

## **Working with Schools, Industry and Communities to Make a Difference**

### **Vocational Centres UK Ltd**

### **Lyons Inquiry**

#### **Introduction**

Vocational Centres UK Limited is a private training provider specialising, though not exclusively, in providing construction training and qualifications for 14-16 year old learners and supporting them in applications into apprenticeship and further education. We have no access to subsidy and are financed by our clients who for the most part are schools and Local Authorities in Manchester, Oldham and Salford.

As remarked by Phil Woolas, Minister for Local Government and Community Cohesion, whilst recently opening our South Manchester Construction Training Centre, we are almost uniquely successful with regard to the direct positive impact that we have as an organisation on individuals and the communities within which they exist. It is only through valuing, listening to and responding to needs of individuals will greater economic prosperity and community cohesion be achieved. Extracts from our varied CV, listed below evidence successful, flexible and responsive partnership working at a local level that is perhaps crucial if the letter and spirit of Leitch, Eddington and Barker are to be realised. Whatever changes are put in place to realise the targets and ambitions they must have at their heart the removal of unnecessary agencies, quangos, committees, processes and procedures that at best dilute and at worst obstruct the impact of change.

#### **Vocational Centres UK Limited's CV Extract**

- 14-16 Construction Skills Centres delivering qualifications, esteem and opportunity to 2000 young people who for the most part had been disengaged from school
- Establishing and delivering construction training at HMP Risley
- Training unemployed adults to work on local housing renewal, through the 'Ambition Construction Programme'
- Training unemployed 18-24 year olds to work with a local authority property maintenance unit (Bury Metro/Job Centre Plus/ESF)
- Supporting FE Colleges in Internal Verification processes.
- 'Activity Agreements' targeted at young people that have been NEET for 20 weeks or more. The idea is to get them gradually involved in a number of vocationally related activity's to encourage them to engage in the Labour market, as well as building confidence and self esteem
- Developing the Specialised Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment
- Developing Specialised Diploma, GCSE and BTEC partnerships with specialist schools and academies
- Enhancing community based projects in areas of high economic, social and cultural deprivation.

**Vocational Centres UK Limited has worked with:**

- 50 Schools
- 100 school staff and mentors
- 2000 young people and their families
- 25 tutors drawn from the trades and the community
- Manchester, Salford, Oldham and Bury
- BEST (Manchester Education Business Partnership)
- Connexions
- Job Centre Plus
- Manchester Powerhouse and Bethel community projects
- CITB Specialised Diploma Development
- Construction Trust for Youth
- Construction Employers: Bovis, Laing O’rourke
- Association of Learning Providers (14-16 development group)

Further information can be found on our website: [www.vcuklimited.co.uk](http://www.vcuklimited.co.uk)

- It may be interesting to note that the LSC is not on the list.

**Do local authorities have the powers they need to effectively undertake their place-shaping role, particularly with regard to economic prosperity?**

The issue is not so much the powers but rather as to whether or not they have the structures, will, flexibility and capacity to make a speedy impact on the economic prosperity. From our perspective, whilst individuals within the local authorities we work with are understanding of the need, direction and actions required, the organisation albeit refined into leaner cabinet structures and larger integrated services such as “Children’s Service” are less able or ready to respond. Too often the protection of a vote, the party line, professional jealousy or sheer incompetence block and blur common sense and lead to an impasse of inactivity and sustain the failure of generations.

Whether it is an integrated transport structure, strategic approach to land use or the raising of skills, a reformed and refined local authority working in true partnership with all community stakeholders, responsive to local context and need is potentially best placed to turn targets into actions. However there must be radical overhaul of their infrastructures to enable this to take effect within and across local authorities. People must talk, listen and work together in a better way. Powers must be linked to clear challenges, supported by realistic funds and measured according to direct impact in changing lives. The model should move out of the town and shire hall and into the community.

**How do issues raised by the three reviews, and the implications of their recommendations, vary between different parts of the country and different kinds of place, for example between rural areas and major cities?**

Whilst there are differences in context and need between for example the rural village and the inner city suburb, too often ignorance, assumptions and stereotyping has led to policy and strategy that is in effect inappropriate to the needs of the individuals and

their communities. In essence there are far more similarities and parallels than differences. It is for the community to have the skill to invest in changes that have the greatest impact and effect specific to their context and need

The local model is attractive and should lead to a more needs focused delivery that will raise skill levels, improve transport and land use, it must be underpinned by the recognition that individuals will continue to be socially and economically mobile. Strategy and planning must be inclusive, accept and integrate into all contexts the globally mobile work force and enable individuals to participate.

**Are there any other aspects of these reviews relevant to local authorities and to their place-shaping role that I have not identified? If so, what are they and what are their implications?**

The structure, power sharing and partnership with other stakeholders are crucial to the implementation of these recommendations. Historically too many cooks have spoiled the broth, everybody wanting to be a talker and nobody wanting to be a doer. If success were measured in committees, meetings, consultants, executives, directors, chambers and boards then as a country, we would be number one in prosperity. There must be a place for the recruitment and positioning of proven individuals who will have executive power and responsibility for making things happen.

## **Leitch Report**

### **Governance**

It is evident from our experience that the existing governance of 14-19 education is at best cumbersome and confusing and at worst obstructive to change at school and provider level. The dominance of interest groups such as further education colleges and reconstituted TECs across LSCs, protected by red tape, has sustained the unworkable and closed the door to local innovation at school and provider level. It is clearly difficult to balance and manage all interest groups and at the same time maintain a focus that has a speedy impact. However, I would suggest that whatever model is chosen that it stems from a radical root and branch rethink and that a new remit and structure is created which enables local and individual voice and empowers them to make a difference. Local Authorities with their existing over arching responsibilities across local communities combined with their role, as major employers should be best placed to broker the implementation of the reforms and achievement of targets. However they must be given strong direction and support from central government through the establishment of locally based executive agencies.

### **Convening**

Clearly Local Authorities have a right and responsibility to engage with and join Employment and Skills Boards and Sector Skills Councils. However, their membership has a dual and possibly conflicting representation as employer and representative of their citizens. Nevertheless they are ideally placed to plan, co-ordinate and broker effective change at a local level in sympathy with the wider local context. However, historic evidence is that they have consistently failed to fulfill this

role in an effective manner and early evidence suggests that the newly formed Children's Services are making slow progress through the mire of old systems personnel and prejudices.

## **Funding**

A simple response might be more funding through increased devolvement from the centre and if necessary raised taxes. However, I would urge caution and ensure that appropriate plans that lead to meaningful outcomes are in place before parting with a penny. Local Authorities must be given strong guidance and support from the centre to ensure as brokers, planners and co-ordinators of change they sharpen their focus, making more efficient use of existing funds and enable more effective distribution of additional funding.

## **In Conclusion**

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute and have case studies available to substantiate our response. We are also keen to be involved further given the opportunity.

Kind regards,

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## **Contact**

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