

## **The Wolf Review of Vocational Education**

**a response from the Institute for Learning:**  
the professional body for teachers, trainers and  
other teaching and training professionals  
working in further education and skills

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## Executive summary

1. Following the announcement from the Secretary of State for Education that Professor Wolf would undertake a comprehensive review of vocational and practical education, the Institute for Learning (IfL) set about developing a consultation with its members, teachers and trainers working in further education and skills. Here IfL sets out four important challenges faced by teachers and trainers delivering high quality vocational learning in further education colleges, work-based learning, adult and community learning, specialist colleges, offender learning, the voluntary sector and other providers meeting the educational needs of young people and adults.
2. In arriving at a consensus on the most important issues for IfL's members, the consultation process has opened up the many and varied challenges faced by professional teachers and trainers. These are referenced throughout this initial response, together with some suggestions for how Professor Wolf can engage with IfL's members and draw on the skills and expertise of expert teachers and trainers as the review moves into its second phase. IfL urges that the Wolf Review looks to its members' perspectives and the first-hand evidence base teachers and trainers provide from direct experience of excellence in vocational education.
3. The four Ps. IfL members have identified four priority areas for the Wolf Review to address:
  - a. *Parity of esteem*: parity of teaching status between the highly skilled and experienced further education teachers and trainers who provide high quality vocational and practical education and their counterparts delivering 'academic' learning, most commonly in schools but also in higher education. IfL members call on the Wolf Review to make the case for Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status (QTLS), the professional status conferred by IfL on qualified teachers and trainers in further education, to be accorded parity with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Only by allowing IfL members to work alongside their school teaching colleagues as peers will government and the education system recognise and get the most from the distinct expertise of teachers and trainers of vocational and practical subjects.
  - b. *Vocational pedagogy*: the critical distinction between vocational and academic education; the approaches to teaching vocational and practical subjects – by experts in the vocational or practical area who have successfully 'done the job' and who have developed new professional identities as teachers and trainers in further education and skills. IfL members call on the Wolf Review to make the case for an independent inquiry into vocational pedagogy and establish the basis for comprehensive research into vocational teaching and training, drawing on the experience of expert teachers and trainers.

- c. *Progression*: from school into vocational education, through exposure to vocational learning pre-16 led by expert vocational teachers and trainers from further education, coupled with high quality information, advice and guidance and from initial vocational education into work, technician and higher craft level study and higher education. IfL members call on the Wolf Review to make the case for a wide-ranging review of the vocational and practical options open to learners from age 14 and to ensure that all learners, by the time they reach 16, are well informed about the benefits of vocational learning in all further education settings (colleges, work-based learning, apprenticeships, etc) and the progression opportunities into work and higher education.
  - d. Public and policymaker *perception*: how vocational and practical education is perceived by those who are the beneficiaries of the skills and knowledge individuals acquire and by those responsible for steering the policy direction for the education system. IfL members call on the Wolf Review to ensure that the current vision of the Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning for society and educational policymakers to hold craft, vocational and practical education in the highest esteem becomes a reality.
4. Focussing on the professional status of teachers and trainers, defining and developing vocational pedagogy and raising awareness of and clearly signposting the benefits of vocational and practical pathways through progression will transform the way vocational education is valued and bring about the changes needed to deliver economic growth and prosperity. IfL extends an open invitation to Professor Wolf to meet with groups of members and incorporate the expertise and experience of teachers and trainers as the review progresses into the next phase.
5. So far some 5,000 members have taken part in creating IfL's initial response, through an expert reference group and an online survey. The survey is ongoing and contains over 10,000 commentaries and recommendations on issues central to the Wolf Review of vocational education. IfL looks forward to working with Professor Wolf on the issues identified in this initial response and in examining more closely the other factors considered important by teachers and trainers working in further education and skills if the education system is to fully embrace vocational education.

## Introduction

6. Formed in 2002 as an independent professional body for teachers in further education colleges, the Institute for Learning (IfL) broadened its remit in 2004 to include all teachers, trainers and tutors working across the range of (then) post-compulsory teaching and training. In November 2004 IfL was tasked with leading government's professionalism reforms for teaching and training in publicly funded further education and skills and, from September 2007, IfL's membership covered all teachers and trainers working in further education colleges and other providers in receipt of Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and, as the successor body, Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funding.
7. IfL exists to raise the professional status and standing of its members – 175,000 (September 2010) teachers and trainers who, through their commitment to their continuing professional development (CPD), demonstrate their professional excellence and dual professionalism – in the public interest and for the benefit of learners. IfL's members are, by and large, experts from other professions and occupations – chefs, engineers, technicians, hairdressers, nurses, care workers, etc – who have come to work in further education colleges and other learning providers and who have developed skills, expertise and a deep understanding of teaching and learning through initial teacher training (ITT) and CPD.
8. IfL's focus on the dual professionalism of its members means that teachers and trainers are both experts in their subject, with current vocational skills and knowledge, and in teaching and training methods, kept up to date through highly individualised professional learning. In addition to promoting dual professionalism, high quality CPD and celebrating the status of its members, IfL aims to give its members an influential voice based on their expertise and experience of teaching and training millions of young and adult learners every year. In recent months members have contributed to IfL's responses to government's skills and funding consultations and this initial response to the Wolf review should be read in conjunction with these wider policy areas.
9. Through their dual professionalism, the very heart of their approach to vocational pedagogy, IfL's members are experts, ideally placed to determine what works well in vocational and practical education. Many pioneered initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s to bring vocational learning into the school curriculum and increasing numbers of IfL's members find themselves working in partnership with schools and others on 14 – 19 provision. IfL members deliver vocational programmes in the excellent work-related teaching and training facilities available in further education colleges and other learning providers and some lend their expertise to the vocational and practical curriculum where it is delivered in schools.

## Methodology

10. IfL's membership structure and grades recognise the individual journeys that teachers and trainers take, the teaching and training qualifications they achieve and the experience they gain. Fellows have considerable teaching and training experience and have gone well beyond the teaching and training qualifications required to work in the sector to explore teaching and learning at masters level. The first phase of IfL's consultation with its members involved an online conversation with a reference group of 200 Fellows, exploring key themes and ideas for the Wolf Review from their experience of delivering high quality vocational and practical learning.
11. This reference group included practitioners in the field of vocational and practical learning, experts with many years experience of leading 14 – 19 programmes, teacher trainers responsible for the ITT of vocational teachers and trainers and members with a research interest in this area. The themes and ideas that emerged from this conversation were tested widely across the reference group, refined and presented to IfL's Advisory Council of elected members and stakeholder representatives for further consideration before being shared with the wider membership.
12. Using the themes and ideas from this first stage of consultation, IfL created a comprehensive online survey for members. 4,900 members have participated in the survey at the point of the compilation of IfL's initial response to the Wolf Review, a figure which continues to rise daily. Whilst this initial response aims to do justice to the contributions of IfL's members, there remains a rich vein of data that could further inform Professor Wolf's research and the survey will remain open beyond the deadline for the call for evidence to enable members to continue to reflect on their experience and contribute to the review.
13. The themes and ideas are presented here to inform and develop the thinking of the Wolf Review. Based on the evidence from its members, IfL sets out the principles central to providing the very best vocational education for 14 – 19 year olds and beyond. The themes touch on some of the specific questions raised by Professor Wolf in her call for evidence and look more widely at issues of infrastructure, funding and accountability.
14. IfL intends that this initial response is the start of its contribution to the Wolf Review. IfL will increase its engagement with members for the review through live podcasts, online conversations and targeted focus groups. IfL and its members would be delighted to welcome Professor Wolf to participate in all or any of this activity and to hear first-hand the views of expert practitioners in vocational and practical education.

## Key challenge one

*Parity of esteem: through the achievement of parity of teaching status between the highly skilled and experienced further education teachers and trainers with QTLS and their counterparts delivering 'academic' learning, most commonly those teaching in schools with QTS but also those teaching in higher education.*

15. For many IfL members there is a real sense that it is difficult to demonstrate that vocational and practical learning is held in the same regard as academic study when there remains a great distinction between the two teaching professions. For some this is evidenced in the difference in pay, terms and conditions. The majority, however see it as more of an issue of professional status and proper recognition of that status by the educational system:

*"FE teachers come in to teaching with industry recognised qualifications and experience, they then train as teachers. Why then are they not afforded the same status as school teachers, who can come to work in FE but if my expertise is needed in school I am not recognised as the qualified teacher I am – in my opinion more highly or appropriately qualified than the school teachers I work alongside."*

16. 88% of respondents to the online survey agree (26%) or strongly agree (62%) that the education system holds further education teaching and training professionals in a lower regard than school teachers and that this is evidenced through inflexibility in school regulations preventing highly skilled vocational and practical teachers from being recognised as teachers in a school setting. One member told how Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status, conferred by IfL, was perceived by the school system:

*"I was one of the first IfL members to gain QTLS status. In July of this year I was made redundant, along with others, for budgetary reasons. I am feeling the first-hand effects of QTS/QTLS inequality. After failing to find new work in FE, I decided to start the lengthy and costly training needed to gain the right to teach my subject in a Secondary school. As well as being an IfL Fellow, holder of QTLS and recent MA Education graduate, I have had to start at square one.*

*It is difficult to imagine that any government which strives for international competitiveness could be so short-sighted when it comes to the skills and value of further education teachers. In addition, the TDA are subsidising my training, as they do for all PGCE students – which in my case, can at best, be described as a duplication of all my previous FE teacher training and CPD. As the government tries to make efficiency savings, they are missing probably one of the most obvious and sensible moves."*

17. This case is not an isolated incident, with over 850 respondents providing comments on their personal experience of the disparity between vocational and school teaching. There was a clear connection made between parity of status across the two professions and what effective vocational and practical learning looks like. Many members commented on their successful experience of working with 14 – 19 year olds, often the very students who have failed to achieve their potential whilst at school. The system has recognised that vocational and practical learning is an important educational choice for young people yet fails to properly recognise and acknowledge the distinctive skill set required of vocational teachers and trainers.

*“As an FE teacher I often work in schools for 'school link' projects, often with challenging learners, often getting better results than the school teachers working on the same course due to my vocational skill and using different teaching methods. If I was employed by the school directly for this work I would be classed as 'unqualified'.”*

18. Members identified a related issue in terms of the career pathway traditionally followed by the majority of school teachers. Historically, young graduates choose to train as a school teacher shortly after or during the final year of their first degree. Naturally their exposure to vocational and practical learning will be limited, particularly in contrast to their immediate experience of academic learning and that of their peers, despite teacher training for schools being a vocational route. It is understandable that their view on progression from school to further and higher education will be shaped by their own experience of relatively straightforward academic routes. In the experience of IfL members this also is related to the pressure for schools to retain the highest achievers for sixth-form academic study.
19. Teacher trainers responding to this question in the survey commented on their experience of training vocational teachers working in further education contexts and graduates undertaking pre-service school teacher training. One of the most powerful examples came from a teacher trainer with experience of working with mixed groups of trainee teachers:

*“I feel very strongly about this as I feel that some of the FE teachers we train are better equipped than some of the school teachers we have. If someone can teach a subject, whether it is in an FE setting or secondary school, then surely they deserve equal status? Many of our FE trainee teachers are teaching students from schools who have opted for vocational subjects. In some cases these are 14 - 15 year olds who have been excluded from school and I see first-hand how a teacher with a wealth of vocational expertise is able to connect with young people who would otherwise miss out.”*



20. The overwhelming conclusion from this theme within the survey is that government would send out a strong message about how it values practical and vocational education and the important role it has to play in the country's economic recovery if it worked to ensure that parity of esteem was achieved between QTLS, the full professional status for teachers in further education and skills and QTS, the professional status for school teachers.
21. Further education attracts the very best vocational experts into teaching and training roles. They undertake ITT in-service 'on-the-job', gaining essential teaching skills and a teaching qualification accredited by a higher education institution or national awarding body. Once qualified, teachers and trainers are supported by IfL through the process of *professional formation*, enabling conferral of QTLS status by demonstrating they use the skills and knowledge acquired through ITT in their professional practice.
22. For IfL members, becoming a professional teacher or trainer is an essential second area of vocational expertise, beyond their first career in industry. IfL believes that the nation needs the highest quality vocational education and training. This should not be provided by those with vocational skills and knowledge 'having a go' at teaching or training, probably based on copying how they were taught decades earlier, but by highly skilled teachers and trainers able to ensure tailored, swift, and successful vocational learning for young people and adults of all abilities. The time and money of learners and employers is too precious to waste. Teaching and training methods must be up to date, use new technologies well and for IfL and its members the case is irresistible that vocational teachers and trainers must be expert in the craft of teaching.
23. **Recommendation one:** IfL members call on the Wolf Review to make the case for Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status (QTLS), the professional status conferred by IfL on qualified teachers and trainers in further education, to be accorded parity with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Only by allowing IfL members to work alongside their school teaching colleagues as peers will government and the education system recognise the distinct expertise of teachers and trainers of vocational and practical subjects. It is clearly in the interests of young people in schools, society and the economy for vocational and practical education to be provided by the teachers and trainers best able to do so.

## Key challenge two

*Vocational pedagogy: the critical distinction between vocational and academic education; the approaches to teaching vocational and practical subjects – by experts in the vocational or practical area who have successfully ‘done the job’ and who have developed new professional identities as teachers and trainers in further education and skills.*

24. IfL members believe that where 14 – 19 vocational and practical education is successful, it is because it is provided by teachers and trainers who have worked in industry, business and commerce in the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is the dual professional identity of teachers and trainers – that rich mix of subject or vocational expertise coupled with teaching or training excellence – which provides the key ingredients for effective vocational teaching and learning.
25. The very best vocational learning is delivered in the workplace or in excellent simulated workshops and training facilities. Colleges and other learning providers, working closely with business and industry, are able to provide environments such as simulated beauty salons, construction sites and engineering workshops, where current standards, practice and technology can be maintained. 81% of respondents believe that it is difficult to achieve this level of currency in school settings and that this often results in teaching and learning having to focus on taught theory rather than the development of practical skills.

*“I teach 14 – 18 year olds CACHE Child Care and Education. The students taking the level 2 Child care/Education course have both theory and practical elements, in the past these students progressed onto level 3 then employment or University. For the 14 – 16 year olds this course has been a major success as the students spend 3 – 4 hours per week over 2 years working in a real early years environment, gaining all round skills. Unfortunately this level 2 course has now been removed for 14 – 16 year olds, they only have the option of a level 1 course in childcare and education which in my opinion is too low a level.”*

26. IfL members believe that in vocational education it is an early exposure to ‘doing the job’ that grabs the attention of learners, with the theory being brought in once the appetite for learning the trade, craft or subject has been established. For many this is the very essence of vocational pedagogy and is the single biggest factor underpinning the successes of further education when it comes to engaging students, including those who have become switched off from learning. There is a clear case that if QTLS was recognised for teaching in schools there would be a growth in such approaches. For some members there are examples of best practice:

*“It does not need to be this way. For example, one school of which I have first-hand experience has a Food Science department headed by a qualified chef with many years of working in the real world. He is the one teacher in the school who isn't called ‘Sir’. He insists on the title ‘Chef’ and thereby creates a totally unique (real) working environment within the school. He runs his ‘kitchen’ with a chef's efficiency and attention to detail and insists on his students playing their part in that. It is not difficult, it just requires new thinking and a willingness to innovate from the management team.”*

27. In general IfL members feel that it is entirely possible to provide high quality vocational and practical education to 14 – 16 year olds, but to do so requires innovative partnerships between further education and schools and, critically, close joint working and team planning and teaching between FE teachers and trainers and their school teacher colleagues. The reality of providing real working environments, essential to effective vocational learning, can only be achieved through collaboration. The need for those with QTLS to be able to teach flexibly in a school setting is a vital ingredient for greater success.
28. 75% of respondents feel that brilliant vocational and practical education responds to the immediate needs of business and industry, but that there is a particular challenge for colleges, learning providers and schools in meeting this need. Members are concerned that courses, programmes and, too often, the qualifications they lead to do not keep pace with fast moving areas of business such as those with a high dependence on technology. Many members commented that in areas where ‘green technologies’ are becoming increasingly important there is a significant gap between business need and the ability of the education system to respond.

*“The needs of business cannot be adequately addressed through qualifications alone as ‘quality standards’, albeit important, lead to lengthy development time for qualifications before they can be delivered. This is another reason why focussing on vocational qualifications for 14 – 16 year olds is of limited use. Making early vocational qualifications less specific and allowing for learning ‘why’ things work would result in more generally capable young people who would be able to adapt to changing workplaces.”*

29. 88% of members responding to the survey believe that business and industry needs to work more closely with awarding bodies, colleges, learning providers, schools and teachers and trainers if the education system is to provide qualifications and curricula that are current and relevant. Teachers need to be given greater autonomy to develop their courses to be rapidly responsive to industry and to liaise directly with employers rather than be mediated by others. Partnerships are critical for successful vocational education, but these need to be led by those best equipped to create and deliver the curriculum.

30. Broader learning beyond the constraints of a qualification is essential. Members feel that this is particularly important for 14 – 16 provision where the skills taught at 14 could well be out of date by the time the young person is ready for employment. The very best vocational education provides young people with the skills and knowledge that make them employable. It is worth making the distinction between vocational education which is broader and vocationally specific training which focuses on the narrower elements within a job role. For young people aged 14 – 16 and below vocational education is the right approach, as it may be for many 16 – 18 year olds who may not yet be sure of their exact career direction.
31. **Recommendation two:** IfL members call on the Wolf Review to make the case for an independent inquiry into vocational pedagogy and establish the basis for comprehensive research into vocational teaching and training, drawing on the experience of expert teachers and trainers.

### Key challenge three

*Progression: from school into vocational education, through exposure to vocational learning pre-16 led by expert vocational teachers and trainers from further education, coupled with high quality information, advice and guidance and from initial vocational education into work, technician and higher craft level study and higher education.*

32. IfL members believe that the time is right for a wide-ranging review of vocational and practical qualifications. 57% of respondents to the online survey feel that the focus on the assessment of 'competence', primarily through National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), has resulted in vocational pathways becoming devalued. Whilst many vocational and occupational areas have maintained 'technical certificates' and other knowledge assessment approaches, there is a concern that the theoretical content of vocational qualifications has diminished through the introduction of NVQs and that this has a consequence not only for the understanding needed to practice a craft, trade or occupation but also the ability to progress to higher education.

*"I have noticed a growing void between older qualifications such as City & Guilds compared to the newer NVQs. The knowledge levels vary significantly: traditional City & Guilds qualifications produced a student with deeper knowledge. As a teacher of horticulture, I am concerned that students passing NVQs currently do not have the knowledge to carry out the duties required and to apply to transferring practical skills."*

33. This is not to say that NVQs are not recognised and valued by employers as clearly they are, but members question whether it is the assessment of competence that employers value or the teaching and learning that leads students and learners to the point of assessment. For some members it is not the qualifications that are at issue but a funding methodology that encourages providers to deliver qualifications at the lowest possible cost, often substituting good teaching and learning with assessment.

*"NVQs were initially designed for education and training to lead to assessment, sadly the pressures of outcome funding has meant that the first part now seems to have disappeared. There is no reason why learning has to be separated from assessing competence. A structure of training – assessment – training not only judges knowledge and competency holistically, it makes it much more relevant for the learner and encourages commitment. NVQs were never meant to be used in the way they are now. Ideally they should be in-service professional qualifications, not a pre-service learning route – though the latter can lead to the former. They are not necessarily suited to young people developing early vocational skills and knowledge."*

34. Vocational and practical learning has a significant role to play for young people with learning difficulties, disabilities, complex health needs and communication disorders. Whilst for some this will lead to progression into work, for many it is more important that it leads to active citizenship, general life skills, personal expression, health and well-being and the skills needed for adulthood. Members with expertise in providing these young people with the skills and knowledge they need to make the most of future opportunities are particularly concerned that the Wolf Review recognises the importance of vocational and practical learning in this context.
35. IfL members believe that there is a place for high quality vocational education within schools but that the new Diploma qualifications, through their complexity, do not provide meaningful vocational choices for learners from age 14. Programmes which allow young people to experience and develop a range of practical and vocational skills across different occupations provide a better platform for informed career choices, particularly when delivered by expert further education teachers and trainers who have, themselves, direct experience of business and industry.
36. IfL members with many years of experience of vocational education have observed reducing numbers of learners going on to higher study on completion of a level three qualification. Members described the once typical progression route for craft/trade apprenticeships – starting with a work-related City & Guilds craft/advanced craft qualification, progression to technician level study through BTEC national and higher national qualifications which, in turn, lead to degree level study. Whilst these progression opportunities still exist, members believe that fewer learners follow this route.
37. This is not the case in all sectors. Members who teach accountancy, for example, see evidence of progression from initial vocational qualifications through to chartered accountant status, following the routes determined by the accountancy professional bodies. Others areas, childcare qualifications being cited often, offer little by way of progression for vocational learners.
38. IfL members recognise that the key to progression is focused guidance and support from the start of a programme of vocational learning. Progression outcomes should be clearly defined from the start of the programme and teaching and learning should be closely monitored towards those outcomes. Learners need regular feedback and progress updates to maintain the focus on the potential for progression.
39. IfL Members believe that progression to HE does not have to follow immediately on from a vocational programme, often years in business and industry before studying for a part-time first or higher degree provide the best possible preparation. Members feel, however, that more could be done to raise the aspiration for progression and that this should start at school by mapping out how learning that starts from a vocational or practical base can lead to higher study.

40. There should be more vocational taster courses in schools taught by further education teachers and trainers with QTLS. These should be supplemented by visits to colleges and other learning providers, talks from successful apprentices and others who started out on vocational programmes and work experience providing a more explicit view of the benefit of vocational education to raise the aspirations of young people at school.
41. Schools have an important role to play in offering information, advice and guidance which enables young people to make informed learning choices. There is a widely held view among IfL members that schools have used vocational pathways as an escape route for challenging pupils and those not achieving in school. The concept that vocational and practical qualifications provide a safety net is at odds with the complexity of vocational qualifications and the need to engage with demanding theoretical concepts well beyond the school curriculum.

*“[vocational] qualifications should not be the safety net for poor achievers. When this is the situation the students have little regard for the learning. I often have 14 and 15 year old learners who say that they have little interest in the subject and are only there because the school staff wanted to get them out of lessons. The reality is that these are capable young people who are considered less able or, in their words, ‘stupid’. This has a profound negative effect on the students as well as the image of vocational qualifications itself.”*

*“If we are to encourage younger people to choose vocational qualifications whilst still at school it must be on the basis of their individual aspirations, not because they are considered to be unlikely to achieve at least five A – C GCSEs.”*

42. Members believe that these informed choices can only be made through the empowerment of individuals and this means proper advice and guidance delivered by professionals. Increasingly, society asks young people to make key career choices at an early age and many adults too have to make life-changing decisions as a consequence of deficit reduction policies. This needs a single, all-age career service delivering high quality information, advice and guidance.

*“I provide learning support for Motor Vehicle students and see so many young people who want to ‘fix cars’ and are told it is the best option for them, but who have insufficient numeracy and literacy skills to understand the theory.”*

*“At first I doubted that the Educational Maintenance Allowance would make a difference, but I have seen an increase in participation from young people who otherwise would not be at college. To watch these young people go on to achieve things they thought impossible is the very best motivation for me as a college lecturer.”*

43. With the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) signalled for reduction as a consequence of the Comprehensive Spending Review, IfL recommends that the impact of this policy shift is modelled against the potential for a significant lowering in the number of young people participating in further education on vocational courses. These young people may come from poorer family backgrounds and any decision which disadvantages them could be a potential 'own goal' from a government seeking to increase the range and quality of vocational education and the numbers of young people engaged in practical learning.
44. **Recommendation three:** IfL members call on the Wolf Review to make the case for a wide-ranging review of the vocational and practical options open to learners from age 14 and to ensure that all learners, by the time they reach 16, are well informed about the benefits of vocational learning in all further education settings (colleges, work-based learning, apprenticeships, etc) and the progression opportunities into work and higher education.



## Key challenge four

*Public and policymaker perception: how vocational and practical education is perceived by those who are the beneficiaries of the skills and knowledge individuals acquire and by those responsible for steering the policy direction for the education system.*

45. IfL members challenge the notion that society does not value vocational and practical education. They consider that the public at large do know the importance of employing those with appropriate skills and knowledge, and do not hold the view that these are less valuable for having been achieved through further education. Members believe, however, that among some parts of the population, including within the education system, schools and policy makers, the *status quo* seems to be that vocational education is second class compared with academic study. The fact that the research base underpinning this 'problem' comes from an academic viewpoint is, in the opinion of members, symptomatic of the problem.

*"When we are having the car serviced, electrics rewired, gas boiler fitted, we are ALL grateful for the professional's expertise. I am a further education teacher, but can't do these things - they are skills that I simply do not have. Those mechanics, electricians and gas fitters have achieved qualified status just as teachers do, that they do it through further education rather than higher education should not be important."*

*"I agree that the public values skills, but not necessarily the qualifications that go with them. The continual changes to vocational qualifications are their undoing. GCSEs and A levels have been used for decades, the public understands them and this stability gives them value with employers. Both the public and employers struggle to understand what is what in terms of vocational qualifications."*

46. There was a call from many IfL members for an educational system which values vocational and academic curricula because of their distinctions, not because of some artificial concept that learning at a notional 'higher level' in any way makes that learning more economically or socially important. The education system needs to champion and celebrate those who start their careers in apprenticeships, craft training and other vocational routes and who, through their work, go on to make such an important contribution to society and the economic prosperity of the nation.

*"With so many degrees and higher degrees being essential for particular careers – law, medicine – they are vocational. Whilst the remit of the Wolf Review is admirable, it is more a question of valuing further education as highly as higher education, rather than vocational education as much as academic learning."*

*"We seem to value the academic far more than the craftsperson, why is this so?"*

47. 68% of respondents believe that equating vocational qualifications to a certain number of GCSEs or A Levels contributes significantly to the devaluing of craft and trade qualifications as it sets the learning of adults and young people entering adulthood on a level with the last years of compulsory school education. Whilst the educational system may argue that the learning is at a similar level this is not the case for the benefit to the individual, society and the economy.

*“We equate vocational qualifications to GCSEs and A levels to give them a sense of worth, as if they are valueless in their own right. Before this survey I hadn’t thought of it in this way, but this has to be wrong.”*

48. **Recommendation four:** IfL members call on the Wolf Review to ensure that the current vision of the Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning for society and educational policymakers to hold craft, vocational and practical education in the highest esteem becomes a reality.