sections outlining for employers the principal interest, skills and aspirations of each student scheduled to spend time in that workplace. Students are in each of the three versions required to assess the skills and qualities being nurtured 'on the job'. Places are provided for employers, also, to comment on students' behaviour, commitment and competence. One of the workbooks includes exercises designed to demonstrate the relevance of mathematical applications in the workplace; the others concentrate more on 'soft skills'. All stress the significant amount of learning which can be taken from a well-ordered and planned work placement.

Efforts to provide thorough and impartial careers advice and guidance have led to outputs such as the testimonies of employers in which they describe their own motivations, numerous setbacks and eventual triumphs. Elsewhere students have devised job trees featuring branches on health or science frequently not previously comprehended by learners. In one instance a scheme of work for a unit on careers in science is shared.

Classroom teaching should benefit from other outputs. Material on moral and ethical dilemmas in health could well stimulate much fruitful discussion; students preparing to go out into the workplace might be interested to watch beforehand a film in which their peers from a different college rate the most important features of placement. Another output takes the form of a scheme of work detailing the progress of an ambitious inter-disciplinary business – science collaboration which other colleges might adapt for their own purposes.

Many of these individual tools and resources find a place in the idea of the 'academy' – a specialist appendix to a given course intended to make available many work-related enrichment and exploratory experiences as possible. A unifying concept rather than a concrete 'thing', the academy has the capacity to become, with local requirements and customisation, something of a catch all for a vocational course team seeking to augment the basic curriculum with any number of attractive, employment-related activities.

### **Employers, technical skills and the skills plan**

Close engagement with employers is not a universal characteristic of sixth form colleges. Each of the vocational teaching teams involved in this project had a bank of employers prepared to provide work placements. Relations were typically friendly but not especially close with employers responding to requests but not necessarily contributing their own perspectives to any ongoing review of effectiveness.

The OTLA project has helped strengthen some of those links and help build more effective partnerships. The views of employers have been sought on the quality of materials; on the information given to them about placement students; about the skills and qualities those students are looking to improve. In several initiatives, employers have been brought into colleges to give talks, to share experiences, to listen to students and to assess the credibility of proposed teaching resources. Such deepening of interactions has spawned several unforeseen consequences. A senior National Health Service (NHS) manager has joined the governing body of one of the colleges; a network of employer panels is in the process of being established at another to institutionalise the kind of involvement arising out of the project; in at least two instances, far more constructively critical review systems than previously existed have been put in place to evaluate the perceived success of work placements.

All of this may be small beer in regard to the skills plan and upskilling of the nation's workforce but, seen in the context of sixth form colleges, represents a significant shift in thinking. Vocational programmes, it is accepted, should not be regarded solely as 'plan B' routes to university for students who fail to achieve the entry requirements to do GCE 'A' Levels. Vocational pedagogy might be something more than A Level teaching with a dose of work experience thrown in. T Levels, perhaps, need not be entirely outside the sixth form college hinterland. Some such moves in mindset might have happened anyway in at least some of the partner institutions but OTLA participation has brought key strategic issues into stark relief and served as a catalyst in their being confronted and responded to.

In summary, some modest but worthwhile steps have been taken along a path which previously might not have been seen as falling within sixth form college travel plans. If as a result of the project, the country gains some better informed workers and citizens, some filling vacancies in areas they had not heard about before; if a band of young people are inspired by well-structured work placements to opt for careers they were formerly lukewarm about; if a small number of employers has acquired a greater appreciation of the work being done in colleges; and if various

senior management teams have found ways of ensuring that all vocational programmes satisfy a series of agreed quality standards then this project will have left something of a legacy and may confidently see itself as contributing to something which is outstanding.

### **Summary of achievements**

This project has helped bring about the following.

1. Improvements in teaching, learning and assessment by inquiring into the nature of vocational and technical education and how best to bring the classroom into the workplace and the workplace into the classroom
2. Better organised work placements which draw upon employer input and which feature detailed workbooks
3. A series of job shadowing opportunities for students
4. Work placements for staff to re-familiarise them with a care-based environment and to help them empathise with students about to undertake work experience
5. A major careers information event
6. A programme of tutorial activities on careers in science
7. Materials identifying ethical issues likely to be faced in health – related job roles
8. An example of a multi-disciplinary business/science project which can be adapted for use by other teams
9. A Care Academy which stands as a potential model for other vocational areas
10. A video capturing student views on work experience and the potential benefits arising therefrom
11. A highlighting of the place of applied general and vocational education within London sixth form colleges
12. Increased awareness and understanding of T Levels and their potential relevance for sixth form colleges
13. A strengthening of existing collaborative structures and the forging of some new ones
14. An increase in the part played by employers in contributing to the content and implementation of vocational programmes
15. The posing of questions about the future relationship between academic, technical and applied general routes or pathways, which show possible tensions between them and which reflect upon the institutional re-positioning which may be required to respond to the introduction of T Levels
16. Lessons about how difficult it is to attribute ‘impact’ to any one variable when several factors are invariably present in any development
17. An appreciation of how difficult it is to maintain momentum in a project which comprises eight institutions and which spans various breaks and other priorities
18. Confirmation of the fact that institutional self-interest will almost always be a more powerful imperative than willingness to collaborate. (Nearly all of the partner leads were at one time or another obliged to prioritise internal issues and thus to give less attention than was desirable to the project)
19. Realisation of the truism that the most successful ventures have been carefully planned, ordered and the ground adequately

prepared. The slow start of activity and hasty assembly of key players meant that there was less collective planning ahead of the implementation phase than would have been desired, this resulting in some atomisation of the individual college initiatives

20. The further realisation that, to optimise impact, it is vital to secure senior leadership support from the outset. Only then is there any strong prospect of 'local' advances and recommendations being brought to a wider, whole college, audience.

### **The future**

The prior and continued existence of the London Sixth Form Partnership (LSFP), which comprises five of the eight John Ruskin College project participants should guarantee that the most important issues to emerge will not go unheeded. That body has already committed to a professional development session on T Levels during the course of the 2018 summer term. The three colleges within the OTLA alliance but outside of the LSFP will be invited to that event but will not as a matter of course be privy to associated initiatives undertaken under the Partnership banner. That said, it is assumed that the Association of Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges Association will be prominent in ensuring that T Levels and vocational/technical education remain close to the centre of the post 16 stage in the months and years to come.

As must be the case for any time limited project, it would be fascinating and almost certainly enlightening to revisit the eight initiatives and the eight partner leads in, say, a year's time to monitor subsequent modifications and additions to what has been achieved to date. In parallel with a follow-up gathering of partner leads there could be a meeting of senior curriculum leaders to help ascertain the scale of any movement of ideas and practice from health and science to other college departments. Perhaps such a 'one year later' postscript could become a feature of the OTLA approach.