

Executive Summary

How are vocational institutions innovating, evolving and changing as a result of Covid-19?

A study of practice and perspectives in five countries

June 2021



Executive Summary



As an international problem, Covid-19 requires international cooperation. The social, economic and educational recovery from the pandemic can be enhanced by knowledge transfer and exchange. This research brought together 15 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions from the five countries in the British Council's I-WORK Programme (Improving Work Opportunities - Relaying Knowledge) to explore innovation, evolution and change stemming from the pandemic. TVET practitioners and leaders from Ghana, India, Malaysia, South Africa and the UK were asked to reflect on five key questions:

1. How are institutional policy and structures likely to change to reflect the changing situation? Is this different for private institutions?
2. What changes are proposed to the curriculum/ occupational areas to reflect the rapidly changing demand and how are they identifying this demand?
3. How will learners get the practical and work-based experience they need and what changes to work-based learning and apprenticeships are needed?
4. What changes are needed to the skills and type of staff in the teaching institution?
5. How can new delivery models and ways of working promote more inclusive practice?

The research took place as institutions approached almost a year of adapting their teaching, learning and support to localised lockdowns and the restrictions of the pandemic. The national policy context may have been different in each country, but the research findings pointed to a single conclusion: that across the board, the move to digital learning and teaching had brought benefits, opportunities and challenges that might not otherwise have been realised.

As an international problem, Covid-19 requires international cooperation.

TVET institutions showed resilience, creativity and entrepreneurship during the pandemic. They developed new assessment, quality assurance and teaching methods, some of which can no doubt be translated into long-term practice. Staff upskilling on digital tools took place on a significant scale and students become more independent and resourceful in their approach to learning and work experience. For some institutions, these developments were new, creating curriculum opportunities and closer alignment with employers. For others, it was a case of reutilising what was already there and quickening up existing educational principles.

Despite the new advantages of the move online, old disadvantages resurfaced during the pandemic. Problems of lost learning, accessibility for students in rural areas and the affordability of technology were exacerbated during Covid-19. Nor was the hands-on experience needed in vocational programmes and work-based learning able to be fully replicated online.

The matrix below summarises the standout findings from across the five areas of this research in respect of three categories – digital transformation; new opportunities and pre-existing challenges.

Digital transformation

Development of new and bespoke learner management systems and VLEs

Move to flexible and blended curriculum delivery and assessment models

An improved understanding of the benefits of online delivery

New quality assurance systems

Improved staff digital skills and CPD opportunities

New staff appointed, including with digital skills

Improved student digital skills, independent working ability and employability

Better communication within and outwith the college, improved staff teamwork and staff-student engagement

New opportunities

New curriculum and commercial opportunities for TVET institutions

Utilisation of digital marketing in addition to traditional marketing tools

New and greater audiences and student reach through online tools, including social media

Closer alignment with employers

New avenues for engagement with local community partners

Heightened perception and profile of TVET during the pandemic

Policy development and review at organisational level

Student entrepreneurship

Pre-existing challenges

Rural access and connectivity

Gender inclusion in upskilling

Disadvantaged students

Student welfare and mental health

Cost implications of technology

Centralised vs devolved curriculum control

Replication of practical/ vocational assessments online

Importance of in-person attendance in communities where college is a 'home from home'

The I-WORK Programme established a community that can be brought together beyond the life of the programme to keep sharing best practice support on the roadmap out of the pandemic. Indeed, developing communities of practice is a recommendation from this report, one of a set of recommendations for TVET policy-makers and practitioners relating to strategies and themes that can be developed to support TVET institutions, their staff and students.

The report makes **three recommendations for TVET policy-makers:**

Education policy-makers at a national level should reflect on the degree to which the TVET curriculum should be decentralised in order to respond to labour market changes.

Policy-makers should consider the potential for national digital training programmes for staff in TVET institutions.

Policy-makers should prioritise the impact on rural communities, disadvantaged communities and women in their post-Covid-19 skills recovery programmes.

and a further **nine recommendations for TVET practitioners and leaders:**

Institutions should build on good practice during the pandemic and develop a digital learning strategy, where it is not already in place.

Leadership at every institution should have a business continuity plan for managing emergency situations and risk. This plan should be regularly reviewed.

Institutions should develop an internal communication plan to ensure effective communication with their staff.

TVET institutions should develop a learner engagement strategy, where not already in place, that specifically takes account of access to learning for students in rural or hard-to-reach locations.

Institutions should develop an employer engagement strategy if not already in place. The strategy should have a specific strand which focuses on those emerging industries where colleges and employers could work together to replace opportunities that were lost due to Covid-19.

Institutions should conduct an audit of their work-based curriculum to identify new opportunities for employer involvement in placements, projects and assessments.

Institutions should create a digital journey plan for staff so that they can pick up the skills and new ideas they need at the right pace for their practice.

Institutions should ensure that the development of digital skills is embedded in their CPD policy.

Institutions should incorporate procedures for remote support into their student support and safeguarding policies.



www.britishcouncil.org

© British Council 2021

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.