THE THIRD ROUTE TO HIGHER EDUCATION - AND PROFESSIONALISM

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An alternative view to the often differentiated career pathways of academic or vocational learning is presented and considers a hybrid route as a third route to higher education and the professions, or grades recognised by the professional institutions as recognition of competence and commitment to their chosen profession. Ultimately we in education and training are seeking to increase overall competency being a combination of skills, knowledge and experience.
Conventional vocational education and training aims to provide a ladder or column of opportunities. However, in practice very few young people move up a ladder but rather move into work based learning or apprenticeships and subsequently move sideways into specialist training in order to progress. Target groups for work based learning are different at the lower end from those at levels 3 and above. Very few learners move from level 2 to level 4 through a work based route and it may be more appropriate to consider the provision of a climbing framework where young people move backwards and forwards and sideways, using a hybrid model of academic and vocational development. Within this analogy apprenticeships may be regarded as the landing stage for career progression.

The third route sees apprenticeship and professional formation as a continuum and in so doing creates a more practical and clearer framework for linking apprenticeships with a path to higher education.

Previous policy aspirations have failed to provide a direct link from apprenticeships to higher education.

In a recent (2009) HEFCE study tracking the destination of 37,400 apprenticeship completers;

- Only 6% of level 3 and 4% of level 2 progressed to HE within 4 years of completing
- The rate of progression differed by sector and location
- The top sector for progression was accountancy where an established and transparent qualifications ladder to professional status via both HE and work based routes exists

As a result, for most sectors there is a level 3 to 5 gap to overcome in achieving a natural progression from apprenticeships to higher education and a widening participation in HE.
Addressing this issue requires fresh thinking and broader partnering across the learning spectrum.

BEST has pioneered a collaborative CPD programme with the leading professional institutions in their sector whereby vocational programmes at level 3 achieve recognised professional status and membership to enable a continuous development route via academic and/or vocational routes. This dual track approach offers a technical, management or combination approach to achieving ultimately chartered professional status.