Premier’s TAFE NSW Scholarship

Bridging the Three Pillars – Schools, the Training Sector & Industry to Build Skills for a New Creative Economy

Tanya Dobble

TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute

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The focus of my study tour was to research the various approaches vocational and higher education institutions take to integrate work skills and theory within their design programs. Collaboration with industry, engaging younger learners in design programs and student retention were also key elements.

The UK and the Netherlands have continuously produced successful, internationally renowned design graduates, so I wanted to get a better understanding of the structure of the programs and how the design industry was used to develop employment related skills within a learning environment.

Purpose

The Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning’s (CAVTL) report, ‘It’s about Work’ 2013, states that the key enabling factor for employability is the vocational education and training(VET) system working as a two-way street rather than education and skills operating as a separate sectors. The opportunity to liaise with internship coordinators, program coordinators and international coordinators at the various institutions in the UK and the Netherlands, as well as with design industry professionals, provided valuable insight into current trends and the practices employed by international businesses in developing VET curriculum. ‘Dualisation’ is regarded as one of the significant factors in the success of the Dutch VET System. The concept involves students ‘working’ two to three days a week to gain practical skills, then spending the remaining days a vocational college to learn the theoretical skills.

Process

The CAVTL report was instrumental in determining the approach I took to my research and the institutions that I contacted. Initial contact was usually through international program coordinators and other leads I established through research reports and case study exemplar reports. Many of my initial contacts provided further relevant contacts or suggested additional institutions that were relevant to my study tour research. Program coordinators organised tailored programs to introduce me to teachers, participate in student critique sessions, openly discuss and question students, and view facilities.

Objectives

* + to examine flexibility in the delivery of design programs, and collaboration with industry
  + to examine implementation of any new technologies used
  + to examine the teaching/learning in different settings, use of technology, informal learning and social devices
  + to examine student engagement and promotion of design programs to students whilst still at school
  + to investigate the overall perception of design education by industry and students
  + to investigate innovative approaches to design education.

Report Scope

This report examines exemplary practices of various VET and higher education institutions to design education and explores how VET education and dualisation can be successfully provided as a valid pathway from an earlier age in school. The report also investigates best practice partnerships between vocational education providers and businesses.

Gathering Data

The ‘Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report’ and the CAVTL ‘It’s about Work … Excellent Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning’ report provided me with extensive background information regarding the vocational education system within the UK. The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB) based in the Netherlands provided me with contacts and information regarding the interaction of senior secondary vocational education (MBO) with the organised labour market.

Study Tour Activities

The study tour from 8 March to 11 April made it possible for me to visit numerous education establishments, meet business development managers and identify VET/business partnership opportunities. Some of the organisations visited included:

**The Wendy Shorter** **Training Centre for Upholstery and Soft Furnishings Skills** opened seven years ago and in that time Wendy Shorter has won numerous awards, written a book, and successfully trained many students into their own professional practices.

After reviewing industry trainees around 2005, the industry and the Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers decided to develop its own craft qualifications to ensure that students would attain the practical skills that industry was demanding.

This hand- on craftsmanship and practicality based skill set is a trend I have seen a lot in the institutions I visited. The courses offered by Wendy Shorter are structured quite rigidly into three stages, in which the students achieve a gradual building of their skill set through research projects and practical tasks.

Within the training centre, Wendy also conducts a programme similar to our TVET programme (TAFE at school) where sixth form students from two of the local schools are able to attend and complete a stage 1 (equivalent to our TAFE Certificate III) course.

**The London College of Fashion (LCF),** University of the Arts London (UAL), is situated adjacent to the heart of London Street Fashion, Oxford St. This central location is also the headquarters of the Study Abroad Centre that coordinates short courses for international students who wish to have an introduction to fashion studies as a taster for the mainstream courses on offer or for credit at their base colleges. The college is highly competitive and requires grades of a B (63–72.99 per cent average) for admission.

The day I visited, Study Abroad students were on their one-week mandatory study tour of Paris. This allows students to visit major fashion shows and liaise directly with industry professionals to gain current and contextual learning experiences.

Industry involvement in courses offered

Lecturers are all industry professionals and currently work in industry. Industry involved lecturers provide unique experiences; for example, the Queen’s personal hat maker is employed on a part time basis and heavily involved with the 3D and Fashion subject.

Claire Wilcox, a professor at the Centre for Fashion Curation at LCF, has curated the Alexander McQueenSavage Beauty Exhibition for the Victoria and Albert Museum. A talk open to staff and research and postgraduate students was held as part of a research fortnight.

*Incorporating technology into teaching and learning practices*

Technology used within the course includes body scanners for patternmaking and design development, 3D printing, and rhino 3D modelling software. These technologies have been used for more than 10 years, so they are now regarded as old technology. What is new and flourishing is the hand crafting skills and labour-intensive hands on craft skills. As these craftsmen are now few and far between, it is becoming imperative to pass on these skills fulfil the demand for nostalgia within design.

*The application process and why UAL is selected over other colleges*

Application is by portfolio, written essay and application form. Average grades must be B credit averages. The Fashion Styling course has no grading requirements, but a styling submission is assessed. If the submission is not strong enough, the student is asked to resubmit it to provide evidence that their commitment is great enough to withstand the rigours of the course.

Attendance is crucial due to intensiveness of course. The completion rate is high because of follow up on attendances and support during semester.

All students have access to resource areas, computers, printing, materials libraries, cafeteria, and exhibition space. Students can select electives to match their core subject focus and can use credits achieved in short courses completed as recognition of prior learningfor mainstream courses as well as showing portfolios for evidence..

The college strengths lie with the combination of industry relationships and the involvement of part time lecturers who balance work in industry with teaching at the college. The campus has just recently opened an exhibition space on the ground floor for local and international artists to display work, exposing students to current artistic practice and commentary on social issues.

**Paul Grainger and Teach Too, London**

[Paul Grainger](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/staff/CPEN_16.html) is the co-director of the Centre for Post-14 Education and Work and the development coordinator of Further Education at the UCL Institute of Education. He has been involved with further education for more than 30 years, including as a college principal.

In preparing for my study tour submission, I came across The Education & Training Foundation, an appointed body of members that has been established to set professional standards and codes of behaviour and develop qualifications in the further education sector.

The foundation ‘supports colleges, training providers and employers to improve the quality outcomes and impact of vocational education and training with a clear line of sight to work. One of the main priorities of the foundation is to take forward the recommendations from the report by CAVTL.

Project manager of the [Teach Too](http://teachtoo.org/phase1/models/fashion-enter) scheme and the Two*-*Way Street Leadership Exchange Programme Paul Grainger generously agreed to speak with me about how the programs operated and the role employers have played in providing collaborative partnerships with training providers throughout the UK under the programmes.

He is passionate about the Teach Too scheme and explained in depth how it is able to support occupational experts to become involved in teaching their expertise. A case study he cited was the Barking and Dagenham College, situated in the East of London. Dagenham is the site of a major automotive factory operated by Ford of Britain, a subsidiary of the Ford Motor Company. It opened in 1931 and in its peak in 1953 employed around 40 000 workers (en.wikipedia.org/Ford Dagenham).

The company downsized and re-specialised and in 2013 announced that 1500 jobs were to be lost. That left Dagenham and the surrounding areas with highly skilled, mature unemployed workers who had a lot of knowledge in technical and engineering skills.

Implementing the Teach Too scheme has been instrumental in developing programs that collaborate with the new industries relating to engineering and technology that have been moving into the area and developing workshops in which highly skilled senior industry representatives have been employed to deliver their skills and knowledge to students.

The Green Technologies Centre, which opened in 2012, is a specialist centre set up to train staff and industry specialists in solar thermal and solar photovoltaic cells. The company, Viessmann, supplier and manufacturer of this equipment, has provided industry practitioners to deliver sessions to students of the college, while also using the centre as a training base for their own staff. This exemplifies the two-way street relationship.

The college is also unique in that it has set up a technical skills academy that is partnered with the Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

The academy is specifically for 16- to 19-year-olds who are not in school, employment or training and has been purpose built to provide an environment that resembles an actual workplace. Students can experience a wide range of courses, including catering, beauty, childcare, construction and plumbing, with opportunities to work in actual work situations. The success of the academy has led to the development of higher qualification courses as students decide they wish to pursue further study. It has also increased the number of skilled workers in the local area.

Lastly and most importantly Paul Grainger reminded me with his own passion that a successful practitioner was a lifelong learner and to do that you needed to first MASTER your learning through:

* + **M**otivation
  + **A**cquiring information
  + **S**earching for meaning
  + **T**rigger recollection
  + **E**xamining knowledge and
  + **R**eflection

– *Master it Faster*, Colin Rose

**Summa College, Eindhoven**

[Summa College](http://www.summacollege.nl/english) is a leading secondary vocational college, comprised of 22 schools in various locations. Each of the schools has its own specialisation. The courses offer very practical, hand- on training. Design programs are not the primary focus, as courses related to industry demand are the main priority.

On visiting the main customer service centre based at the main campus on Sterrenlaan 10, I was advised to visit the Wonen and Design (Interiors and Design) College in De Run 4250. That campus is located about 15 minutes from the centre of Eindhoven in an industrial complex and houses workshops and studios.

The programs offered fall into the categories that are assigned within VET education and the Dutch VET qualifications:

*Secondary vocational education*

A student can undertake one of two paths depending on their capabilities and desires. The BOL path, or what is known as professional training, is the more academic path that involves 60 per cent full time study and 20 per cent internship, averaging four days college attendance and one day in industry (internship).

The BBL path, or occupational path, is more commonly known as an apprenticeship, where the student is training in an industry situation for 60 per cent of the time and 20 per cent attending college in a classroom situation.

**MBO levels**

MBO has four levels:

* + Level 1/Entrance Training – Assistant Students at level 1/entrance training perform simple tasks. They work under the guidance of a supervisor and assist others with practical tasks.
  + Level 2 – Basic Practitioner Students at Level 2 independently perform standard tasks.
  + Level 3 – Practitioner Students at level 3 work independently. They organise, plan and delegate tasks among employees.
  + Level 4 – Middle Management Students at level of middle management implement fully independent tasks. They supervise and co-ordinate activities in a department or in a small business.
  + Level 4 – Specialist Students at the level of specialist perform independent tasks and carry out specialist work.

**Internships**

Internships are mandatory in all the courses. They are either organised by students individually (with college assistance) or by the college using existing and new industry networks. International internships are encouraged and facilitated with the aid of the college international internship coordinators. ‘Immersion’ is a word used often.

Preparing students for the workforce is really what VET education has been established to do. Doing this effectively whilst creating innovative thinkers has been something the Netherlands system has prided itself on and evidently is very successful at.

Using blogs to document and journal individual responses to work and study has been a successful way of combining technology with learning used at the college.

The learning process the students are exposed to not only motivates further learning, it engages them in their current work, and allows them to develop critical thinking skills and achieve personal feelings of responsibility through their results. Teachers involved find this an exciting and relevant process, as they were placed in a unique learning experience provided by their students.

**Piet Hein Eek, Eindhoven**

The Piet Hein Eek workshops/restaurant/showroom is situated in Strijp-r in Eindhoven. The former factory space was originally the ceramic workshop for Philips, producing parts for radio and television during the 1950s.

Peit Hein Eek is a designer/architect/artist who graduated from the Design Academy at Eindhoven in 1992. His personal manifesto is based on creating a stimulating and invigorating environment first in order to work and function successfully.

Hein Eek states that material, technique and craftsmanship are the starting point of all his work. This seems to be a common ethic I have encountered during my research. He describes it more simply as ‘designing using existing opportunities’.

This is not a new phenomenon by any means, but in era when sustainability – recycling, reusing and repurposing – is paramount, his approach of taking scrap materials and literal waste products to create objects of beauty and inexpressible value is innovative and unique.

**Fashion Rules, London**

Hardy Amies was the official dressmaker for the Queen from 1952 until his retirement in 1989. His parents played a key role in assisting him with his career path. Although his father wanted him to attend Cambridge University, Hardy was keen to pursue journalism, requiring an apprenticeship. Advice from the editor of the *Daily Express* encouraged Hardy to travel the world and learn several languages.

Hardy’s mother worked as a salesperson for a London dressmaker, and that influenced his next path hugely. A letter he wrote to a French seamstress describing the drapery of a dress was brought to the attention of a Mayfair couture house and he was given his first big break. He became managing director of that company at 25 without any formal training.

His path diverged slightly during World War II, when he was recruited into military intelligence due to his knowledge of languages, but his heart always stayed with fashion. In 1946 he started his own fashion house on Seville Row, growing a $500 million dollar business over 50 years.

The desire of parents for their children to attend a higher education institution is still ever present after 80 years. ‘Gap year’ and exposure to a broader world can provide invaluable learning experiences. Networking is crucial. Passion for creativity should never be ignored!

**Central St Martin’s, London**

Central Saint Martin’s is now one of the colleges belonging to the University of the Arts London. The college has recently moved into new premises known as The Granary, situated in Kings Cross. The college is regarded as the geographical and emotional heart of the UK’s creative industries. It works closely with industry and community partners within the arts and design sector.

Courses range from the preparatory/foundation courses to postgraduate courses. Foundation courses give younger students still at school the opportunity to experience creative media and an understanding of studying in further and higher education. This has a flow-on effect for parents, who may need further reassurance that a creative path is to be encouraged.

Research and innovation is promoted and collaborative learning encouraged. One example is the Sustainable Textiles project with Mistra, a programme funded by the Swedish Government and involvement with The Chelsea School of Arts. Year one of the project includes the development of a series of workshops using the Textiles Environment Design’s 10 strategies for sustainable design and research into manmade fibres from cellulosic compounds.

The college offers plenty of opportunity for continuous and further learning. Masters of arts courses in Innovation Management cater to mid-career professionals who are possibly already working in innovation industries but wanting more radical ways to interpret design methodologies. Students who have completed a graduate diploma in fashion, for example, attend a bridging course to an MA and are able to ‘St Martinise’ in a one-year course.

Collaboration and peer learning is followed. Those students have the opportunity to be immersed just by viewing any of the programmes available. Cross curricular activity is encouraged; students interact and are involved in projects across different faculties, even by simply moving through each of the different spaces.

The library is home to some collaborative spaces where independent thinking and critical questioning is paramount. The Design Against Crime Research Centre, a student workshop collaborative effort with the University of Technology S Sydney had its origins here.

Result

I met with international program directors, a VET policy advisor, international internship coordinators, program coordinators, teachers and students. I visited landmarks and institutions that were influential and instrumental in my love of design.

* + I learnt that providing an environment where people can learn for themselves, create their own knowledge and interpret the world uniquely was of paramount importance in all the colleges I visited.
  + The debate over hand skills and traditional craftsmanship being overtaken by technology is strong and heated.
  + The most successful programs involve a multidisciplinary design approach in which students are required to include a Project X (a collaborative project involving other faculties) component in every major submission.
  + Internships/work experience and collaboration with industry is imperative to building student confidence and competence.
  + Face-to-face delivery was dominant, with class size ratios of 30 to 1 the norm for lectures, and 6 to 1 for more in depth learning in group tutorials/ discussions.
  + Peer-to-peer feedback created better learning experiences.
  + Scrum, an iterative and incremental agile software development methodology for managing product development is an agile framework for completing complex frameworks and was successfully implemented as a vital teaching tool.
  + Alumni were supported through a business start-up program, and in turn provided mentoring for current students.

Conclusion

The study tour was intense. There was so much on offer and everyone involved was so willing to share their knowledge about their educational practices and procedures. Meeting with college directors and staff to investigate business partnership opportunities was very beneficial.

Recommendations

* + implement teaching strategies such as Scrum within my own teaching practice
  + increase industry involvement through encouragement of internship programs, industry visits, collaboration with industry professionals
  + provide students with varied learning experiences, study tours, industry liaisons
  + collaborate with other design sections, encourage peer to peer learning experiences a multidisciplinary approach
  + keep sight of craftsmanship and hands-on skills in place of technology.