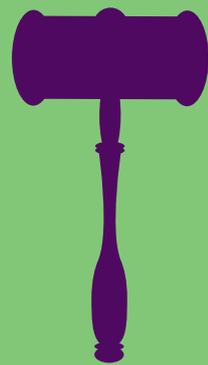


# THE UK SKILLS SYSTEM

## AN INTRODUCTION

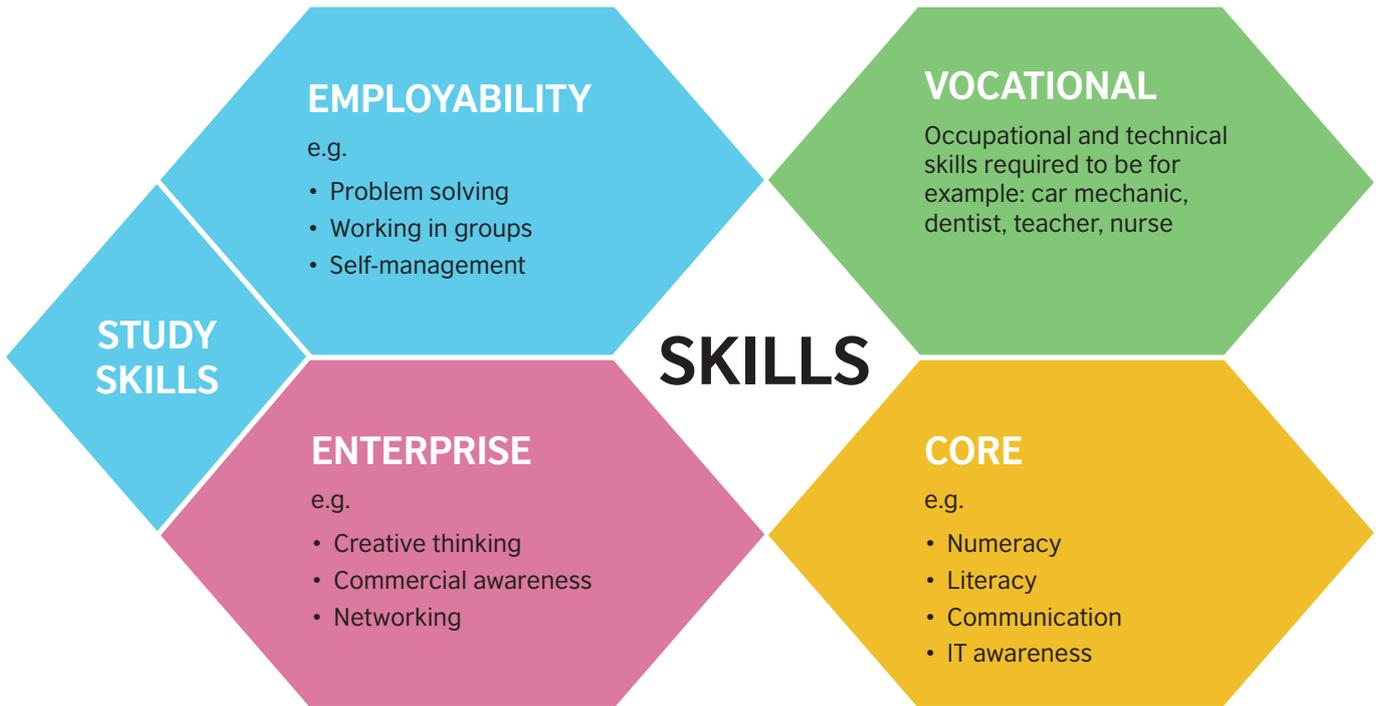


“ Ensuring that Britain’s workforce is equipped with the right skills is essential to delivering sustainable growth and prosperity. ”

Confederation of British Industry,  
*Skills for Growth – delivering the skills businesses need to grow* (2014)

# WHAT ARE SKILLS?

There are a number of definitions of skills and depending on the approach they may have different labels to the ones used below. As can be seen from the diagram the skills link to each other to form an overall skills set.



All these are delivered through the range of learning providers who make up the UK's Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector.

Skills are also delivered outside the organisations that have traditionally been thought of as making up the TVET sector such as further education colleges and employers. These include schools (from primary upwards) and universities. Skills are also delivered in less formal settings such as youth groups.

# WHO DELIVERS SKILLS IN THE UK?

In all four of the nations that make up the UK, skills are delivered through a range of organisations within the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector. These include:



## SCHOOLS

Deliver a range of core skills and vocational courses, particularly for learners aged 14 to 18.



## FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

These institutions are at the heart of the TVET sector in the UK. They deliver all kinds of skills identified in the diagram on page 1 to learners from the age of 14.



## UNIVERSITIES

Alongside academic and higher-level vocational and technical skills, universities also deliver core skills and some have a focus on enterprise and employability. Learners usually start their university education from the age of 18.



## PRIVATE TRAINING PROVIDERS

These deliver a range of skills but usually with a focus on the vocationally specific elements. They often deliver employability skills through this focus. These offer courses for learners over the age of 16.

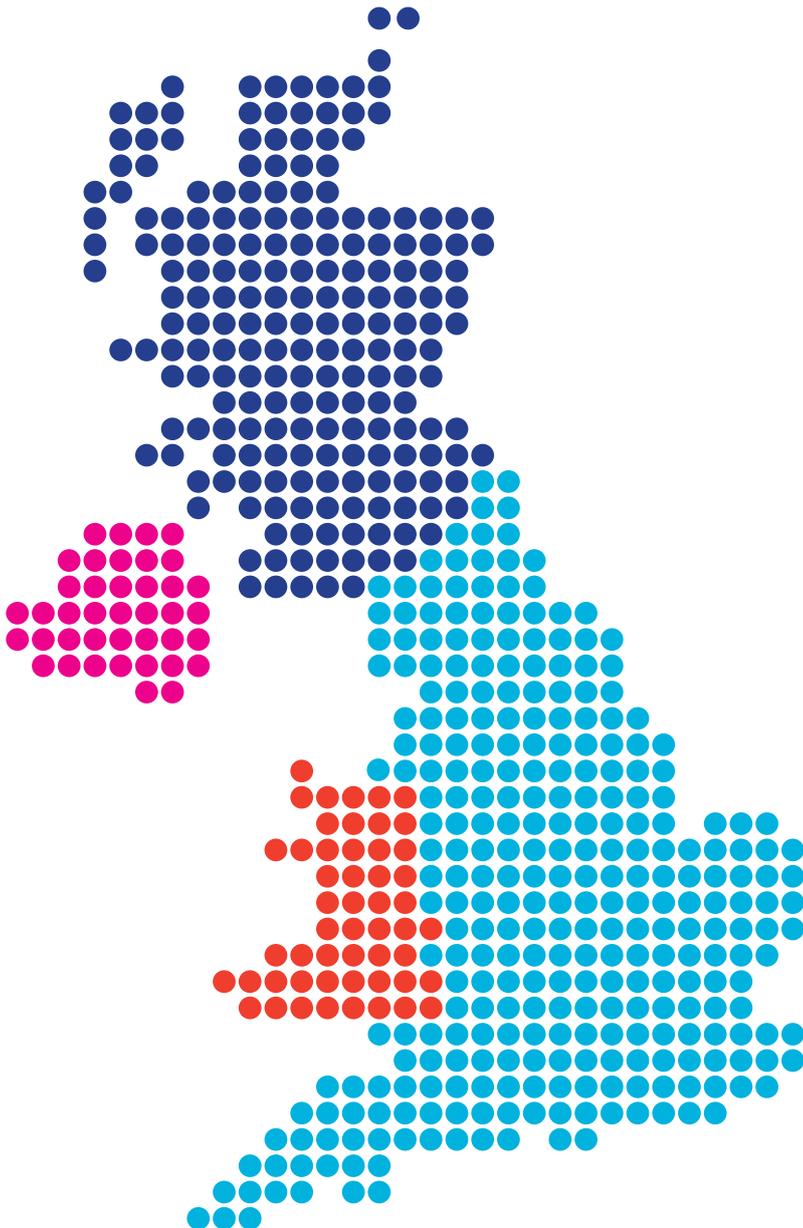


## EMPLOYERS

Many employers now provide on and off the job training opportunities, often through apprenticeships. Training is normally directly related to the job role and the needs of the organisation. Good employers also provide their employees with the opportunity to update and enhance their skills as part of their job role.

# DOES THE UK HAVE ONLY ONE SYSTEM?

The UK is made up of four nations. They have similar systems of skills delivery through TVET, but there are also some interesting differences in how skills are delivered and supported.



## Some examples of differences:

### ENGLAND

In England, further education colleges are autonomous corporations with many freedoms.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland has an integrated approach to its career service whereas in the other countries separate bodies deliver different parts of the service.

### SCOTLAND

Further education colleges in Scotland are now public sector organisations.

### WALES

Wales has its own baccalaureate qualification.

Skills policy is devolved to UK nations, meaning the Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly and NI Assembly are responsible for all skills issues in their respective nations. Each nation has different regulations for the accreditation of qualifications.

# WHY IS DELIVERING HIGH QUALITY SKILLS IMPORTANT FOR EMPLOYERS?

It is vital that employers have the workforce they need to enable them to grow and prosper in a global economy. They need the provision to be both relevant and of high quality.

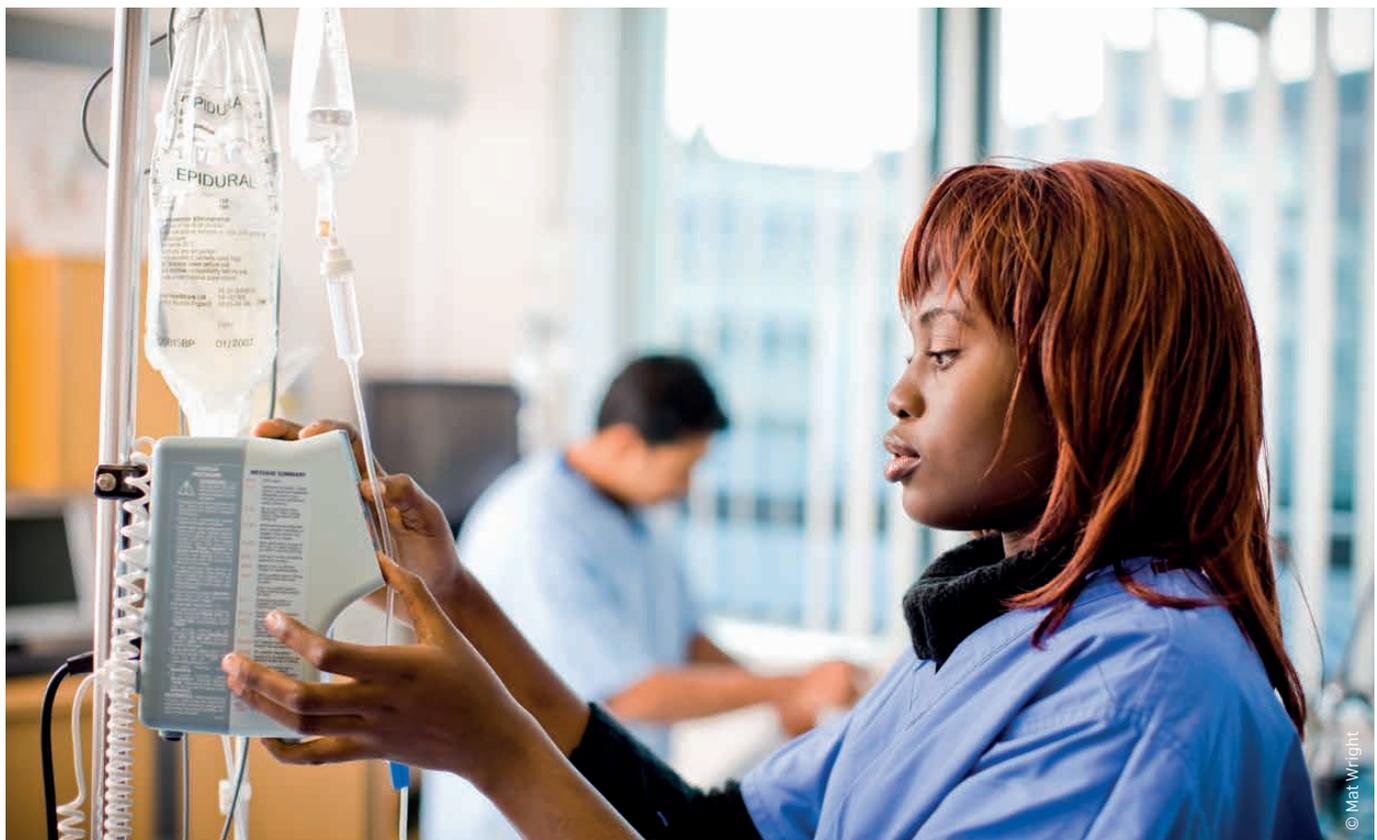
*Many (14–19 year olds) leave education without the skills that will enable them to progress at a later date.*

*Alison Wolf, Review of Vocational Education in England (2011)*

As in many other countries, some employers in the UK complain that schools, colleges and universities do not provide them with the workers who have the necessary skills to be ready for work.

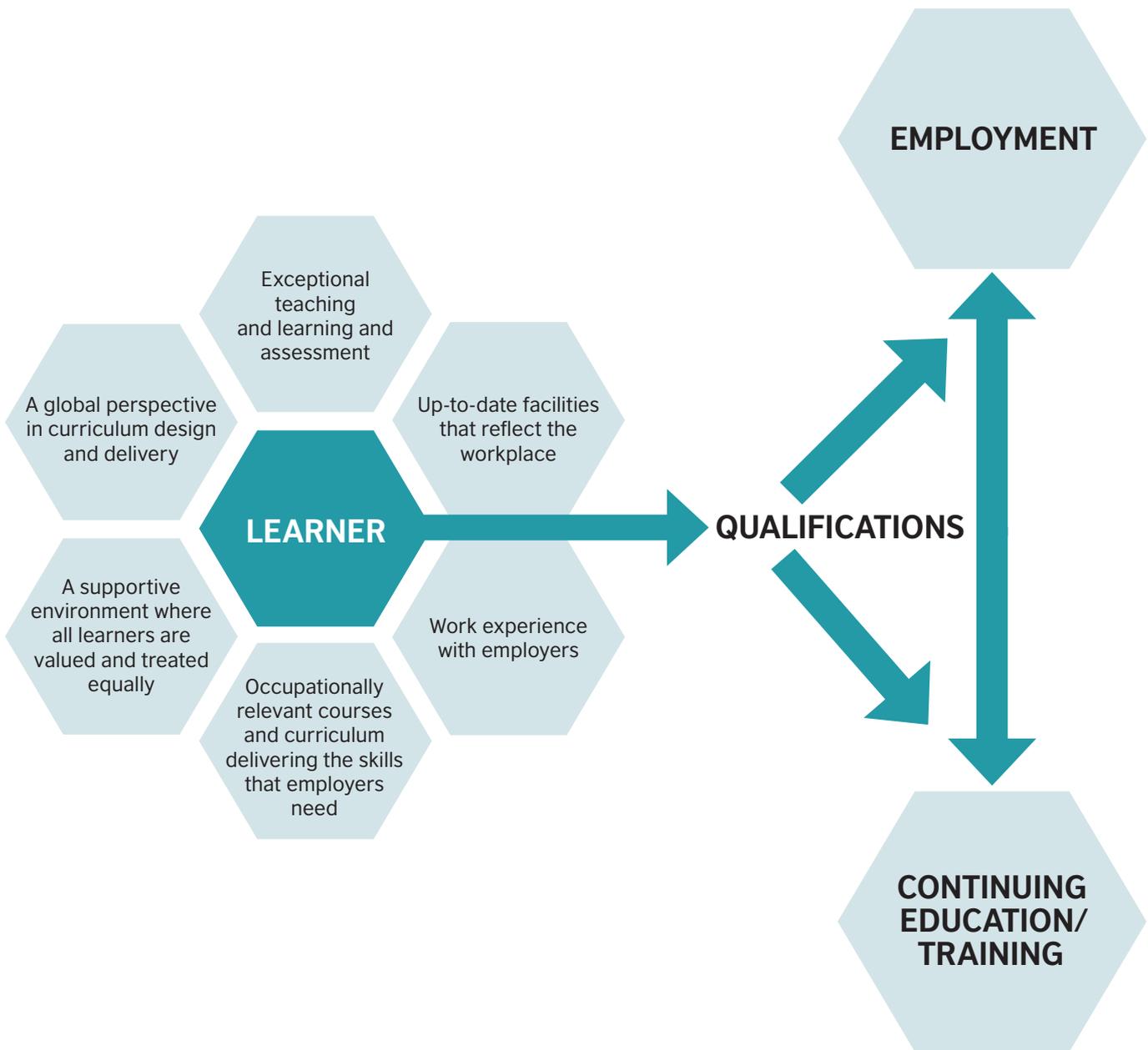
To meet employers' needs, UK governments have had a strong focus on engaging employers in both the design and delivery of TVET. This is helping to drive up quality and relevance through improvements in competency based assessment.

**The aim is to have a working population that is:**



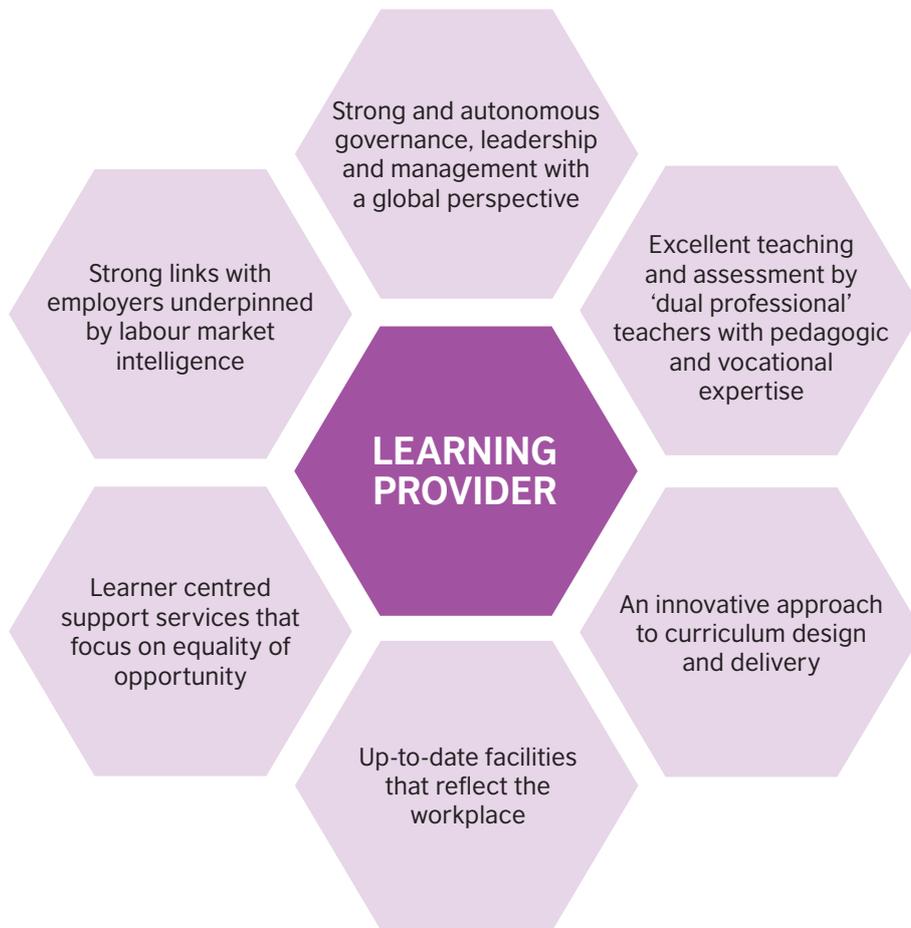
# WHAT DOES EXCELLENT SKILLS DELIVERY FEEL LIKE FOR LEARNERS IN THE UK?

Learners have a range of expectations for TVET as they enter an increasingly global economy. In particular they want the provision of TVET to be relevant to their career goals and to be flexible in terms of delivery and progression routes.



# WHAT DOES A HIGH QUALITY LEARNING PROVIDER LOOK LIKE IN THE UK?

In order to deliver the skills that employers need in a manner that learners expect, learning providers need to have:

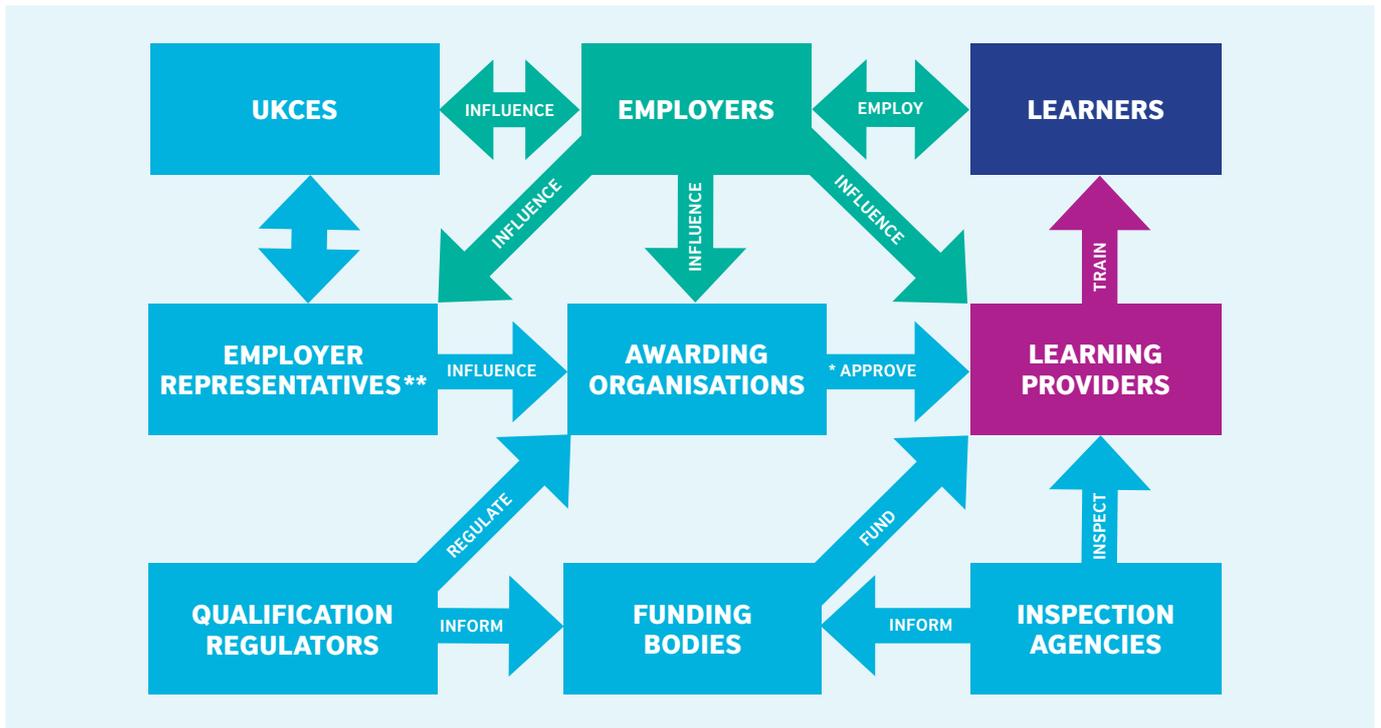


© Mat Wright

# HOW THE TVET SYSTEM WORKS TO DELIVER SKILLS IN THE UK

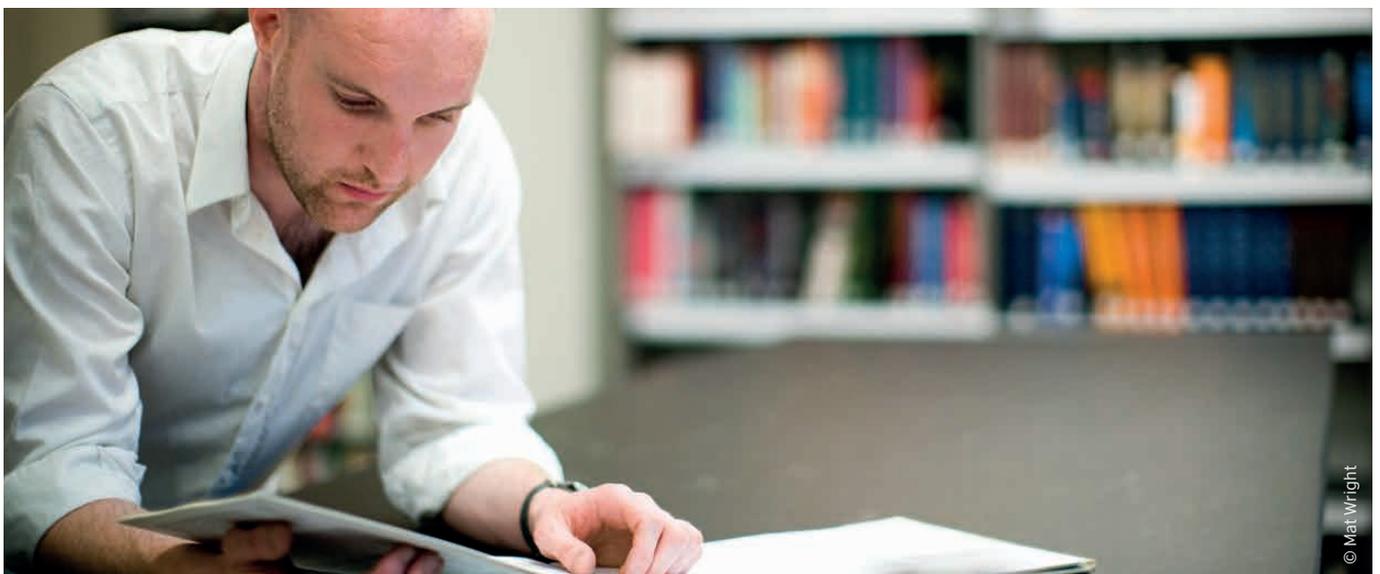
In the UK there are a number of organisations that work alongside training providers in delivering skills provision.

This diagram explains how they link to each other in relation to public sector funding. The British Council engages with all of these and the following pages give further information on these organisations and how they work.



\* The approval is for assessment centres within learning providers.

\*\* Employer Representatives include Sector Skills Councils, Sector Skills bodies and National Skills Academies, which are in turn are represented by the UK Skills Federation.



# HOW IS TVET FUNDED?

TVET in further education colleges is funded mainly by government bodies, but also through income from fees and by income earned from commercial activities. Funding mechanisms vary in each UK nation, and according to the age of the learner.

**Funding is used to influence quality and priorities as it:**

<p><b>FOLLOWS THE INDIVIDUAL LEARNER</b></p>	<p>Training providers in the publicly funded sector submit strategic plans. In these they clearly identify the types of courses they intend to run and the number of learners they expect to recruit on these courses. The funding bodies will allocate funds on this basis once the plan is agreed.</p>	
<p><b>IS WITHDRAWN IF TARGETS ARE NOT MET</b></p>	<p>The learning provider will receive funds for the learner numbers that have been agreed and that actually enrol. If the learners are not successful on their course additional funding will also be withheld.</p>	
<p><b>IS USED AS A POLICY LEVER TO DELIVER EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY</b></p>	<p>The government only funds those areas that it sees as important and wishes to influence. Currently in the UK this includes English and mathematics for 16 to 25 year olds and apprenticeships.</p>	

In the UK there is currently considerable pressure on government funding, which is being dramatically reduced. Learning providers are increasingly looking for innovative and enterprising ways of generating income and reducing costs.

# WHO INSPECTS AND REGULATES THE QUALITY OF PROVISION?

There are different organisations that inspect the quality of learning provision in each of the four countries in the UK – although they all adopt a similar approach.

In England, for example, Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills) and the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) are the organisations that inspect learning providers.



**During an inspection OFSTED considers four areas for all providers:**

- Overall effectiveness.
- Outcomes for learners.
- Quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Effectiveness of leadership and management.

**There are four grades:**

- Outstanding – model of good practice.
- Good – requiring improvement in some areas.
- Requires improvement – requiring improvement in most areas.
- Inadequate – requiring intervention.

If a training provider is deemed to be **inadequate** in England, there is a ‘commissioner’ who is empowered to intervene and effectively take over the running of the organisation.

**THE INSPECTION AGENCIES IN EACH OF THE DEVOLVED NATIONS ARE:**

**Scotland:** Education Scotland

**Wales:** Estyn

**Northern Ireland:** Education Training Inspectorate

There are different organisations that regulate qualifications in the four countries:

**Ofqual**

General and vocational qualifications in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

**Qualifications Wales**

General and vocational qualifications in Wales.

**SQA Accreditation**

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) regulatory and licensing qualifications and some other qualifications.

**CCEA**

General qualifications in Northern Ireland.

**Assessing and verifying quality**

Learning providers must have effective systems in place to ensure fairness, accuracy and consistency when delivering, assessing and quality assuring regulated qualifications. Requirements are set by the awarding organisations offering and awarding the qualifications. These requirements differ, depending on the purpose of the qualifications. Awarding organisations are, in turn, accountable to the qualification regulators, to ensure that the different quality assurance requirements of each qualification meet national standards.

The learning providers are therefore responsible for ‘internal quality assurance’ and the awarding organisations are responsible for ‘external quality assurance’. Both of these procedures are used to monitor and verify the learning provider’s assessment decisions and help to build further trust and confidence in the qualifications. Staff involved in qualification delivery, assessment and verification are required to undertake professional development and meet minimum national standards for their particular roles.

# WHO SUPPORTS AND INFORMS PROVISION?

There are a range of organisations that both support and inform the TVET sector in the UK.

The UK government in all four countries has been exploring a range of initiatives to improve TVET. These include:

- Professionalisation of TVET through the Education and Training Foundation (ETF).
- Greater involvement of employers in TVET through The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).
- Greater involvement of employers in TVET and labour market intelligence through UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), Sector Skills organisations and National Skills Academies.
- Systems reform.



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## ASSOCIATIONS

In each of the four countries there are bodies that represent, support and promote TVET learning providers. General support is available through the following membership organisations:

### CollegesWales

[www.collegeswales.ac.uk](http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk)

### Association of Colleges

[www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk) – for colleges in England

### Colleges Northern Ireland

[www.anic.ac.uk](http://www.anic.ac.uk)

### Colleges Scotland

[www.collegesscotland.ac.uk](http://www.collegesscotland.ac.uk)

In addition there are the:

### College Development Network

[www.collegedevelopmentnetwork.ac.uk](http://www.collegedevelopmentnetwork.ac.uk)

### Association of Employment and Learning Providers

[www.aelp.org.uk](http://www.aelp.org.uk)

### Association of National Specialist Colleges

[www.natspec.org.uk](http://www.natspec.org.uk)

### The Edge Foundation

[www.edge.co.uk](http://www.edge.co.uk)

### Education and Training Foundation

[www.et-foundation.co.uk](http://www.et-foundation.co.uk)

### National Training Federation for Wales

[www.ntfw.org](http://www.ntfw.org)

### Scottish Training Federation

[www.stf.org.uk](http://www.stf.org.uk)

### UK Skills Federation

[www.ukskillsfederation.org](http://www.ukskillsfederation.org)

## EMPLOYERS

Employers are strongly encouraged to get involved in informing the design and delivery of TVET. They do this in a variety of ways and some examples are shown below.

Employer influence within the system through:

- Sector skills organisations
- Industrial partnerships
- Reform to apprenticeships through trailblazer apprenticeships

Employer influence on institutions through:

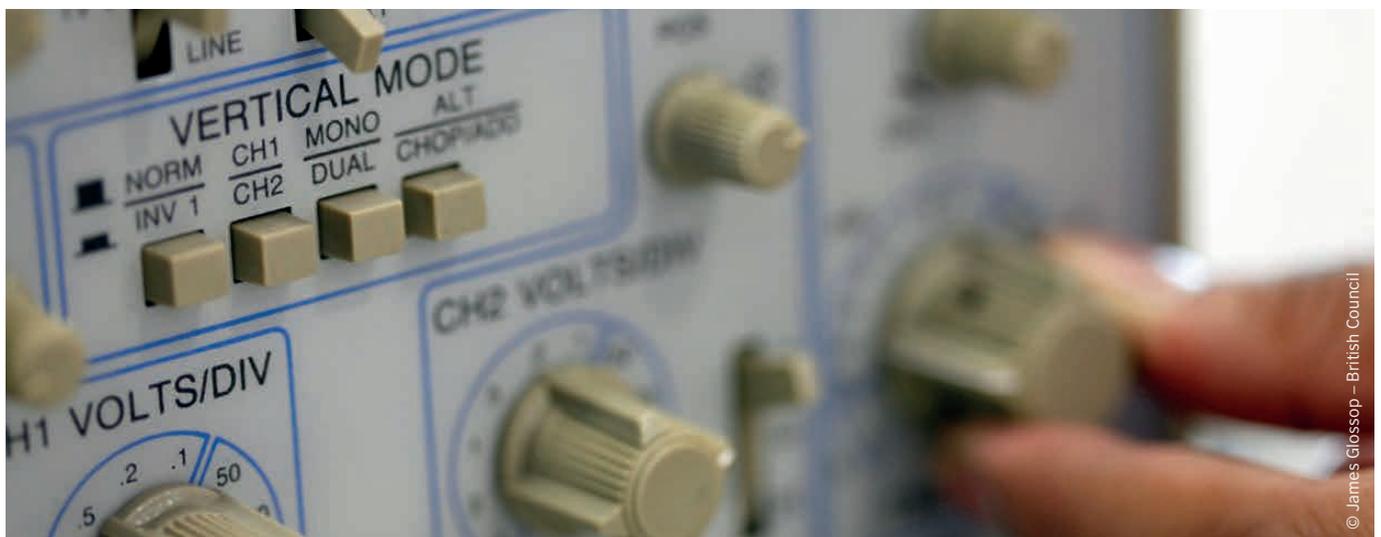
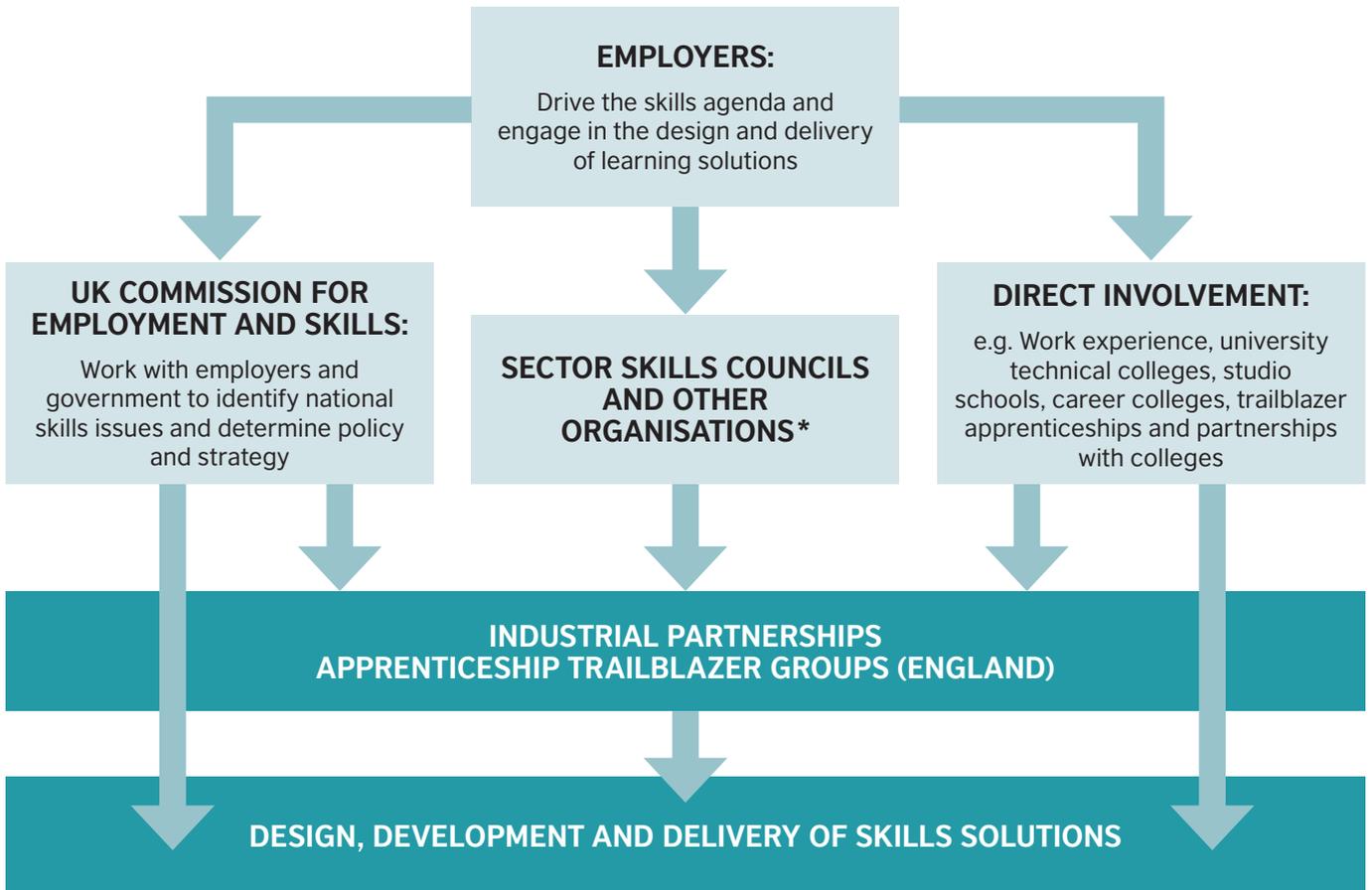
- Further Education College Governance
- Sponsorship of University Technical Colleges
- Management of Career Colleges

Employer involvement in delivery through:

- Input into the curriculum in, for example, Studio Schools
- Providing work experience
- Providing mentoring

# EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS/ ENGAGEMENT

The central role of employers in designing a high quality, relevant and flexible TVET system.



\*Sector Skills Councils, Sector Skills bodies and National Skills Academies are represented by the UK Skills Federation

# WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO LEARNERS STUDY IN THE UK?

Skills training takes place at all levels in the UK from very basic to higher degree level.

In the UK, foundation degrees, bachelor's and postgraduate degrees are awarded by universities. Further education colleges also deliver higher education courses including degrees in partnership with universities.

Vocation qualifications are accredited by over 130 awarding bodies in the UK. Awarding organisations are represented by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) and the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB). These awarding bodies are accredited by government-appointed education bodies in order for their qualifications to be recognised as part of national qualifications frameworks for each country within the UK. These national qualifications framework are mapped to the European Qualifications Framework, in order to ensure that qualifications are transferable, recognised internationally and support mobility.

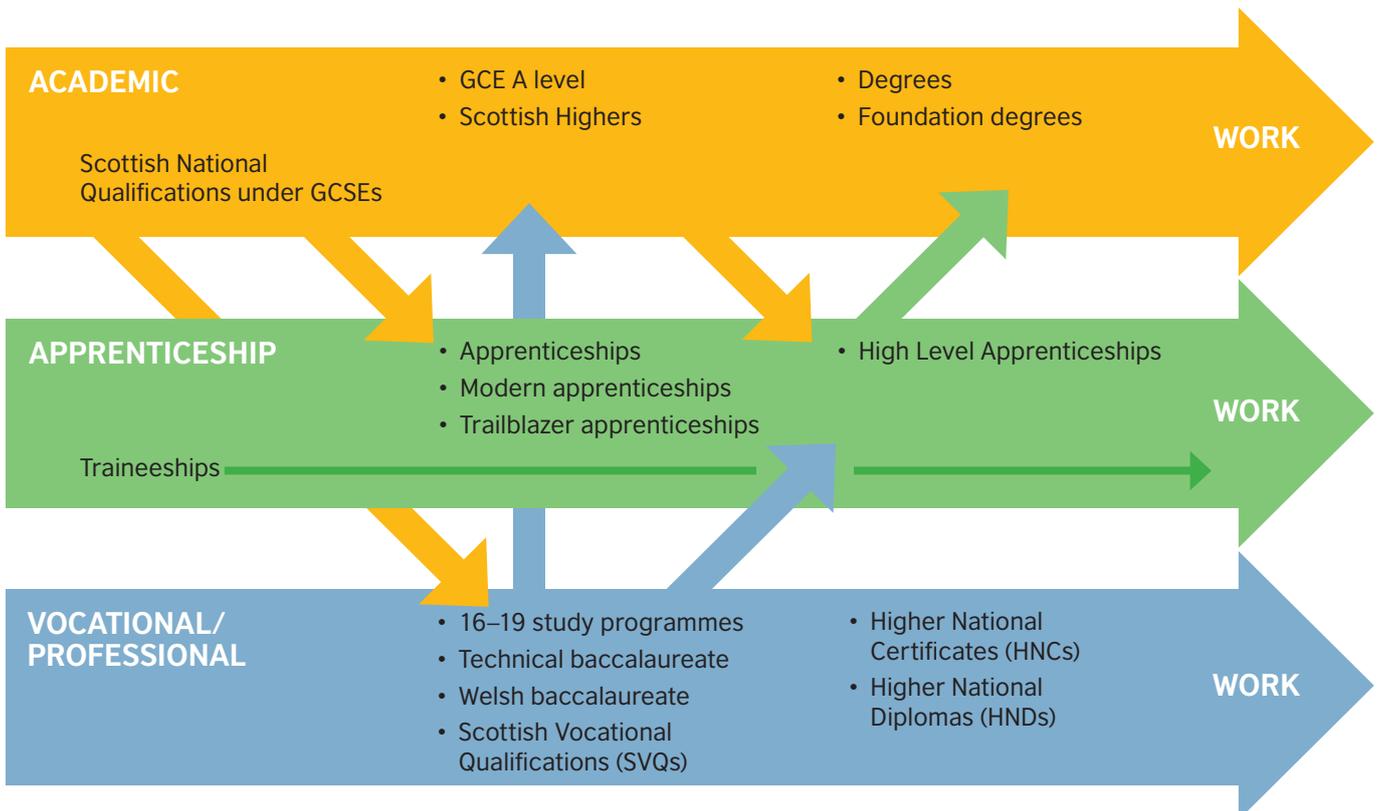
The role of these awarding bodies is to:

- Develop qualifications to meet an identified need and the need might be:
  - defined by government for 14–19 year olds
  - pre-employment training for young people
  - skill development for adults
  - work based training for employers
- Quality assure and standardise the qualifications.
- Support providers to deliver the qualifications.

As in many countries there are some ingrained views as to the importance and status of different types of qualifications. Flexible progression routes are helping to improve perceptions of vocational qualifications. Some degree programmes are by their nature vocational (e.g. performing arts, teaching, nursing and medical/dental courses) and all have a very strong emphasis on acquiring occupational/job related skills. Governments across the UK and awarding bodies work hard to promote the importance and profile of TVET.

Unlike other countries awarding bodies in the UK are private companies and operate in a competitive market place.

## A sample of flexible progression pathways



# ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION

In recent years there has been a strong emphasis on encouraging enterprise and innovation.

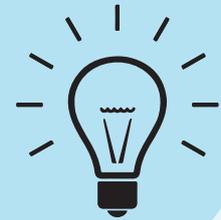
## ENTERPRISE

Enterprise can be seen in the TVET system in the UK in a number of ways. Here are a few examples:

- The independent status of colleges in the UK has meant the enterprising leadership skills have been developed in college leaders and managers.
- Colleges have set up commercial trading companies delivering full cost provision to employers.
- The Gazelle Group has been formed. This is a group of colleges that have come together specifically to showcase and demonstrate good practice in delivering enterprise and innovation.
- The Youth Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES) initiative in Wales provides online guidance to schools and further education institutions on entrepreneurship learning and progression.

*Developing entrepreneurial attributes throughout education is the most important step any society can take to support youth employment and promote economic growth and social value.*

Gazelle Group



## INNOVATION

Governments in the UK have introduced a range of innovative initiatives to address the policy priorities of youth unemployment, skills shortages and the quality of provision. These include:

- Greater employer engagement in TVET.
- Utilising funding as a policy lever to progress TVET strategy.
- New funding for local schemes through the SFA's innovation code.

Training providers have also been innovating in both the design and delivery of the curriculum and in the ways in which they engage with the employment market. These include:

- Greater use of IT.
- Distance and blended learning.
- Use of social media.
- Using employer links to become more demand led in their provision.

Here is an example:

- Market Maker Experience – a student competition requiring candidates to use state-of-the-art technology to develop an innovative business idea that demonstrates their ability to successfully develop and run a business. It is sponsored through the Institute of Directors.



# HOW CAN THE BRITISH COUNCIL HELP WITH LINKS IN THE UK?

The British Council has strong links with the organisations referred to in this document that are part of the TVET system in the UK.

The British Council is committed to fostering international links and collaboration that will allow:

- 1. The UK to learn from other countries so that it can improve its TVET system.
- 2. Other countries to learn from the UK in those areas of TVET provision that might be relevant and useful to them.
- 3. Young people to develop and gain global employability skills and cultural awareness both in the UK and overseas.

A word cloud of TVET-related terms in various colors and sizes. The words are arranged in a roughly rectangular shape. The largest word is 'SYSTEMS REFORM' in pink. Other prominent words include 'EMPLOYER' in blue, 'ENGAGEMENT' in blue, 'BUSINESS SUPPORT' in blue, 'TEACHER TRAINING' in blue, 'ADVICE AND GUIDANCE' in red, 'FUNDING' in yellow, 'MANAGEMENT' in brown, 'STANDARDS' in green, 'DESIGN' in green, 'CAREERS' in blue, 'WORK' in blue, 'EXPERIENCE' in green, 'ACCREDITATION' in blue, 'LEADERSHIP' in blue, 'STUDENT EXCHANGE' in orange, 'QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS' in yellow, 'POLICY CHANGE' in green, 'COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT' in red, 'ENTERPRISE' in yellow, 'QUALITY ASSURANCE' in red, 'SOCIAL MEDIA' in blue, and 'STANDARDS VERIFICATION' in blue.







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