

# **Rhythms of Vocational Education:**

## **A Lefebvrian Perspective**

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# Abstract

This thesis explores how historic spatial and temporal influences have shaped both vocational education and vocational teachers in a Further Education College in England. It tenders an under-researched individual reflexivity, explored through a novel repurposing of Henri Lefebvre's tri-dimensional spatial dialectic, that challenges previous literature. Vocational education has been forged through a complex interplay of historical influences, policy initiatives, and reform. Repeated attempts to achieve parity of esteem with academic education or to enhance productivity in response to global competition have left the sector struggling with a contradictory sense of purpose. At the centre of these cyclical policy shifts are vocational teachers, who face a culture of continuous measurement and bureaucracy that clashes with altruistic intentions to impart practical knowledge and skills to future generations.

Literature suggests that vocational teachers identify more strongly with their prior occupation than with their role as a teacher, despite being fully qualified in both disciplines. This thesis, however, challenges this narrative, adapting Lefebvre's tri-dimensional spatial dialectic from *The Production of Space* away from a geographically rooted methodology centred on space, to one that centres on the *self*. Through this lens, it argues that vocational teachers no longer consider an overwhelming allegiance to their former occupations. Instead, the evolution of further education—shaped by policy shifts including the extension of compulsory education to age 18, the introduction of the study programme, the impact of austerity, and the disruption of the global pandemic—has redefined their professional identities. Vocational teachers displayed a transcendence beyond the dual professional inference, emerging as reflexive individuals, with the ability to navigate and adapt to incessant reform, escalating bureaucratic and managerial pressures, and the increasing complexity of student needs. It is this reflexivity that flows through the dialectic, demonstrating how vocational educators continuously reshape their professional selves, offering a compelling counter-narrative to established assumptions.

The study employed a combination of semi-structured go-along interviews with teachers in their everyday vocational settings, supplemented by an observation in an automotive workshop to enhance and contextualise their contributions. The findings were grouped and themed using reflexive thematic analysis, then examined through Lefebvre's rhythmic characteristics and the adaptation of his spatial dialectic. The findings highlight the need for more inclusive and well-planned reforms, with greater involvement from vocational practitioners, addressing shifting student behaviours, reducing administrative burdens, and enhancing support for continuing professional development.

# Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 Further and Vocational Education.....	8
1.2 Henri Lefebvre: Space, Time, and Everyday Life .....	9
1.3 Research questions .....	10
1.4 Overview of Chapters .....	10
<b>Chapter 2: Historical Rhythm and Context .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 A Brief History of Formal Vocational Education .....	12
2.2.1 The First Formal Vocational Occurrence .....	12
2.2.2 The Beginning of Technical Decline in Britain .....	13
2.2.3 City and Guilds of London Institute .....	15
2.2.4 The Rise and Fall of the Junior Technical School.....	16
2.2.5 World War Two and the Butler Act .....	18
2.2.6 State Intervention through the Industry Training Boards.....	20
2.3 The Rhythm of Reform .....	22
2.3.1 Quickening Rhythms.....	22
2.3.2 Competent or Not Very Qualified?.....	23
2.3.3 Reaching the Gold Standard.....	25
2.3.4 The Doomed Diploma.....	26
2.3.5 The Wolf at the Door - Introducing the Study Programme.....	28
2.3.6 A New Solution to an Old Problem.....	30
2.3.7 Lefebvrian Cycles .....	32
2.4 Vocational or 'Fauxcational' Qualifications? .....	32
2.4.1 Tripartite Education - What's in a name? .....	32
2.4.2 A Brief History of the 'Technical' .....	34
2.4.3 Defining 'Vocational' Education .....	36
2.4.4 When is a Vocational Qualification not a Vocational Qualification? .....	38
2.4.5 Specifying 'Vocational' .....	39
2.4.6 Repetition, Reform, and Return .....	40

2.5 Concluding Remarks .....	41
<b>Chapter 3: Lefebvrian Space and Time .....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	42
3.2 The Production of Space .....	42
3.3 Lefebvre's Tri-dimensional Dialectic .....	44
3.3.1 Spatial Practice - Perceived .....	46
3.3.2 Representations of Space - Conceived .....	47
3.3.3 Spaces of Representation - Lived .....	48
3.4 Exploring the Tri-dimensional Dialectic in Literature .....	48
3.5 The Significance of the Tri-Dimensional Dialectic for Vocational Teachers .....	51
3.6 Rhythm in Philosophy.....	52
3.7 Analysing Rhythms .....	54
3.7.1 Rhythmic Characteristics .....	57
3.7.2 Polyrhythmia .....	58
3.7.3 Euryrhythmia .....	58
3.7.4 Arrhythmia .....	59
3.8 The Rhythmanalyst.....	60
3.9 Opportunities and of Limitations of Rhythmanalysis .....	62
3.10 Concluding Remarks .....	64
<b>Chapter 4: The Production of the Vocational Teacher .....</b>	<b>65</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	65
4.2 The Vocational Teacher in the Perceived Space .....	66
4.3 The Dual Professional in the Conceived Space.....	68
4.3.1 Where does professionalism sit? .....	70
4.3.2 How Identities Shape the Vocational Teacher .....	72
4.4 The Third Space as the Lived .....	75
4.4.1 The Reflexive Individual.....	77
4.5 Concluding Remarks .....	77
<b>Chapter 5: Methodology and Methods .....</b>	<b>79</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	79
5.2 Ontological and Epistemological Position .....	79
5.3 Research Design .....	82
5.3.1 Interviews .....	82
5.3.2 Site Selection .....	84
5.3.4 Sampling Strategy.....	87
5.3.5 Participant Selection .....	89

5.3.6 Transcribing the Interview .....	90
5.3.7 Observing the Field.....	91
5.4 Analysis of Data .....	92
5.4.1 Introduction.....	92
5.4.2 Thematic Analysis Framework.....	93
5.5 Concluding Remarks .....	95
<b>Chapter 6: Key Findings and Discussions.....</b>	<b>97</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	97
6.2 The Production of the Vocational Teacher.....	97
6.2.1 Decoding Lefebvre’s Tri-dimensional Dialectic .....	97
6.2.2 Experience and Altruism – The Perceived .....	98
6.2.3 Profession and Professionalism - The Conceived.....	102
6.2.4 Identity - The Lived .....	109
6.2.5 Dialectical Transitions – Change through the Dialectic.....	111
6.2.6 Concluding Remarks .....	113
6.3 Rhythms through the Vocational Space .....	114
6.3.1 ‘Seen from the Stores’ - Observing Rhythms in Vocational Space.....	114
6.3.2 Rhythms of Student Engagement.....	118
6.3.3 Rhythms of Politics and Policy.....	130
6.3.4 Rhythms of Reform .....	139
6.4 Concluding Remarks .....	142
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications .....</b>	<b>144</b>
7.1 Introduction.....	144
7.2 Lefebvrian Perspectives of Vocational Education .....	144
7.2.1 Polyrhythmia in Vocational Education .....	144
7.2.2 Eurhythmia in Vocational Education .....	145
7.2.3 Arrhythmia in Vocational Education .....	146
7.2.4 The Production of the Vocational Teacher.....	147
7.3 Contributions to Knowledge.....	149
7.3.1 How have the rhythms of history shaped vocational education?.....	150
7.3.2 How does policy contribute to the production of the vocational teacher?.....	150
7.3.3 What are the repercussions of post-2011 reforms on vocational teachers?.....	151
7.3.4 Adapting Lefebvre’s theories beyond his original intention .....	151
7.4 Recommendations .....	152
7.5 Limitations of Study.....	153
7.6 Concluding Thoughts .....	154

<b>References .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>178</b>
Appendix 1 - Interview Question Prompts .....	179
Appendix 2 - Field observation areas of focus .....	180
Appendix 3 - Participant Information Sheet.....	181
Appendix 4 - Participant Consent Form .....	182
Appendix 5 – Sample Interview Transcription .....	183
Appendix 6 – Ethics Approval.....	197
Appendix 7 – Sample Nvivo Coding.....	198
Appendix 8 – Vocational Spaces.....	201
Appendix 9 – Curriculum Reform Example: Electrical Installation.....	202
Appendix 10 – Navigating the Dialectic.....	203
Appendix 11 – Theories on the Production of Space .....	204

## List of Figures and Tables

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1 – The Production of Space	45
Figure 2 – The Production of the Vocational Teacher	66
Table 1 - Sample Participant Selection Detail	88
Table 2 - List of teachers interviewed and years of teaching experience	90
Figure 3 – The Production of the Vocational Teacher	98
Figure 4 – The Perceived Element of the Dialectic	102
Figure 5 – The Conceived Element of the Dialectic	109
Figure 6 – The Lived Space of the Vocational Teacher	111
Figure 7 – Teachers drawn into Lefebvre’s Conceived Space	135
Figure 8 – Moving through the Dialectic	143
Figure 9 - Lefebvre’s Dialectic Producing the Vocational Teacher	149



# Abbreviations

AO – Awarding Organisation

AOC – Association of Colleges

BEC - Business Education Council

BTEC - Business and Technology Education Council

C&G – City and Guilds

CGLI – City and Guilds of London Institute

DBIS - Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

DfE - Department for Education

DfEE - Department for Education and Employment

DfES - Department for Education and Skills

ETF – Education and Training Foundation

FE – Further Education

IfATE - Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

ITB – Industry Training Board

JTS – Junior Technical School

GNVQ - General National Vocational Qualification

NCVQ - National Council for Vocational Qualifications

NOS - National Occupational Standards

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

NVQ - National Vocational Qualification

Ofqual – The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

QCF - Qualifications and Credit Framework

RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

STS – Secondary Technical Schools

TEC - Technology Education Council

TVET – Technical Vocational Education and Training

VET – Vocational Education and Training

YTS - Youth Training Scheme

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Further and Vocational Education

This thesis focuses specifically on the experiences of vocational teachers within Further Education (FE). The term ‘further education’ saw its first official use by the then Board of Education in 1906/07 in the title of its *Regulations for Technical Schools, Schools of Art and other Schools and Classes for Further Education* (Board of Education, 1906). FE now covers a substantial number of educational programmes and comes in a variety of institutional variations, including further education colleges, sixth form colleges, adult and community provision, offender learning, and independent training providers. It is this variety that results in frequent misunderstandings of purpose by political classes (Gleeson, 2005), creating a cycle of reform recorded as far back as 1867 that chases the notion of parity with academic qualification equivalents and international competitors. The result is a system of vocational education that has been subjected to more political reform than any other educational sector (Keep et al., 2021).

Political focus on FE has increased during the latter years of the 2010s and the early 2020s. Skills shortages, in part due to educational reform and underfunding, Brexit emigration, and what has been referred to as the ‘great resignation’, a phenomenon following the COVID pandemic where many have moved on or retired, are impacting the economy, with FE seen as part of the solution (Bewick and Gosling, 2023). This increased attention has accelerated educational reform, with vocational education undergoing frequent change while academic equivalents remain untouched. At the receiving end of this reform are the vocational teachers. My aim within this research was to explore everyday challenges faced by the vocational teacher in FE, focussing on reforms resulting from the Wolf Review (2011) and the raising of the participation age in education to 18 in 2015. Having worked initially in the construction industry and later in FE, I wanted to explore how these pressures impacted those, like me, who have left industry and entered teaching as a second career.

Current research in this area though is limited. Whilst there is a growing body of research in FE, there is little that focuses on vocational education at its most literal. Le Gallais’ research (2006a) is a rare example, focussing on construction trade teachers and those who deliver traditional craft-based qualifications rather than often conflated technical qualifications (explored in more depth in chapter two). Multiple instances of reform since Le Gallais’ thesis have reshaped both vocational qualifications and the students that study them. In 2024, this shows little sign of abating.

## 1.2 Henri Lefebvre: Space, Time, and Everyday Life

My interest in Henri Lefebvre started with his writing on rhythm and repetition. Having worked in FE for 25 years I have started to observe patterns in educational reforms. Lefebvre's analysis of rhythms as means to document historical changes drew me to his theories, but as I read more of his work, I decided that framing the thesis through rhythm alone would do his wider thinking a disservice and incorporated his work on space to support the analysis of data.

Lefebvre was particularly interested in everyday life and making the quotidian radical. While he quotes few influences in his works, he does quote Hegel in, 'The familiar is not necessarily the known' (Lefebvre, 2014: 152). In the words of Merrifield (2006: xxiv), 'he was a philosopher, cum sociologist, sociologist cum literary critic, literary critic cum urbanist, urbanist cum geographer, he was too eclectic to be any one of those categories alone'. His work on the rural and the urban, moments, metaphilosophy, everyday life, the state, space, rhythm, and globalisation all contain threads that weave throughout his life and publications. His books ranged from literary theory to politics, from sociology to philosophy, and from urban and rural theory to history, although few have made it into the English language, and many books were often dictated without Lefebvre ever returning to edit them.

Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (2014) was built around the concept of alienation and the sociological aspect of Marx. Lefebvre suggested Marx focused on alienation being 'the transformation of man's activities and relations into things by the action of economic fetishes, such as money, commodities, and capital' (2014: 501), yet considered this vague and thought many forms of alienation existed. Lefebvre entwined alienation with the 'lived' (2014: 510), linking with his later thinking on space and time as well as early phenomenological and ethnographical referential inferences. His thinking on alienation aimed to liberate us from alienation itself, to see and examine people at a distance and make their strangeness become apparent. As Lefebvre states: 'to look at things from an *alien* standpoint is to look at things *truly*' (2014: 42, emphasis in original).

Lefebvre considered his later work on space and time as a continuation of his work on the everyday (1992: 2; 1991: 405), moving to suggest theoretical lenses to record and document the more banal lived experiences as opposed to larger, more grandeur instances. It is through his theories on space and rhythm that I analysed the findings of my research, while ensuring that his wider contributions to the critique of everyday life was not overlooked.

## 1.3 Research questions

FE receives much smaller amounts of research funding than counterparts in compulsory and higher education (Staufenberg, 2022), consequently, the breadth of research is more limited in scope. While there is growing research on FE, it often has a more general approach, for example on pedagogy (Bathmaker, 2013) or identity (Sarastuen, 2020; Esmond and Wood, 2017), or have a European or international bias (Caves et al, 2019). While there are some later analyses on recent vocational education reform that adds to the discourse (e.g. Orr and Terry, 2023; Dobraszczyk, 2021), I believe that research on the effect these reforms have on teachers of vocational education is lacking. This thesis therefore aims to address the following:

- How have the rhythms of history shaped vocational education?
- How has policy contributed to the production of the vocational teacher?
- What are the repercussions of the implementation of recent political reform on vocational teachers?

## 1.4 Overview of Chapters

The thesis is formed of seven chapters, with this chapter being the introduction.

**Chapter two** provides a historical analysis of formal vocational education, from early apprenticeships through to nationalised vocational standards. It follows this by examining relevant examples of reform before exploring technical and vocational education and defining vocational education for clarity within the thesis.

**Chapter three** explores space and time in vocational education through the theories of Henri Lefebvre, focusing on the production of space, and the definition, identification, and potential analysis of rhythms from a philosophical and methodological perspective.

**Chapter four** determines how Lefebvre's dialectic could be used to determine how the vocational teacher is produced, bringing considerations including identity, professionalism, managerialism and lived everyday experiences into a mutually interactive tri-dimensional dialectic.

**Chapter five** philosophically grounds the methods and methodology underpinning the research, determining ontological and epistemological positions, participant selection and data gathering methods in the form of semi-structured, go-along interviews (Carpiano, 2009), and a field observation

within a practical workshop environment. The chapter ends with the data analysis strategy, where I use reflexive thematic analysis with the assistance of Nvivo software.

**Chapter six** discusses the research findings. These are split into two sections, the first exploring how vocational teachers are produced through Lefebvre's dialectic, the second exploring how reform, politics and policy, and external societal influences affect everyday experiences for the vocational teacher.

**Chapter seven** offers a conclusion to the thesis, summarising the findings through Lefebvrian categories highlighted in chapter three and four, before further discussing contributions, recommendations, and limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Historical Rhythm and Context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the origins of formal vocational education in Britain. To accurately contextualise the research questions, I believe it is important to trace the development of vocational qualifications as a term of reference considering their historical context (Gonon and Deissinger, 2021). Repetition is an important consideration throughout the thesis and foregrounds later rhythmic analysis of vocational education explored through Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004).

I start with a brief introduction to the birth of formal vocational education, from the apprenticeship through the Statute of Artificers in 1563, to the Industry Training Boards introduced in 1964. I then explore historic underpinnings between the 1800s and 1980s and relevant qualification reforms. In the final section, I explore the history and definition of the term 'vocational education' framed against the often conflated, 'technical education'.

### **2.2 A Brief History of Formal Vocational Education**

#### **2.2.1 The First Formal Vocational Occurrence**

While Lawson and Silver (1973) suggest that all mediaeval education was likely vocational, the first formal instances were through apprenticeships. Sheatley (1976) suggests that the term 'apprentice' likely derived from the Norman French sometime in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and was linked to occupations or functions mostly managed through the guilds; societies formed to both protect and support their individual disciplines. The first formal state-recognised apprenticeships came following the Statute of Artificers in 1563 in conjunction with the guilds (Curtis, 1967). The statute created indentured apprenticeships, named after the two-part torn contract, physically split between master and parents, and saw the young person in servitude for seven years until journeyman status was met, developing both technical skills and maturity (Wardle, 1975). On completion they could choose to stay with the master or start their own business, finance permitting, earning master status themselves.

The guilds ensured that opportunities remained limited, and entry was bought through an apprenticeship premium or nepotism, resulting in limiting opportunities to middle and wealthy

classes. This was often at the expense of women, foreigners, and countryfolk (Moran, 1977; Pfister, 2002). As the model approached the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a rapid increase in mechanisation resulted in an increased association with cheap labour, where orphaned children were often apprenticed to industry (Hopkins, 1998; Wardle, 1975). The guilds dominated intellectual property, often fiercely guarding practices to avoid intellectual theft (Musgrave, 1966). Epstein and Park (2008) note the example of the pendulum clock, invented by Christiaan Huygens, that was imitated by rivals, improved on, and in production within months before a patent could even be filed. The guilds are often derided for their secrecy and monopolies (Rigby, 2002; Moran, 1977; Musgrave, 1966), yet Epstein and Park (2008) note more positive contributions, including the establishment of a stable environment, particularly the encouragement of craftsmen to invest in training and the coordination of complicated production processes.

### **2.2.2 The Beginning of Technical Decline in Britain**

The lack of formal strategy combined with guild monopolies meant that by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, Britain was not producing enough skilled labour to compete internationally. As industrial developments continued apace, skill needs changed (Osborne, 2014), and Britain, slow and unwilling to react, saw its industrial dominance begin to wane.

Britain led the way in technological advancements during the first industrial revolution. Huge exports in cotton and swift city growth, combined with artisanal ingenuity, ensured international dominance by the 1820s (Osborne, 2014). Centres of commerce formed, particularly in new industrial towns such as Manchester, Sheffield and, of significance to this thesis, the West Midlands. Although much was made of Manchester's contribution to swift industrial growth, its production was still heavily cotton-based, whereas Birmingham, freed from the restriction of guilds oversight due to unchartered status, used a combination of initiative and enterprise to innovate and rapidly progress, primarily through hand skills as opposed to the adoption of steam (Hopkins, 1998). The West Midlands prior to 1800 had reached a position of economic significance and was home to scattered communities of smiths and miners, producing ironmongery, nails, and cutting tools in Birmingham, locks in Wolverhampton and Willenhall, and coal from Brierley Hill to Bilston (Allen, 1929: 13). The availability of raw materials and the skills developed within the region attracted new industry and manufacturing diversified, from glass making in Stourbridge to saddlery in Walsall. Industry in Birmingham and the Black Country began to separate, with the former moving into smaller, more intricate work, and the latter into large

scale manufacture. Despite international recognition for skills and manufacturing, the region lacked the attention that London had received, for example, the foundation of the Birmingham Brotherly Society 30 years prior to the Mechanics Institute, formed to promote knowledge amongst the working class, is largely ignored (Hopkins, 1998).

Partially in response to the French Industrial Exposition of 1844 and partially as a demonstration of Britain's industrial might, the inaugural Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was held in 1851, proving a milestone in British technological history. The Exhibition was the first in the series of World's Fairs held in London (Musgrave, 1966; Curtis, 1967; Barnard, 1969). Despite a financial success, critics noted a British arrogance, citing defective manufacturing and the fact that many of the prevailing exhibits were foreign (Musgrave, 1966; Butterworth, 1968; Barnard, 1969). Critics declared that international developments in the applied sciences placed them ahead of Britain in a 'disturbingly professional manner' (Butterworth, 1968; Wardle, 1975: 30). The Exhibition did provoke action in the field of education (Butterworth, 1968). Whilst the British government held its approach to schooling as educationally superior to compulsory schooling in Europe (Green, 2002), it used the funds generated from the World Fair to form the Science and Art Department in 1853 to promote and encourage practical arts and science, train teachers, and develop examinations. This though missed the point. Britain's rapid industrial development had largely been through cultural endeavour and driven by entrepreneurial artisans, including Nonconformists (Osborne, 2014; Barnard, 1969). Financiers working alongside these artisans enabled small steps in technological advancement that had kept Britain leading the industrial world, however international competitors often skipped these steps, learning from Britain's and other competitors' advances (Osborne, 2014).

The Department also drew criticism, specifically favouring academic education at the expense of the technical. Barnard (1969: 177) notes an abstraction of knowledge from application, preferring to focus on the knowledge requirements that underpinned vocational development rather than the practical skills directly, which he argues in relation to technical education as, '...the crux of the matter'. Musgrave (1966: 179) laments the emphasis on demand for technical education that is remarkably, 'placed in principles, not in practice', implying a focus on academic knowledge at the expense of the vocational. Sanderson (1992: 17) further cites the Revised Code of 1862 that forced elementary schools to shun practical work in favour of literacy as a condition of earning grants as 'wrongfooting' Britain's awakening concern of international competition. As if to reinforce these contentious attitudes, successful industrialists chose to send their children to schools and universities to 'study Ovid and Seneca at the expense of Faraday and Carnot' (Osborne, 2014: 345). Early



reputational damage to the perception of vocational education may be linked to the transferral of existing industrial schools to the Home Office in 1861. These schools had provided education and basic craft training for boys and domestic training for girls who were accepted into the schools as vagrants. Following the transferral, they would now move to accept young offenders who had served a minimum of 14 days in prison (Lawson and Silver, 1973), sparking an association of manual training with 'penal discipline and early disgrace' in the public mind (Sanderson, 1994: 17).

Educational lobbyists, despite differing in their beliefs of where technical and vocational education should go, unanimously agreed that British technical training was deficient and endangered the country's economic health (Green, 1997). Despite some successes, Sanderson's chronicle of Britain's technical education demonstrated a continued industrial decline against international competitors (1992: 166). Attempting to stem this decline, a select few took a personal interest in tackling the threat. One of these ventures was to become the City and Guilds of London Institute.

### **2.2.3 City and Guilds of London Institute**

Many of the vocational areas in this thesis use the City and Guilds (C&G) as the qualification awarding organisation. Whilst there are now many more competitors within the vocational sphere, there is an unmatched historicity to the C&G's contribution to vocational education.

The influence of the guilds continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. While technical education continued its academic bias, there were now enough influential voices and parliamentary support to challenge the imbalance. Following a letter from the MP for Frome, Thomas Hughes, to the Lord Mayor, a group convened in 1872 with the intention to create a movement for the encouragement of Art, Manufacture and Technical Education (CGLI, 1994:12). The guilds formed a collaboration with the Corporation of the City of London, resulting in the formation of the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) in 1878. Early reports clearly set out its vocational intention, including the statement, '...knowledge of the Scientific or Artistic principle upon which the particular manufacture may depend' (CGLI, 1993: 18). The first technological examinations began in 1879, with subjects including Steel Manufacture and Telegraphy. Technical education had found its 'guardian' of technical education in the CGLI, boosted by its director, Philip Magnus, who championed them through external meetings, school openings and prize giving (Musgrave, 1966). Magnus, a politically influential rabbi who supplemented his income tutoring private students in mathematics, mechanics, and

physics, is considered by some as the father and architect of modern technical education (Musgrave, 1966; Lawson and Silver, 1973).

The CGLI, without competition, enjoyed slow but sustained growth. Adult learners were taught in rented rooms in Cowper Street Schools in London through daytime and evening study. Increases in demand resulted in the CGLI constructing what is believed to be the first institute of its kind in 1879, the Finsbury Technical College, followed by the South London Technical Art School and finally, the Central Institution (London Metropolitan Archives, n.d.; CGLI: 1992). While the CGLI proved successful, technical education was still often only available at a cost or through philanthropic gestures, and the wider facilities developed by the CGLI were available to very few select London-based individuals. Despite these limitations there was a wider groundswell of practical activity introduced across the country into elementary schooling, and a medley of institutions began to appear (Lawson and Silver, 1973; Winders, 1969).

For many, the development of technical qualifications and the formation of the CGLI came too late. While Britain procrastinated, international competitors gained footholds and threatened Britain both industrially and militarily (Sanderson, 1994). Countries who had realised the benefits of non-academic education at an elementary age were now becoming more dominant and technologically advanced. A Royal Commission on Technical Instruction in 1884 was deeply critical, highlighting that, ‘...our most formidable assailants are educated peoples’ (Lawson and Silver, 1973: 346). The report generated enough political concern for the Technical Instruction Act to be passed in 1889, enabling the support of technical education at a county level, funded out of rates taken from the Customs and Excise Act of 1890, frequently referred to as, ‘Whisky Money’ (Winders, 1969; Barnard, 1969). The combination of technological decline, increased public demand, proven vocational successes and a new-found interest in education was to bring one of the most significant moments in British educational history, the Educational Act of 1902 and with it, the Junior Technical School.

## **2.2.4 The Rise and Fall of the Junior Technical School**

The Education Act of 1902 set up an organised system of elementary, secondary, and technical education and brought education under municipal control. Robert Morant, the then Permanent Secretary of the Board of Education, had a broad view of education. Although criticised as an academic elitist (Sanderson, 1994), Morant was knowledgeable on much in relation to international

education matters and acutely aware that countries such as Germany, France and the USA had post-primary schooling that included technical and practical skills. Under Morant, vocational education, meals, and medical inspections were introduced into schools, envisaging a system that allowed both grammar and technical establishments to exist (Sanderson, 1994). Following the 1902 Act, most science schools became secondary schools, leaving a gap in education from leaving school at 14 to the start of an apprenticeship of two to three years (Curtis, 1968). Often school leavers in England took unskilled labour during this period and drifted into 'blind-alley', low prospect occupations, such as kiln-loaders or street-sweepers, tempted by earnings twice that of an apprentice, yet half that of a skilled worker, such as a bricklayer or a stonemason (Sanderson, 1994: 11). It was this concern that prompted the Board of Education to provide grants for daytime technical classes to teach secondary school leavers.

Although Morant advocated grammar schools and academic education, he also championed the 'National Efficiency' approach, concerned about low aspirations in the artisan class and low-prospect employment. Whilst investigating German and other international school systems, Morant was particularly impressed by the French *école primaire supérieure*, an advanced version of primary education designed for those unlikely to enter higher education. It was from this observation and previous knowledge of the German schooling system that the concept of the Junior Technical School (JTS) was born. The JTS concept attempted to create a more technically efficient and skilled working class, taking pupils from elementary schooling to prepare them for the needs of local industry (Lawson and Silver, 1973). In some instances, particularly in London, they focussed on specific trades, such as tailoring and dressmaking, delivering a general education alongside vocational skills. (Barnard, 1969). There was an expectation that teachers had a proportion of industrial or workshop experience prior to entering teaching.

There were issues with the JTS model. The relationship with other secondary education was ill-defined and unsatisfactory. Higher fees payable to grammar schools gave parents the sense that grammar education was intrinsically superior to the JTS (Barnard, 1969; Sanderson 1992). Hadow's 1926 report, *The Education of the Adolescent*, recommended that primary education end at age 11, followed by a secondary or other post-primary pathway (Selleck, 1972). This gave an awkward double-break at the age of 13 in a pupil's career (Barnard, 1969) and resulted in fewer students attending. Furthermore, due to the nature of the vocational provision, they required smaller class sizes, specialist equipment and skilled teachers. Numbers therefore proved unsustainable and costly compared to other secondary schools, with an approximate five percent share of learners across ten

percent of schools by 1937 (Barnard, 1969). These issues aside, the introduction of technical education was praised by industry. The British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education for example acknowledged the impact of the JTS and requested increased numbers (Sanderson, 1992). Hadow's successor, Sir Will Spens, had higher ambitions still for technical education, and saw the JTS as key to the future. His recommendation of the 'Technical High School' as a natural evolution to the JTS sought to improve the reputation of technical education by reducing the entry age to 11 and the conversion of what he considered excessive numbers of grammar schools to technical schools.

The first formal attempt at locally controlled technical education had mixed success. On one hand, it was a proven link between school and the world of employment, on the other, it was expensive and incongruous with other educational establishments. On the verge of war and more in need of technical and vocational education than perhaps ever before, education was to undergo further reforms.

## **2.2.5 World War Two and the Butler Act**

Demand for technical education in the inter-war period grew, as new industries, including car manufacture and the production of electrical goods, expanded. The Board of Education noted the demand and crucially, how other European countries had already developed national systems of technical education to meet it. A survey of technical education commissioned in 1935 was overtaken by preparations for war (Bailey and Unwin, 2014) and it wasn't until The Butler Act was published in 1944 that the vocational landscape would change again. This signalled the death knell for the JTS and specialised technical education within schools.

R.A. Butler became the President of the Board of Education in 1941, the youngest minister to have ever held the post. It had been a difficult year following defeats in Europe and the retreat in Dunkirk, and Butler's announcement of a bill dealing with the post-war reconstruction of education was not appreciated by Churchill (Skelding, 1983). Butler was undeterred and amongst other priorities, identified the need of industrial and technical training and the linking of schools to employment. Butler consulted with many advocates of technical training and was initially enamoured with their impact, despite an academic inclination toward public and grammar schools (Sanderson, 1994). He initially drafted the White Paper on Educational Reconstruction forecasting the contents of the

proposed education bill. Aware that the war would not allow for immediate enactment of the bill, a staged release was proposed (Curtis, 1968).

Despite the success of the JTS with employers and industry and some notable cross-party support, they did not survive the publication of the Act. The Act established the modern-day notion of education for all (Jones, 2003) and developed the familiar tripartite of primary, secondary, and further education, with secondary level assuming a broad part in the vocational development of children. Some of the JTSs were to become Secondary Technical Schools (STS), with the age of entry reduced to 11 to increase student numbers, however these slowly disappeared for the same reasons as the JTS (Sanderson, 1994), leaving the class structure of the British system of education intact (Skelding, 1983). Sanderson (1994: 139) also notes that the decline in technical education was in part due to ministers in the 1950s and 1960s having 'no first-hand experience in technical education', with the few that did likely to be Labour ministers ideologically committed to the comprehensive model of schooling. As part of the Act, Local Education Authorities were directed to plan for 'county colleges' (Fieldhouse, 1994; Skelding, 1982), seen as a vital contribution to the national recovery and keeping British products competitive internationally (Skelding, 1982: 45), however the war-crippled economy prevented many of these colleges appearing (Dent, 1954 cited Jones, 2003: 16). Instead, voluntary day release, currently in place in institutes and employers' works schools, was deemed to suffice, and that school and college improvements should take priority over county colleges (Fieldhouse, 1994: 295).

Provision in the Education Acts of 1918 and 1944 for day-release education had not been implemented, and attendance in education on apprenticeships remained 'recommended', rather than 'essential' (Sheatley, 1976: 108). The continued failure to invest in vocational skills provoked complaints from industry due to skills shortage concerns (DBIS, 2015; Leitch, 2016), yet education reforms of the 1960s continued to ignore vocational education and GDP continued to decline (Pemberton, 2001; Sanderson, 1994). Attempts to redress this resulted in far fewer school leavers receiving day release education in 1978 than in 1964, as critics bemoaned apprenticeships for the lack of quality control, a host of restrictive practices and accentuating barriers between skilled trades (Skelding, 1982; Hansen, 1967). The government's expectation of industry to take responsibility for vocational training proved misplaced and intervention in the form of the Industry Training Boards was seen as a solution.

## 2.2.6 State Intervention through the Industry Training Boards

The development of voluntary part-time education and training for young employees between 1945 and 1951 led to a considerable expansion in vocational education, largely through apprenticeship schemes. By 1951 numbers had risen from approximately 42 000 young employees to over 250 000 yet catered for only one in eight of the 15 to 17 age-group (Fieldhouse, 1994).

In response to a predicted increase in school leavers, the end of national service, and the continued skills shortage, the 1958 Carr Committee report was something of a disappointment to those hoping for substantial reform, accepting that the responsibility for training of apprentices should rest firmly with industry. The National Joint Advisory Council (1958) advised that the Government should 'keep out' and concentrate its efforts on the expansion and improvement of facilities for technical education. Unions were in support, protecting their skilled adult workforce, insisting on all apprenticeships having strict age regulations and a five-year length, irrespective of the trade. Meanwhile, skills shortages continued to pervade industry. A report commissioned by the Ministry of Labour against a backdrop of repeated technological decline highlighted a failure by industry to invest and labour shortages in key industries a significant concern (Banks, 1969; Hughes, 1973).

Despite favouring the non-interventionist approach, the government conceded the Industrial Training Act in 1964 (ITA, 1964), allowing private sector industries to operate a levy-grant system to address 'skills bottlenecks' (Hughes, 1973: 127), drawing funds through a business levy and making them available for training through Industry Training Boards (ITBs). It believed that without this intervention, there would continue to be a suboptimal level of training. The levy would allow for central collection and redistribution of funds and an equalling out of sectors under threat of having skilled individuals poached (DBIS, 2015). The government's rationale was that the market system was not producing adequate quality and volumes of trained individuals (Hughes, 1973).

The Act had three objectives:

1. to secure an adequate supply of properly trained persons at all levels in industry
2. to secure an improvement in the quality and efficiency of industrial training
3. to share the cost of training more evenly between firms

The ITBs combined employers and employees, alongside representatives from technical bodies and FE. By 1972, there were 27 ITBs covering approximately two thirds of the population (Sheatley, 1976).

The boards defined the training needs and standards for each industry specialism and sought to develop modular methods of training and increase the off-the-job training commitment through mandatory day-release attendance models, often using the C&G as the awarding organisation (Hughes, 1973; Gospel, 1995; Green, 1998).

The market-based approach initially raised standards and improved vocational education through part-time day-release college models (Pemberton, 2001) but was criticised and opposed by trade unionists and educationists who objected to change (Perry, 1969). Hughes (1973) acknowledged flaws but proffers a considerable defence of the ITBs, suggesting that many of the failings could be addressed through increased flexibility in the levy-grant system. Lee (1966: 280) suggested that their consequences can be seen in the 'impressive, if limited, expansion of technical education and the rationalisation of college courses'. Criticism though did not abate. As the boards progressed into the 1970s, it became obvious that the reported skills shortages were not entirely down to education itself, and although quality and efficiency of training had much improved, numbers in training had not increased (Sheatley, 1976). Stringer's (1986) study of industrial training noted, among other factors, poor standards of young applicants, restrictive employment practices, over-long apprenticeships, and lack of manpower planning as reasons for continued vacancies. Furthermore, union inflexibilities and increasing unemployment reduced the opportunities for internal progression, the former due to the costs of negotiation, which were seen by management as too high (1986: 399; Benson, 1979).

The ITB did not improve Britain's international standing while GDP continued to decline (Sanderson, 1994). As reform in the 1960s continued to ignore vocational education, increasing youth unemployment resulted in a reduction in apprenticeship opportunities and fewer young people in training (Parliament.uk, 2013). Following reviews and direct criticism of the levy grant system, the Industrial Training Act 1982 (ITA) laid down new requirements for the operation and the winding up of the ITBs (DBIS, 2015), moving them to become voluntary employer-led bodies without mandatory levies. Despite the failure of the ITBs, they did succeed in a standardised national qualification system, improving the quality of industrial standards, particularly in areas such as construction (Sheatley, 1976). Traditional vocations now had recognised qualifications beyond that of the more technical National Certificate, and apprenticeship reviews had challenged and removed some barriers, including the five-year minimum duration.

Despite improvements in vocational education, employment opportunities were changing due to an increase in mechanisation, a sharp economic downturn, political turmoil, and industrial conflict

(Morgan, 2017; Pring, 1987). Consequently, vocational opportunities were disappearing as local industries, and thus courses, closed. FE colleges up until this point had primarily focused on two groups of students — those who aimed at qualifications for operative, craft, or technical level, and those who studied A Levels or O Level resits (Pring, 1987: 139). This was about to change as the rhythm of reform marched forward. The challenge moving forward was not necessarily reform itself, but now the frequency and the impact on educational organisations and those that work in them.

## **2.3 The Rhythm of Reform**

### **2.3.1 Quickening Rhythms**

British education had diverged from a standardised approach, such as the European Baccalaureate or the US High School Diploma (Wolf, 2011), and had instead developed large numbers of separate vocational qualifications and multiple single-subject awards. While apprenticeship interest grew in anticipation of the end of National Service in 1963 (Vickerstaff, 2007), the numbers receiving qualifications continued to drop. Short-term vocationally specific schemes were introduced in the 1980s, such as the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) and the subsequent Youth Training Scheme (YTS), to offset the rise in youth unemployment. Fewer than twenty percent of 16-year-olds were in employment by 1986 (Cooper, 1989), and these programmes were subsidised for employers to offer work experience alongside a vocational qualification (Jones, 1998). The Manpower Services Commission, initially set up as a driver to improve the quality of vocational training and tackle Britain's long standing technical deficiencies, was now pressed into service dealing with high levels of youth unemployment (Green, 2002).

This section begins toward the end of these youth schemes. It focuses first on the introduction of reform introduced by the National Council of Vocational Qualifications in 1986, that saw the introduction for the first time of competency qualifications in the form of the National Vocational Qualification, and culminates with the latest technical qualification, the T Level.



### 2.3.2 Competent or Not Very Qualified?

Lefebvre (1995: 157) references 'modernity' as the increase in 'technical control social man wields over nature', with the 'first symptoms appearing at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>'. He considered that the consequences of increasing technological advances had resulted in the decline of the craftsman and of professional experience, reducing control of machinery to a 'modicum of physical strength' (1995: 158). While the previously mentioned youth schemes eased short term unemployment, they rarely resulted in sustained employment or the development of high levels of skill (Raffe and Smith, 1987). This led the government to pursue vocational reform in the form of competence qualifications.

Contemporary competence-based approaches emerged in systematic form in the context of American Cold War education policy. Concerned of their own failures in technical education following the launch of Sputnik by the USSR in 1957, the government designed a programme to improve teacher education through learning objectives and observable behaviours called 'Performance-based teacher education'. This approach was heavily influenced by behavioural psychology and emphasised 'learning objectives and on learning assessment in terms of observable behaviours' (Bagnall and Hodge, 2017: 126). Thatcher's new administration in 1979 was determined to remove the corporatist vocational education structure underpinned by the 1964 Industrial Training Act (Winch, 2021). Policymakers became 'convinced that one of the forces holding back productivity growth was the jungle of vocational qualifications', and if these could be improved, it followed that employers would more readily identify and recruit skilled personnel (Wolf, 2011: 57). Consequently, the *New Training Initiative* was published in 1981. This set out a framework from which employers, unions, educationalists, and government could see more clearly how they could contribute to the vocational and technical skills challenges of the late 20th/early 21st Centuries (Department for Education, 1981; Debling, 1989). One of the ten initiatives was the setting of a target date of 1985 for 'recognised standards for all the main craft, technician, and professional skills to replace timeserving and age-restricted apprenticeships' (Department of Employment, 1981: 3).

The Initiative was one of several papers submitted in the 1980s, sparking decades of reform. The Higginson Report in 1998 led to the establishment of a new vocational route by the National Council of Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) (Nicolls and Le Versha, 2003). A substantial part of this reform was the creation of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), a framework that was to dominate qualification design for the next 30 years (Winch, 2021). The NVQ was designed as an instrument to

assess competence in the workplace. It was based on employer designed 'occupational standards', that were converted to learning objectives - clear and precise statements describing effective performance expectations in distinct occupational areas (Mansfield, 2005; Searle, 2001). The qualification itself was the creation of the civil service through Sector Skills Councils, the organisations that replaced the ITBs. Much emphasis was placed on the employer influenced element of the qualifications, yet the phrase 'employer-led' was more considered aspirational than descriptive (Searle, 2021; Grugulis, 2002).

Notable opposition to the competence-based measurement was the focus on the narrowing of 'employers' immediate skills requirements at the expense of trainees' holistic personal development' (Hargraves, 2000: 286). Research by Steedman and Hawkins (quoted in Green, 1998: 11) specifically note a reduction of mathematical content when comparing a Bricklaying NVQ at Level 2 to its antecedent of as much as two thirds, removing subjects such as fractions, percentages, quantities, and volumes from the syllabus. The NCVQ, in their creation of competences, deemed this educational standing as superfluous, regardless of the likely possibility that professionals use these skills in industry. It was observations like this that led to the crude corruption of the NVQ acronym to suggest, 'Not Very Qualified' (Kingston, 2007); a prevalent attitude when I first started working in FE as assessments were often reduced to ticking boxes. Awareness of the new offer was also an issue. Hyland (1996) highlighted a lack of employer recognition, with many employers and higher education establishments unaware of the changes. Even as awareness increased, employers were not convinced of their workplace value (Hyland, 1996).

The NVQ concept was not all flawed. For many school leavers it offered the opportunity to gain a qualification while employed, often in relatively unskilled work. Furthermore, it could be completed at their own pace (Reddy, 2014). It reconciled levels of learning, ranging from one to three for occupations, four to five for junior and senior management and professional levels from six to eight. It allowed clarity of the occupational ladder, and some employers valued them for their certification of workplace competence (Winch, 2021). Criticism of the lacking educational content was somewhat addressed in 1994 with the creation of the apprenticeship framework, which required the combination of a technical certificate and minimum levels of maths and English alongside the NVQ in some industries, including construction and hairdressing.

Though industrial acceptance grew, criticism continued. Ending 30-years of dominance of the qualification was Professor Alison Wolf's highly influential *Wolf Report* (2011). The report had long-

standing implications for vocational qualifications, particularly in England, and influenced both the change in apprenticeship qualifications and full-time programmes of study. Wolf identified the original intention of the NVQ, in so much that the focus of National Occupational Standards development was always based on the competencies required in employment and not on pre-employment or within general vocational education (2011: 71). Winch (2021: 14) was convinced that many people were persuaded to undertake qualifications with little to no value and the approach to the NVQ was an 'outstanding disaster'. This may be a harsh assessment. In some industries, the NVQ was eventually accepted as part of the programme of study for apprentices, however the stigma endured, and in many respects worsened as they became attached to in-job training - packaged as apprenticeships in industries where they had not previously existed and criticised as little more than low-waged training schemes (Richard, 2012). The growth in non-traditional sectors, such as short duration apprenticeships in retail and warehousing (Fuller and Unwin, 2014), formed a central theme in the *Richard Review of Apprenticeships* in 2012, resulting in the replacement apprentice 'standards', that switched to a non-qualification, end-tested model.

The NVQ was to remain current for much longer than its sister qualification, mainly due to employer buy-in. In the next section I visit the second element of the NCVQ framework that was designed to create equivalences between the A Level and vocational qualifications, the GNVQ.

### **2.3.3 Reaching the Gold Standard**

Although the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) is less significant to this thesis than the NVQ and some of the subsequent reforms, it was one of the first modern instances where state intervention sought to create a genuine academic equivalence with the 'gold standard' A Level qualification (Nicholls and Le Versha, 2003: 6; Ecclestone, 2000; Williams, 1999). It also becomes part of a rhythmic cycle of reform that has affected vocational education for over three decades, chasing an obsession with parity of esteem between vocational and academic education that 'ragged' through the 90s and has pervaded reform since (Bates, 2006; Nicholls and Le Versha, 2003: 6).

The Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Clarke, requested a new suite of qualifications to prepare students for immediate employment or for higher education following the white paper, *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (1991). The rationale was to provide qualifications that were less occupationally specific and could be delivered in both colleges and within employment, responding to a perceived need to establish an additional route through post-compulsory education alongside academic and vocational pathways (Bates, 1998; Hodkinson and Mattinson, 1994).

Designers of the GNVQ fused formative and summative assessments, encouraging learners to generate naturally occurring evidence through project work rather than absorbing and regurgitating the knowledge needed to pass an annual examination (Allen, 2005; Ecclestone, 2000). The initial rollout was at 'Advanced' level, a clear reference to the intended A Level alternative, and was intended to provide an alternative route into higher education, thus intending to bridge the academic-vocational divide (Ecclestone, 2000; Hodkinson and Mattinson, 1994). There were twelve units to complete, divided into elements of competence that mirrored the NVQ approach, based on themes such as 'knowing how to...', rather than 'knowing that...', suggesting a vocational aspect not evidenced in its A Level equivalence (Allen, 2005: 103). The final grade was based on a holistic interpretation of a portfolio of work (Allen, 2005; Hodkinson and Mattinson, 1994). Richmond (2018) notes that they were too far removed from the NVQ and did not cater well for those who entered employment, becoming linked to lower-achieving students. Isaacs (2013: 279) suggests a 'policy amnesia, bordering on deliberate blindness', in not learning from past developments in the concept of bridging the vocational/academic divide.

There were some successes. Nuffield (2007) suggests that they were motivational for disengaged students, increased full-time 16-19 participation rates and provided a small but significant route into certain parts of HE. The rapid pace of the rollout however led to early difficulties. Teachers found that coursework lacked rigour, documentation was confusing, paperwork excessive and performance criteria vague (Richmond, 2018). Consequently, GNVQs never really escaped the shadow of the A Level. The GNVQ was failing in almost all its ambitions. It was not bridging the divide, it barely persuaded more learners into post-compulsory education, it was not creating strong candidates for the workplace and was not preparing individuals for progression to university. Consequently, the beat of rhythmic reform continued, and the response to this failure was in the shape of the even more ill-fated, Diploma.

### **2.3.4 The Doomed Diploma**

In 2004, Mike Tomlinson, a former Chief Inspector at Ofsted, completed a report recommending reform for the 14-19 age group. In yet another international comparison, the report suggested that the GNVQ had failed to improve the UK's educational standing and reform, and change was needed to 'raise participation, improve basic skills, strengthen vocational routes, provide stretch and challenge, reduce the assessment burden, and make the system more transparent' (Tomlinson, 2004: 78).

The premise was a unified framework, using a baccalaureate type system, to address the issues where the GNVQ had failed. Academic qualification reform was rejected, however vocational changes were not, resulting in the replacement 'Diploma'. They incorporated three elements: sector-specific principal learning, generic learning including English, maths, and IT, and an additional or specialist element, which could include other qualifications and units. There were to be five vocational areas initially, with a further nine to be added in subsequent years, with Construction and Engineering among the first wave, alongside IT, Society, Health and Development, and Creative and Media (Nuffield, 2007).

Schools had the opportunity to deliver the first element of the qualification at levels one and two, and began to collaborate with colleges, often constructing spaces for the delivery of vocational qualifications within the school. There was an intensity behind the rollout of the Diplomas. The determination to create and launch them, which included over £300M of funding, did not allow developers to successfully pilot, review or consult effectively with stakeholders (Edge Foundation, 2023). Practitioners were excluded almost entirely from the development, and awarding organisations played only a marginal role. Employer involvement came through Sector Skills Councils, themselves often criticised by the employers they represented (Senior, 2015; Isaacs, 2013; Nuffield, 2007). Hodgson and Spours (2007) highlighted challenges early on in their development, that Isaacs (2013: 283) suggests were predictable considering lessons learned from previous reform, not least the fact they sat in a 'netherworld between the academic and truly vocational', suggesting perhaps technical merit to the qualification. As with the GNVQ, the issue of who the qualification was aimed at was never truly resolved, and from a historical perspective, the development of the Diploma was another example of the 'back to the future' approach that dominated policy making and initiatives in the late 21st Century (Senior, 2015: 30; Fuller and Unwin, 2011).

The framework of the Diploma was complex and bureaucratic. Certification required no fewer than 10 separate hurdles to achieve and organisational entries to the qualification remained low, with achievement lower still. Enrolments for that academic year contributed just 0.6% of all 16-18 year olds (Wolf, 2011: 55) and providers, initially attracted by funding, were switching curriculum. Despite the substantial investment of time and money, the new coalition government terminated the Diploma qualification somewhat abruptly in 2010. The Diploma became a victim of the highly influential *Review of Vocational Education* by Professor Alison Wolf (2011) and was replaced by a new cycle of reform in the shape of the Study Programme.

### 2.3.5 The Wolf at the Door - Introducing the Study Programme

The failure of the Diploma was not necessarily inevitable and was likely more for political reasons than educational. The global financial crash in 2008, followed by a UK recession in 2009, meant that there were fewer employment opportunities and more learners than ever entered post-compulsory education (Hodgson and Spours, 2013). At the same time, there was a demographic increase in young people and a planned raise of the educational participation age to 18 from 2015.

Wolf's report (2011) drew many parallels with a six-year review completed by Pring et al for the Nuffield Trust (2009) during the planning and preparation for the Diploma. Contributions from esteemed individuals, including Keep, Hodgson and Spours, carefully considered the educational landscape, from social class through to employers and policy making. Where they agreed, was that many vocational programmes were not as good as they could or should be. Wolf stated that the failures [in vocational education] are 'not despite of, but because of the central government's constant redesign, re-regulation, and re-organisation of 14-19 education' (2011: 21). Echoing Ball's observations of performativity that had crept into education over several years (2003), the report stated that the focus on education had been bypassed in the pursuit of a qualification that in many instances did not prepare them well for the next stages in their life. Brockman et al (2011) lent credence to Wolf's argument, identifying that vocational learning in Britain was different in purpose and narrower in scope than European equivalents that served wider social and economic purpose.

Wolf's review also identified issues with incorrect programmes, stating that 'perverse incentives created by the current funding and accountability mechanisms had created a situation where large numbers of young people took vocational qualifications that the labour market did not reward'. This was often at the expense of more valued and critical qualifications. (2011: 45). Ofsted (2008: 9) noted that in one college, the leap from good to outstanding was due to managing the data more effectively and not through improved teaching and learning, highlighted previously by Pring et al (2007). Performativity though is not a new concept, and having worked in FE through this period, it was transparent enough to me that teachers were not only aware of it, but often knew how to play the 'game' well enough to avoid scrutiny (Bourdieu, 1984). Coffield and Williamson (2012: 46) examined the situation in detail, concluding that:

Our schools, colleges and universities have been turned into exam factories, where teaching to the test and gaining qualifications and learning techniques to pass exams are now what matters, rather than understanding, or being interested in, or loving, the subjects being studied.

It is worth noting that Ecclestone discussed this much earlier in evaluating BTEC programmes, stating that teachers and students viewed assessment as ‘meeting the requirements and not about deepening learning’ (2002, 167). This is also reflected in Wolf’s comments around the ‘gaming’ of systems, invoking Goodhart’s Law, in that ‘if a single measure is used for control, it will become corrupted’ (2011: 136). It has certainly been my experience that this ‘gaming’ of qualifications has existed as a strong driving force within colleges, with ‘elite gamers’ often enjoying Ofsted ‘Outstanding’ status during their Common Inspection Framework phase, where quantitative successes, as opposed to educational experience, determined outcomes.

Wolf noted that qualifications for the critical labour market skills of maths and English were subject to ‘serial redesign, especially in the case of qualifications for students on vocational programmes’ (2011: 45). Regardless of this observation, she proposed another recommendation akin to redesign at a programme level, although in this instance a mandated requirement. The GCSE was to become a component of the study programme, with a view to achieving GCSE grade ‘C’ by the time they had left compulsory education. Other elements included the opportunity to gain real experience and knowledge of the workplace to enhance employability skills, alongside other non-qualification activities to develop students’ character, broader skills, attitudes, and confidence, and to support progression (Gov.uk, 2023).

Wolf’s influence was significant, and all 27 recommendations were accepted in full by the 2010 coalition government. The term, ‘Study Programme’, was adopted for all full-time learners on post-16 vocational routes. It certainly helped Wolf that, in Keep’s (2012: 316) words, the report had the ‘ability to communicate complex ideas and data to a non-specialist audience’. The implementation was planned for September 2013 to coincide with the introduction of a standardised funding formula covering 600 hours of delivery.

The move to this newly funded model was made mandatory in September 2015. There has yet to be much long-term detailed analysis of its impact, and the effect of COVID has likely slowed any detailed critique, but the most controversial addition was the introduction of the GCSE. Subsequent achievement rates for GCSE resits in colleges have proved very low, with only a quarter of retakes on average succeeding in hitting higher grades (Shearing, 2023; Tes Magazine, 2020). The removal of recognition of maths and English Key Skills qualifications and the introduction of the more academic ‘functional skills’ qualifications have clearly done little to improve GCSE success.

With the study programme in place, the government started to look at other issues highlighted by Wolf, tackling some of the qualification challenges and vocational etymology. The rhythm of reform did not end though with the study programme, and in another attempt to resolve the question of

parity of esteem and once again tackle comparative international failings, the T level was introduced in 2020 as the solution to tackle the lack of ambition and rigour surrounding technical education.

### **2.3.6 A New Solution to an Old Problem**

In 2015, Lord Sainsbury was commissioned to advise ministers on measures to improve technical education in England. The result was a report by the Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016), compiled by a group of four individuals, including Professor Alison Wolf, and a qualification known as the 'T Level'. Predictably, the report highlighted the continued failure of technical education in the UK, stating the reason they had failed was because they 'tinkered with technical education, and failed to learn from the successful systems in other countries' (Independent Panel on Technical Education, 2016: 6). The now familiar rhythmic beat of 'international comparisons' returns, with the report highlighting how English technical education lagged comparators in France and Germany, however ignoring, as Reay (2022) states, differences of culture, geography, and scale. The report highlights the lack of a standardised framework in the UK compared to almost all other countries with modern educational systems.

The UK's free market approach to qualifications has seen a proliferation of competing awarding organisations (AOs), Ofqual approved institutions responsible for the management and awarding of qualifications. The introduction of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in 2008, a modularised approach to qualification design, meant that it had become easy for AOs to offer the same qualifications through a unitised structure. According to the Independent Panel on Technical Education (2016), there were 158 different AOs, and this had become confusing. Furthermore, there were now over 21 000 qualifications on Ofqual's register. One questionable element of the report is the claim that individuals aiming for a future in plumbing must choose between 33 qualifications, across three levels and five different AOs' qualifications (2016: 11, 41). I believe this is an unusual claim for two reasons. Firstly, there is no legal definition of a plumber and no requirement to hold a plumbing qualification to practice, unlike for example in the gas industry where Gas Safe registration is a statutory obligation. Secondly, the number of AOs is inconsequential. The QCF approach ensured that qualifications had to meet nationally agreed assessment criteria, meaning that each AO would offer an identical qualification, for example a Plumbing Diploma at level two. While superficially there were multiple different qualifications from multiple different AOs, there was in reality only one plumbing diploma with a different AO named on the final certificate.



This proliferation of AOs led to the Panel recommending a change, proposing a licensed system where each AO would bid for single responsibility for the T Level, opened competitively after a fixed period. For example, Pearson won the bid for the construction professional routes, while City and Guilds won the construction trade routes. Another significant change is the requirement for every student to undertake an industrial placement, referring to a substantial amount of time a student is to spend in the workplace, rather than the more ambiguous current expectation of employer exposure. Wolf (2011: 33) previously noted that however hard education-based simulation tries, ‘the best way to obtain a job is to have one, partly because a genuine workplace teaches specific work-skills alongside human factors’, including communication, teamwork and problem solving. The resultant recommendation placed the onus on the provider and student to source an industry placement of no less than nine weeks in duration.

Even before the T Levels were launched, they courted controversy, specifically following the announcement that existing BTEC qualifications would be defunded and consequently replaced as T Levels became established (ACSL, 2019; Shearing, 2022; Lewis, 2021). Barton (2022) amongst many others highlights the danger that disadvantaged, and minority ethnic students could be disproportionately affected by the policy. A change in language surrounding this latest attempt at reform should also be noted. From the original report, the government started referring less frequently to ‘vocational education’, moving instead to ‘technical education’, as Labour did previously with the Diploma (Orr and Terry, 2023; Fuller and Unwin, 2011). Indeed the ‘T’ of the T Level is assumed to be an initial for ‘Technical’. The *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education* (2016) recommended this shifting of language away from ‘vocational’, claiming that the ‘vocational option has often been defined not by what it is, but by what it is not: the academic option’ (2016: 23). The Report continues, claiming that in terms of policy, ‘vocational has become a catch-all term for everything other than GCSEs and A levels and we must not allow technical education to be a rebadged vocational education’ (2016: 23). Although not explicitly stated, it is inferred that ‘vocational’ education does not lead to rewarding, skilled jobs, or open doors for individuals to progress to the most senior of roles whereas ‘technical education’ does (2016: 24). I personally contest this assertion, not only have I worked and continued to work with individuals where this is patently not the case, I am proof that vocational education is not the educational cul-de-sac the report infers.

In section 2.4 I look at this semantic distinction in some more depth, claiming that the Panel’s dismissal of vocational qualifications is a weak judgement, and that there is ground for better definition of each type of qualification and perhaps more importantly, I argue that the need to

constantly attempt a parity of esteem across these qualification types is potentially unnecessary. Before I explore this distinction, I briefly explore how rhythm links with educational reform.

### **2.3.7 Lefebvrian Cycles**

Rhythm is present throughout education. Daily timetables and academic calendars, collude, collide, and disrupt wider rhythms in life, including family schedules and work patterns. History, suggests Lefebvre (2019), is a series of interconnected rhythms. These rhythms are notable and observable by patterns of repetition, though Lefebvre (1976) considers them not absolute, and when we consider instances of educational reform and enactment, there are differences. Sometimes these are subtle, such as the introduction of the QCF, and sometimes these have a much larger impact, resulting in Lefebvrian moments (2014), such as the introduction of the study programme. Lefebvre (2019: 16) talks about the historian perceiving rhythm differently to that of the musician or the athlete, particularly noting the ‘rapidity or slowness of periods, of eras, of cycles’. From a Lefebvrian perspective, we are seeing a rapidity of reform as the cycles shorten and we continue to chase a parity of esteem with academic qualifications and the ambition to educate individuals to be more productive to compete on the international stage. The international ambition was thought to have found initial provenance in the Samuelson Report in 1884 (Keep et al, 2022) and has frequently appeared in reforms since, including the latest reform in the introduction of the T Level. Whilst the reasons behind reform remain surprisingly consistent, the circumstances of each change the approach, yet often return to reforms that have previously tried and failed, the parallels between the formation of the Junior Technical School in 1902 and the University Technical College in 2010 being a clear example.

## **2.4 Vocational or ‘Fauxcational’ Qualifications?**

### **2.4.1 Tripartite Education - What’s in a name?**

Historical rhythms of policy and reform have disrupted and confused qualification types, frequently conflating vocational and technical qualifications. In this section I argue that technical and vocational

qualifications should be separated to enable us to better define and focus on vocational teachers, better define the term, vocation, and visit social considerations around non-academic qualifications.

The introduction of the tripartite system as part of the Education Act in 1944 attempted parity between academic and technical schooling, although vocational qualifications 'continued to be regarded as being for the academically less able and/or unmotivated students' (Searle, 2001: 3). Wolf (2011: 8) considered all qualifications being equal as 'nonsense', stating that education has been 'bedevilled by well-meaning attempts to pretend that everything is worth the same as everything else' (2011: 73). This is perhaps played out in the increase in schools GCSE performance between 2003 and 2010, where benchmark 'A-C' grades improved through adoption of BTECs and other courses where a single level 2 BTEC could be worth as many as four GCSE 'A-C' grades (Jin et al, 2010), blurring qualification values at specific levels. Post-16 education is often split into three categories: academic, technical, and vocational. Internationally, technical, and vocational qualifications are often pooled into the acronym, TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) or in some instances, VET (Vocational Education and Training) (Brockman, Clarke and Winch, 2008). Whilst some organisations use the VET acronym in the UK, most confuse technical and vocational education, either controversially ignoring the differences or vacillating between the two, often on the same page (see Pearson, 2022 and OCR, 2022 for examples).

The New Labour government had focussed heavily on higher education (Fuller and Unwin, 2011) and only started recognising practical skills at the end of their term in office. Tomlinson (2001) argued that New Labour policy deliberately targeted a new middle ground, reaffirming educational privilege for the middle classes. Following the decline of manufacturing, professional industries grew and higher education participation of children of professional parents had reached 72% by 1999 (Social Trends, 2000: 5, quoted in Tomlinson, 2001: 268). Furthermore, this middle ground had enough cultural knowledge to equip their children with a 'value added curriculum vitae' and avoid the relegation of their children to vocational and practical courses (Brown, 1997, quoted in Tomlinson, 2001: 269). Early indications from the coalition government in 2010 though were positive, with Michael Gove, then Secretary of State for Education, using language such as 'craft' and 'trade' (Fuller and Unwin, 2011). This would not last, and the criticism of vocational education in Wolf's report (2011) concluded with the inception of the T Level.

My research disregards academic qualifications, although acknowledges Pring et al's (2009: 17-18) challenge of a nuanced 'false dualism', where expectations, such as the use of English in the training of journalism, medicine, or biology, suggest that these distinctions are more complex. This leaves questions of technical and vocational distinction, a relatively unique situation in England compared to

international comparisons, where countries such as Germany and the Netherlands have a stronger cultural acceptance of non-academic qualifications (Brockman, Clarke, and Winch, 2008: 549).

Although the intention of the T Level is to create this distinction, the English system still favours 'skills' over 'knowledge' (Brockman et al, 2008: 549), as evidenced by the NVQ and apprentice standards, where many lower-level apprenticeships now have no qualifications (Fuller and Unwin 2017).

Technical education in UK educational systems is more difficult to separate than its academic and vocational counterparts. There are instances for example where purveyors of the qualifications themselves do not differentiate accordingly. In the next section I explore technical education as a separate entity to better determine this separation and narrow the research questions focus accordingly.

## **2.4.2 A Brief History of the 'Technical'**

The term, 'technical education' was used for much of the first half of the 20th Century, resulting in a colloquial reference to a college as, 'the tech' (Bailey and Unwin, 2014: 450). Technical qualifications originally took shape as the National Certificate (NC), introduced after the first world war as a tentative substitute for the old 'science and art' type of technical examinations (Foden, 1951: 38). Launched in 1921 through discussions with the Institute of Mechanical Engineers, the NC was designed to train engineers on a new system of certification for apprentices and other students on engineering programmes at a nationally recognised level (Curtis, 1968; Barnard, 1964; Foden, 1958). Prior to this, local examinations were completed by unions regionally and were disparate (Curtis, 1968). The new qualifications were offered by approved centres, externally assessed by experts, and expanded to include other industries, such as construction and electrical engineering. Courses were delivered over five years, the first three years leading to the 'Ordinary' Certificate (ONC), and the latter two years leading to the 'Higher' Certificate (HNC) (Foden, 1951).

In perhaps the first sign of a formal split, the *Atholl Report* (1928) on part-time examinations asked the City and Guilds to adjust the nomenclature of its mechanical and engineering exams to avoid confusion and duplication with the NC (CGLI, 1994: 65). The white paper, *Technical Education* (Butler, 1956), delineated the qualifications into two characteristics, 'technician', linked to the National Certificate, and 'craftsmen', linked to the City and Guilds route. Hierarchically the technician would be considered junior manager level, with the craftsman the skilled labour of the manufacturing industry, accounting for more than a third of its workforce.

Haslegrave's *Report of the Committee on Technician Courses and Examinations* (DES, 1969), highlighted that existing vocational provision was unsuitable for current and future needs. The landscape was complex and the CGLI along with six Regional Examining Boards examined the qualifications that Haslegrave sought to rationalise (Fisher, 2004). The result was the establishment of the Business Education Council (BEC) and the Technician Education Council (TEC) in 1973 by the Education Secretary, seeking to unify qualifications at technician level (DES, 1969: 58; Easingwood, 1979). These were initially part of the CGLI, who shared the same administration, restructuring to accommodate both. As a by-product, this liberated the CGLI from policy, enabling them to focus on developing their own qualifications.

The BEC and TEC, although conceived concurrently, had some significant differences. From the outset the TEC was designed to create technical education that occupied a position between that of the qualified engineer and the skilled craftsman, a 'technician' (Fisher, 2004). Gleeson (1980: 736) highlights the technician as the individual with a distinctive social type, able to bridge the gap between 'the two cultures of the shop floor'. Sheatley (1976: 25) clarifies:

A technician's training and education enable him/her to exercise technical judgement, based on an intelligent application of the general principles underlying the work involved, as compared to the greater reliance in accumulated skill and experience which is characteristic of the craftsman.

Haslegrave's Committee was keen that the role of the technician be given greater status, with a distinct layer of vocational training to ensure a suitable supply of qualified individuals (Fuller and Unwin, 2011: 194). This statement suggested a tripartite system, with the academic status sitting above technical and vocational roles. It was perhaps the later merger with the BEC, noted by Fisher as covering a 'lower level of education' (2011: 240), that created a blurring of the distinction between the technical and vocational that persists, even among awarding organisations (e.g. Pearson, n.d.).

In 1996, Edexcel was formed by the merger of the BEC and TEC and London Examinations (ULEAC), creating the qualification referred to today as the BTEC (Fisher, 2004; Pearson, n.d.), seen as the necessary part of restructuring of education in response to the 1970s economic crisis (Fisher, 2004: 240). The merger and subsequent creation of the BTEC fused technical education with a general education concept, resulting in the BTEC frequently still being referred to as a 'vocational' qualification in many instances (Shields and Masardo, 2015).

While academic and technical education distinctions have been apparent since early formal schooling, the distinction between technical and academic is less prescribed. In the next section I explore

language behind the term, vocational, before returning to the BTEC and its potentially false premise of a vocational qualification.

### 2.4.3 Defining 'Vocational' Education

This thesis specifically focusses on vocational education, it is therefore necessary to better frame 'vocational education' and separate it from the 'technical' visited in the previous section. Whilst there are many definitions of education, Pring's summary (2004: 17) should suffice in terms of this thesis: 'education refers to those activities, on the whole formally planned and taught, which bring about learning'.

The definition of vocation though is nebulous. Snedden, an architect of 20<sup>th</sup> Century American vocationalism, stated that vocational education meant '[e]ducation which conferred skills that could be used directly to productive ends in industry' (Lewis, 1994: 201). Wolf directly notes no formal definition of vocational education in England (2011: 23). In his *Independent Report on Technical Education*, Sainsbury (2016) added that politically, vocational education is often defined as the opposite of academic, that is to mean anything other than GCSEs, A levels and degrees. Sainsbury's report continued to argue against vocational education in favour of technical and moved to remove the term vocational from the remainder of the influential report (that resulted in the T Level qualification). The definition has shifted in line with societal movements, with the rise of capitalism influencing recent perceptions, such as the creation of corporately sponsored educational institutions for young people in the shape of JCB and Rolls Royce (Fuller and Unwin, 2011).

Early use of the term vocation derives from the Latin *vocare* or *vocatio*, meaning, *to call* (Doyle, 1999; Dawson, 1999). Dawson examines the use of the word in depth, grounding its origin in religious roots and associations, and tracing early use to Christian monastic tradition established in the Middle Ages (2005: 222). A 'vocation' originally referred to the work of monks, nuns and priests who served God by removing themselves from daily life and serving the church. However, under the influence of Martin Luther, the association that a divine calling could be followed no matter what one's occupation became a central tenet of the Protestant work ethic (Dawson, 2005: 223-224). Luther considered that the fulfilment of worldly duties is under all circumstances 'the only way to live acceptably to God, is alone the will of God and every legitimate calling has the same worth in the sight of God' (Weber, 2001: 41). 'Labour must be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself and become the calling' (Weber, 2001: 25). Industrial capitalism was replacing agrarian capitalism in Britain as commerce and manufacture grew (Hobsbawm, 1996), and a propertyless population,

dependent on employment from a propertied group, gave rise to industrial capitalism in the form of the industrial revolution sometime around 1780 (Deane, 1984). As the revolution took hold, and industry and entrepreneurial spirit expanded, the term vocation began to take on an increasingly more secular meaning as work started to become a necessary requirement for personal fulfilment and dignity. As economics increasingly began to dominate, vocations became associated with careers, occupations, and paid employment (Dawson, 2005: 224), even becoming the product of individuals' experiences and interests (Billett, 2011).

From an educational perspective, Steedman and West (2003: 1) state that vocational education is a 'system of education which has, as its subject-matter, knowledge used within certain trades, occupations, or professions'. Bridgwood (1987) differentiates the term into two strands, vocational education and vocational training, the latter specifically focusing on preparation for work. Bathmaker broadly (2014) agrees, although adds a third element aimed at low-level work-readiness skills, resulting in a triad of definitions: vocational, vocational-related, and pre-vocational education. Stevenson (2021: 3) prefixes the term, 'expertise' with vocational, a socially determined construct associated with doing something 'better than others'. He draws and expands on Dewey's (1938) concept of meaning, positing that expertise is a connection of meanings and interconnections drawn from experience (Stevenson, 2021: 5). The term 'experience' itself suggests a concrete action, such as the repetition of laying multiple bricks, in opposition to the abstract nature of academic qualifications (Pring et al, 2009). Lucas (2015: 5) also draws on the term expertise, linking the term to 'being skilful' and requiring 'time and practice' in its acquisition.

Guile and Unwin (2015) unify both the philosophical and psychological concept of expertise to an insular perspective – 'a one dimensional accomplishment in a field of activity captured by the phrase, *mastery*' (2015: 28, emphasis in original). I would contend though that mastery is too semantically linked in Britain to early apprenticeship structures to bear the relevance in the present-day it once commanded (See Clarke, 2005) and few instances survive of this term in industry today, some examples being the Guild of Master Craftsmen and the Federation of Master Builders. Steedman and West's (2003) statement that vocational education does not of itself ensure proficiency is a more honest assertion and aligns further with the premise of the development of expertise than mastery, additionally reinforced by Lucas's (2015: 5) observation that 'expertise involves skilled routines and the ability to carry out skilful activities to a *satisfactory* standard' (my emphasis). Interestingly, mastery as a concept still exists in Germanic apprenticeships, with the *Meisterlehre* (apprenticeship with a master craftsman) and *Berufsschule* (vocational school) surviving in structure from the late 19th Century (Deisinger, 2004).

Dewey (1938: 27) questions this notion of experience and expertise, stating that experiences are not all genuinely or equally educative and that the *quality* of experience is key to the development of the learner (emphasis in original). Quality within disciplines associated with vocational education, such as carpentry and hairdressing, is critical to a successful career and improves with experience, however Dewey's observation, from personal experience, suggests that should the initial experience be of a lesser quality, then the individual will only develop further along these lines. Industries like my own refer to this as, 'bad practice'. Dewey's statement evokes Lefebvre's concept of dressage (2019), the breaking of humans as animals (such as horses), learning a trade through a similar series of repetitive acts, enabling the creation of expertise through progressive rhythmic iteration. Lefebvre's notion of rhythmicity intertwines with Lucas's (2015) concept of skilled routines, resourcefulness, and craftsmanship.

Vocational education as a singular definition is difficult due to multiple contradictions, not only in available literature, but through those responsible for the policy and design themselves. This thesis focuses on vocational education specifically and as such, attempts to narrow the definition accordingly, therefore I define vocational education as *the development of routine skills in a specific discipline through quality instruction, experiential learning, and the application of knowledge through both learning and experience.*

In the next section, I explore differences at a qualification level to best select the relevant sample programmes and teachers to participate.

#### **2.4.4 When is a Vocational Qualification not a Vocational Qualification?**

In their reflections on the NC, Foden (1951: 44) and Innes (1948) denote an early distinction between technical and vocational qualifications, separating non-academic students into 'advanced students', capable of achieving the National Certificate, and 'practical' students, likely to study the City and Guilds Certificate. Although notably neither refer to the City and Guilds as the vocational route, the practical tag suggests a partition from their observations on technical education. Innes (1948: 51) notes the dilemma of the 'academic or practical' choice when determining a student's path and the frustration exhibited by students on 'craft' programmes realising their progression is limited without the higher technical route of the HNC. The National Joint Advisory Council (1958: 24) somewhat patronisingly insisted that boys should undertake courses which are properly matched to their capacities to give them a sense of achievement and that they should undertake a NC course only if they 'have the ability to succeed in it'. Venables (1967: 37) research on a local technical college in



Birmingham references a similar observation, stating that until the NC was introduced in 1921, there were no incentives for '[students] more capable of advanced and theoretical studies than those examined by the City and Guilds'.

Brockman and Laurie (2016) discuss the differences between the BTEC and the City and Guilds (C&G) qualifications, reflecting the same attitude within organisations as Venables had done nearly 50 years prior. Motor vehicle teachers highlighted the academic nature of the BTEC being unsuitable for this level of learner and having very little practical value, while others considered the C&G lacking in technical detail, mirroring Foden's observation in 1951 (1951: 43):

Probably the commonest complaint...is that the courses are unduly academic. It is quite possible for a student to obtain a National Certificate in Engineering without ever having been inside an engineering works.

This thesis specifically focuses on everyday experience in vocational education, and as such, requires vocational qualifications to be tightly defined. Although at times vocational, the BTEC can be in many instances delivered almost entirely in a classroom environment (see the Construction and Engineering specifications as examples, Pearson, 2022). These observations alone suggest that qualification developers themselves struggle with a singular definition. If we consider vocational education as the development of expertise through experience, it is difficult to imagine this being gained through classroom delivery alone. This suggests a practical involvement, even if simulated as opposed to real-world experience, is necessary to deliver on the vocational intention.

It is this final observation that drives the term 'fauxcational' in terms of some qualifications being marketed as vocational options. Whilst it is not a given that these types of qualifications will always be of an entirely theoretical nature, the fact that some can and have been able to for many years suggests that there is a difference. Vocational qualifications then, as a minimum, should have a substantial proportion of the qualification delivered in physical environments, either real or simulated, and should not be delivered entirely within a classroom environment. Given this description, I move next to highlight the type of qualification in scope.

#### **2.4.5 Specifying 'Vocational'**

Thus far, I have explored examples of rhythms of vocational reform and the historical impact of policy on vocational qualifications. Having looked at what separates the technical and vocational, and aligned the latter with the practical nature of delivery, I now look at how we determine the awarding

organisations (AO) that align with this practical focus. Whilst there are now multiple AOs offering vocational qualifications, we have seen from a historic perspective that formal roots lie with the City and Guilds (C&G). From 2010, the C&G's dominance was challenged by the introduction of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), a system designed to be a template for all qualifications to be delivered in a modular, unit-based structure, awarding credits for each unit. The key benefit was that these units were transportable across multiple AOs and could even be conjoined to create a truly bespoke qualification through specific rules of combination (Ofqual, 2011).

This change opened the qualification field to multiple AOs, for example EAL, typically biased toward engineering, found itself investing in the development of building services qualifications, previously the preserve of the C&G. Other examples include VTCT, who started in the hair and beauty sector and are now one of the largest providers of qualifications for the services to people sector (VTCT, n.d.), and CSkills, born of the Construction ITB, who introduced a range of qualifications to directly compete with the C&G. Others followed suit, creating a swath of qualifications that were ultimately the same or similar enough to give the perception that there were multiple options for students (see the Wolf Report, 2011). Colleges benefited financially from competing registration and examination costs and in some instances, a lighter level of regulation or scrutiny. One shared commonality, developed through mimicry of C&G qualifications, was the insistence of practical elements in the qualification. As such, they have a reputation in the vocational sphere that neither the BTEC nor other non-academic qualifications can match, and it is for reasons of this prominence, the sample of teachers for this thesis draws from one of these AOs.

#### **2.4.6 Repetition, Reform, and Return**

Repetition reveals itself throughout the history of vocational education. The initial creation of formal vocational qualifications following the industrial revolution was quick to omit the development of practical skills in favour of the more abstract academic elements of vocational and technical education (Barnard, 1969). Within a few short years of formal vocational education, criticism had already started, particularly noting the distinct lack of practical content and a focus on the abstract knowledge that supported it. The development of the National Certificate in 1921, the first formal national qualification that focussed on engineering, found similar criticism, noted most vociferously by Innes (1948). In terms of reform, a specific rhythm highlighting a missing element of vocational education had already started to form by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. That Brockman and Laurie (2016) highlight almost identical concerns after multiple reforms since the first vocational qualification

indicates that although content and structure may have changed, the rhythm persists. Through a Lefebvrian perspective, this links with historic rhythmic occurrences, but this time the rhythm spans several decades, with small differences in approach in the intervening years changing little in terms of outcomes, yet each time causing disruption, moments of arrhythmia, for those having to frequently adapt their design and delivery of curriculum to meet them. Keep (2015: 124) references an 'unexpected feedback loop' between the expectations of policy makers and a much wider and more complex reality of how they interact within the vocational education system. It may be this loop that dooms reform to repeat, return, and ultimately fail.

## 2.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have explored a brief history of vocational education, the rhythm of reform, separated technical and vocational education and defined vocational education. I have documented through this chapter how I believe these rhythms of history have shaped vocational education. Lefebvre (2019) talks about repetition, of cycles both natural and linear, that there is always something new and unforeseen in the repetitive in the form of difference. His neo-Marxist perspective adds that these differences exposed within temporal rhythms perhaps constitute the thread of time itself. Examining a brief history of vocational education, I find much that overlaps, with sometimes subtle differences, but all seeming to ignore the changing temporality and context. The University Technical College concept introduced in 2010 for example draws many parallels with the JTS concept introduced in 1902, however failed to consider the intervening history, resulting in similar failures (Gomery, 2019).

Vocational education suffers from a lack of distinct identity, seemingly difficult to split from its technical counterpart, even by the purveyors of the qualifications. The increased use in educational discourse of 'technical' education may be a deliberate attempt to remove the negative association with vocational, consequently leaving 'vocational' as an unspoken element of education buried within a wider descriptor. For those delivering and receiving education within this specific vocational arena, the message is at best unclear and at worst insulting in areas that underpin much of societal service and infrastructure, from bricklayers to mechanics to hairdressers.

In the next chapter, I visit Henri Lefebvre's theories on rhythm and space in greater depth to begin philosophically grounding my analysis of vocational teachers in vocational education.

## Chapter 3: Lefebvrian Space and Time

### 3.1 Introduction

Through this thesis I aim to explore how the rhythms of history and reform shape vocational education and how this in turn produces the vocational teacher. In this chapter I introduce Lefebvre's (1991) spatial theory, with a focus on his tri-dimensional dialectic, used as a method to 'decode' social space, and his final posthumous work, *Rhythmanalysis* (2014), a methodology focused on the identification and analysis of rhythmic instances. This chapter foregrounds the later use of Lefebvre's theories in the analysis of the data gathered and analysed through both his spatial dialectic and theories on the analysis of rhythm.

Elden (2004) suggests that Lefebvre's theories intentionally evolved, with Lefebvre himself considering that the analysis of rhythm put the 'finishing touches to the exposition of the production of space' (1991: 405). Before I explore rhythm, I first visit Lefebvre's magnum opus, *The Production of Space* (TPoS) (1991).

### 3.2 The Production of Space

Lefebvre published TPoS in 1974, receiving an English translation in 1991 by Donald Nicholson-Smith. He posited that space had largely been ignored in philosophical and sociological terms. Influenced by the refashioning of towns under capitalist hegemony (Burgel et al, 1987), he sought to reclassify space, to move the concept away from mathematical constructions and quantitative analysis, Euclidean dimensions, and Cartesian logic, and expose the production of space through a singular theory (Lefebvre, 1991: 16; 1976), theorising space as the 'primary locus of lived experience in the world' (Watkins, 2005: 211). TPoS expanded upon, amongst others, Marxist, Hegelian, Nietzschean and Heideggerian theory (Elden, 2004), as well as Lefebvre's earlier work on the *Critique of Everyday Life*. Lefebvre's real object of study was the 'process of the production of space and its configuration within a historical period' (Shields, 1999: 167, emphasis in original), with his use of the word 'production' an apparent reference to Marx and Marxist analysis (Elden, 2004). While Shields (1999) suggests the Marxist view is potentially reductive, Lefebvre's links to Marx are abundant.

Lefebvre refutes space being an empty container waiting to be filled. He considers it to have not existed beforehand as a non-social space, but a production of social forces (Elden, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991). His intention was to expose how space is produced by 'bringing different kinds of space and the modalities of their genesis together within a single theory, moving it from the realm of the mental

to become the focus of our engagement with the world' (Lefebvre, 1991: 16). He viewed social space as a 'matrix of social action, at once a presupposition, medium and product of the social relations of capital' (Brenner, 199: 140). The act of producing space is recognised as fundamental to our experiences of the world, and should be the focus of our attempts at appreciation of that experience (Watkins, 2005). Soja (2009: 21) suggests the key argument was that 'spatial processes shaped social form just as much as social processes shaped spatial form'. Shields (1999: 155) emphasised that spatialisation captures the 'processual nature of *l'espace* that Lefebvre insists is a matter of ongoing activities', that is, it is more than an 'achieved order in the built environment or an ideology', it influences itself through actions of social agents.

Lefebvre recognised the significance of the body in all elements of philosophical examination and proclaimed that Western philosophy has '*betrayed, abandoned and denied* the body' (2019: 407, emphasis in original). He claims that it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived, and produced (1991: 162) and that the spatial body's material character derives from space, from the 'energy that is deployed and put to use there' (1991: 195). He further posits that, 'bodily lived experience, for its part, maybe both highly complex and quite peculiar, because 'culture' intervenes here, with its illusory immediacy' (Lefebvre, 1991: 40). Casey (2001: 684) uses the term, a 'constitutive coingredience', stating that there is 'no place without self and no self without place'. Also influenced by Heidegger's *Being and Time* and wider phenomenological philosophies, Casey places Bourdieu's concept of habitus as the middle term between place and self, the formation of a habitual bond between the lived place and geographical self (2001: 686). Simonsen (2005: 4) brings the body into the 'lived experience', exposed in modernity to a tendency toward being drained of all content by mechanisms or language, signs, and abstractions, 'but yet cannot be totally erased'. She highlights an important aspect of material production in that each living body both *is* space and *has* its space (emphasis in original), it reflexively produces itself in space at the same time as it produces that space.

To help decode space, Lefebvre developed a reinterpretation of Hegel's dialectic, introducing a third, non-conclusive element into the dialectic as a tool to examine and expose the abstract production of space. It was Lefebvre's intention that the dialectic transcended theory and became praxis, and it is through adapting this dialectic that I later explore how the vocational teacher is produced. Prior to this application, I explore each element of the dialectic in turn.

### 3.3 Lefebvre's Tri-dimensional Dialectic

Lefebvre often sanctified a third term, claiming that dualistic analysis is linked to ideological, metaphysical, and religious oppositions, such as 'good and evil' and 'light and shadow' (2019: 21). Channelling Hegel and Marx, he invoked a tri-dimensional approach, with analysis becoming dialectically reflexive through much of his later work. This approach would run throughout his theory, allowing dialectical analysis of the production of (social) space (1991: 38-39).

The elements of the dialectic are:

1. Spatial Practice
2. Representations of Space
3. Spaces of Representation<sup>1</sup>

He suggested viewing space through three elements that aligned with the above: the perceived, the conceived and the lived (*l'espace perçu, conçu, vécu*). These are achieved through a Marxist totality of physical, mental, and social space (Elden, 2004), where the sublation of the contradiction of the physical and mental space leads to social space (Schmid, 2022: 268). Lefebvre suggested that the decoding of space helps understand the transition from spaces of representation to representations of space, that it shows 'correspondences, analogies, and a certain unity in spatial practice and in the theory of space' (Lefebvre, 1992: 163).

For Lefebvre, the dialectic did not conclude in the traditionally quoted Hegelian sense, in that the thesis and antithesis combined to form a synthesis, but more of a conceptualisation of three terms of interaction (Unwin, 2000). Figure 1 demonstrates my graphical interpretation of the dialectic, detailing how each element interconnect and interreact in the formation of space. At the centre of this dialectic is produced space, at once the formation of Lefebvre's three spatial elements.

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<sup>1</sup> Note the preferred use of this term in this thesis over 'Representational Space' as originally translated by Donaldson in *The Production of Space*. This follows the overwhelming use by multiple authors since his first translation.

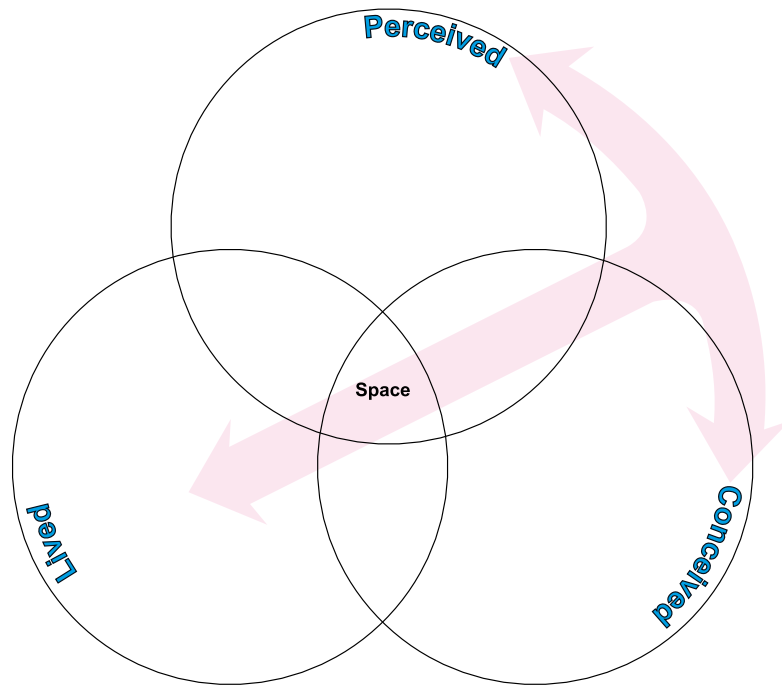


Figure 1 - The Production of Space

While this diagram is an interpretation of the production of space, as I move through this thesis I develop the diagrammatical concept further, forming a practical and visual interpretation of Lefebvre's theory and applying it to the production of the vocational teacher.

A challenge of reading Lefebvre is that many of his theories are incomplete and inconclusive, as he often dictated his works without return or edit and optimistically moved onto new or better spaces before concluding his theories (Schmid, 2022; Unwin, 2000; Shields, 1999; Soja, 1991). Unwin's (2000) critique suggests that Lefebvre's intention was to get people to rethink time and space in the social world and evoke reaction from the reader. Schmid (2022: 267) broadly agrees, highlighting that Lefebvre offers no assistance to the reader, allowing for a reconstruction of the theoretical starting points of his dialectic. Instead, he almost converses with himself, testing out applications and reformulating them, allowing for interpretations of meaning to occur. Prior to the publication of the translated *TPoS*, Soja (1991: 258) notes that anglophone interpreters were often confounded, introducing a 'mangled and muffled version of his ideas'. Elden (2007: 113), whilst grateful for Soja's contribution to the promotion of Lefebvre in the English-speaking world, alludes that Soja himself may have contributed to this misreading, stating that he focused too much on the 'postmodern and on Los Angeles, rather than sketching a framework approach that could be applied to other times and places'.

The spirit of Lefebvre's theory was to avoid an abstract model to prevent it becoming lost in other 'ideological mediations' (Lefebvre, 1991: 40). He wanted to transcend a philosophical analysis of the

production of space, instead allowing a deeper understanding of how space is or has been produced through his dialectic (Schmid, 2022). Elden elaborates on the premise, stating that reading a space is like *critically* reading a book, understanding intent, power relations and context, 'it can help us understand the space we live in' (2004: 192, emphasis in original). In the next section, I explore each element of the dialectic, considering their application against vocational educational concepts.

### 3.3.1 Spatial Practice - Perceived

Grasping a concrete definition of perceived space is challenging. Elden (2007: 110) helps with a radical simplification of perceived space as the 'physical space, a real space, a space that is generated and used'. It is a 'tangible form of space that provides a degree of continuity and cohesion to each social formation' (Martin and Miller, 2008: 146). Schmid defines spatial practice as the material aspect of space which is 'perceivable by human beings with their five senses' (2022: 270) while Simmons (2021: 831) refers to it as the 'embodiment of abstract space'. In Lefebvre's words, perceived space embraces 'production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation' (1991: 33). Milgrom (2008: 271) draws examples of this from architecture, suggesting that while designers might consider themselves producers of conceived space, they are equally influenced by the spatial practices and 'social formations' that surround them. Spatial practice, therefore, concerns both the 'processes of production of the physical built environment and the resulting built environment itself' (Leary, 2009: 195). Kinkaid (2020: 176) aligns Lefebvre's theorisation of spatial practice to Merleau-Ponty's (2013), arguing that lived space is not a single physical dimension of space, but the phenomenal ground of space, the realm where space is synthesised into a phenomenological totality.

Lefebvre (1992: 16) assumes that when we speak of a room in an apartment, a street corner, a marketplace, or a shopping centre, that we know what is meant. He states that they distinguish specific spaces and generally describe a social space, they correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute. The space of work is thus the result of '(repetitive) gestures and (serial) actions of productive labour' (Schmid, 2022: 277). Lefebvre writes:

Considered overall, social practice presupposes the use of the body: the use of the hand, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as of activity unrelated to work. This is the realm of the *perceived* (1991: 40, emphasis in original).



I believe therefore that perceived space is the manifestations of conceived space, where perceived space dialectically interacts with the conceived. With regards to a vocational teacher, there are times when this interaction is fluid and dynamic, as the teacher oscillates between the perceived and conceived spaces, yet at other times creating a liminal trans-space (Wade, 2008) between each, where teachers adopt personas that surpass expectations of both teaching and vocational specialism.

In this space there is a transactional interaction, dynamically translating these representations of space between vocational teacher and student in the vocational space, creating a lived space. These practices include professional discourse, knowledge, conduct, professionalised behaviours, competencies, routines, and specialist practices (Simmons, 2021). Perceived space contains the physical simulacrum of the vocational teachers' prior occupational place of work, linking the body to learning and the wider experiences derived from everyday occurrences.

### **3.3.2 Representations of Space - Conceived**

Lefebvre calls the conceived space the 'abstract elements of production, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, and social engineers' (1992: 39). Those who identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived. They define what should be done, where it can be done, what is permissible and what is not, and how this can be done (Ford, 2015). These are the abstracted theories and philosophies and the 'science of planning' (Shields, 1999: 163). Elden's simplification reduces this to a mental space, a mental construct, '*imagined space*' (2007: 110, emphasis in original). Ford (2015: 181) suggests thinking of the 'bird's-eye-view' map of the city available in the local tourist shop. As Schmid (2022) notes, space cannot be perceived without first being mentally conceptualised.

Within vocational education, conceived spaces are abstract concepts and expectations, separate from practice. They are often contradictions of spatial practices, as industrial expectations are rarely reflected within these abstract educational practices. Examples are workshop plans, layouts, syllabuses, schemes of work, assessment plans, synoptic exams, health and safety documents, or session plans, or a combination of some or all as each intersects the other. These are some of the elements of vocational programmes that reciprocally influence physical place and perceived space. Conceived spaces also consider the wider macro and meso-level influences on vocational education, such as college policies and procedures, internal and external targets, financial pressures, awarding body expectations and requirements, qualification reform, local and national educational complications, and managerial flux.

### 3.3.3 Spaces of Representation - Lived

Lived space or *espace vécu* is directly lived through associated images and symbols. Lived space is 'the space of inhabitants and users - spaces as they are directly lived in everyday life' (Ford, 2015). Lived space is alive, 'essentially qualitative, fluid, and dynamic' (Lefebvre, 1992: 42). It overlays physical space, where the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. Lived space, like our lived time, 'is never really knowable; there is always something mysterious, undercover, undiscoverable' (Soja, 2009: 102), as it is experienced through emotions, imagination, and embodied sensations (Salovarra and Ropo, 2018: 79). They are sites of resistance and counter-discourses, potentially evading apparatuses of power (Stewart, 1994).

The lived is the space of psychoanalysis, ethnography, and anthropology (Schmid, 2022; Shields, 1999: 166), these are all students of lived space (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre's concept of lived space does not refer merely to 'having an experience', but to feelings of disruption, difference, and deviation - where practitioners might intuitively feel that something is not working (Simmons, 2021: 831). Ford explains:

Whereas representations of space are found on maps in tourist shops, [spaces of representation] are found in community archives or urban folk stories; they are etched on walls with graffiti and relayed through spoken work in corner stores and cafés (2015: 182).

Within vocational education, these are the lived experiences of the everyday. The interaction between teacher and students or peers, joys of achievement and success, reflections on critique, on failure, of progression and learning (Lefebvre, 2019). Lived vocational space is where the challenges of the perceived and conceived space converge, influencing each other while changing the lived experience within the vocational space. Frustration, marginalisation, elation are all examples of elements of lived space, as are tolerance, empathy, and patience.

## 3.4 Exploring the Tri-dimensional Dialectic in Literature

Despite Lefebvre's practical ambition for his theory, it can be challenging to turn into praxis. Leary (2009) notes differing interpretations of the dialectic from scholars such as Harvey and Shields (see Appendix 11). Unwin (2000: 13) warns that Lefebvre's arguments are constructed so that they are not readily summarised but instead used to elicit argument and debate and aren't reducible to a simple set of parameters. In this sense, what matters is 'not so much what he wrote, but rather the reactions evoked in its reader' (Unwin, 2000: 19). There are examples of where Lefebvre's theory has been successfully applied, for example Farrington's analysis of the 'Siege of the Third Precinct in

Minneapolis' (2020), Borden's study of skateboarding, space, and the city (2014), Leary's examination of planning theory and Watkins' (2005) study of a theatrical performance.

Educationally, conceived spaces are dominant. 'Spaces of representation disappear into the representation of space - the latter swallowing the former' (Lefebvre, 1992: 398). No element of the dialectic should therefore be considered in isolation, it is at once conceived, perceived, and lived - a 'continual dialectical process that is always changing as perceptions, conceptions, and lived experiences change' (Middleton, 2014; Milgrom, 2008: 270). Shield's (1992) observation of the mutually dependent dialectic is reinforced by Schmid's (2022: 285) consideration of human experience and cognition being a dialectical movement between the lived and the conceived. Lefebvre's intention for the wider dialectic was that it did not result in a Hegelian synthesis, but instead was amorphous, the third dialectical term no longer seen as a culmination (Elden, 2004; Lefebvre, 1999).

Elden (2007: 112) cites Kirsch's (1995) singular simplification of the concept through a park, stating it is designed and conceived in abstraction, but is adapted and transformed beyond the conceived intention as it is perceived and lived differently by social actors and groups. Borden's (2014: 225) exploration of skateboarders in urban spaces demonstrates how these conceived spaces can be reappropriated, creating a 'playground of unlimited potential', as the conceived space of planners is contested by the perceived and lived experiences of the skateboarders. These examples show how the production of social space is not necessarily solely determined by conceived space and how the perceived and lived can equally shape and reciprocally influence produced space.

Outside of geographical context (e.g. Stanek, 2011, Ng, 2010), there are few examples of how this dialectic has been used in research. Watkins' (2005: 213-214) application focused on the theatre, using the dialectic to decode a performance. The script, score and notes were the conceived spaces, abstract elements of the production, and the lived space being the awareness of the cast to the spatial practices, the physical space, routines, behaviours, 'knowing your lines', and the variances and nuances that occur within this space. Watkins was clear that the interplay between each element must be considered as a whole.

Simmons (2021) used the dialectic to explore the production of social spaces for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). He linked the spatial practices to the uniformity of dyadic interaction performed by specialist staff, demonstrating established practices within practitioner literature when dealing with children, alluding to published representations of the educational space. This included reading signs, indications and interactions with the children and responding accordingly through professional knowledge and experience. His reading of the lived

space pulled on the 'differential' element of space (Lefebvre, 1991: 52), an area where conceived elements of space, such as pedagogical resources and routines, were absent, allowing for new forms of social interaction. In this environment, interaction transcended the dyadic, increasing communication between peers and evoking high emotions, including laughter, smiling, happy vocalisations and eye contact. Simmons recognises how each dialectical element influences the other, for example, staff played an important role in developing the interactions prior to the lived experiences, indicating dialectical interaction between expertise, professional practice, and lived experiences of the children.

Ford (2015) aligns the dialectic with a spatial education theory, that of teaching-learning-study. He defines teaching, drawing heavily on Biesta, as 'the act of bringing something new to the student, some idea, concept, object, or action...something that is new to the student, but not necessarily new to the world' (2015: 186). Ford links learning to the measurable, a competency, the know-how to think or take some action and study[ing] to 'perpetual activity', about activity that does not end because it has none, quoting Lewis (2013: 63) in that studying 'leaves the studier open to "the possibilities of a world beyond the current order of things"' (Ford, 2015: 185). For Ford, three elements dialectically interact, teaching holds production and reproduction in tension, interacting with learning, while studying inhabits the lived element of the dialectic.

These examples explore how Lefebvre's concept can be adapted to wider sociological situations. In each one, the dialectical interaction reveals hidden elements, for example, teaching and learning is often considered a singular concept (Biesta, 2015) yet are distinct elements with a dialectical link producing a liminal mid-ground, yet still dialectically influencing study or studying. These liminal elements are those most often unseen, and using the dialectic allows us to explore these further. In the next section, I look at some of these liminal elements that vocational teachers experience as they pass through the dialectic.

### 3.5 The Significance of the Tri-Dimensional Dialectic for Vocational Teachers

This thesis explores how history and policy have shaped vocational education and how this in turn has shaped the vocational teacher. While the term ‘space’ evokes a physical or geographical area, I follow the likes of Watkins (2005), Simmons (2021), and Ford (2015) in repurposing the dialectic, in this instance to critically determine how the teacher is produced through Lefebvre’s theory. Expanding on the graphical representation introduced previously (Figure 1), I use each element as a lens to explore characteristics related to the vocational teacher, before finally pulling them together into a singular graphical representation.

Political interference in FE is common. Following incorporation in 1992, colleges gained more autonomy yet inherited a flood of bureaucracy and a significant increase in accountability (Hodgson et al, 2015). Ball (2003), a critic of managerialist culture in education, introduced the notion of performativity into critical analysis of the education system. He believed that policy reform forced neoliberal frameworks onto organisations, encouraging a competitive environment while creating a conflicting dualism of managerial panopticism and entrepreneurial control. Under New Labour and the electoral slogan of ‘education, education, education’, pressure intensified on schools and teachers to improve, continuing the previous government’s avalanche of education-related policy initiatives and legislation (Unwin and Randhawa, 2022; Tomlinson, 2001: 263). Following incorporation, colleges were financially encouraged to develop market-based, business-focussed approaches to management, resulting in the ‘atomisation of the FE sector’ into competing conglomerates (Smith, 2017: 14).

This dialectical relation between the perceived and conceived elements of vocational education rarely considers those immediately impacted, particularly the happiness and well-being of teachers and students in the lived space. As Reay (2022) laments, this heavily judgmental ethos means too many students live education within a culture of control and compliance. Biesta (2007) suggests that the rise in measurement has at least brought education into the fore, opening the potential for decision-making based on accurate data, although warns though that we measure data that is easier to collect rather than data that matters (2016). Linking with Ball’s (2003) performativity, we have developed a culture in which ‘means become ends in themselves so that targets and indicators of quality become mistaken for quality itself, replacing normative validity with a technical validity’ (Biesta, 2016: 35). This is evidenced by some organisations ‘gaming’ qualifications with little academic merit yet enabling colleges to gain Ofsted’s illustrious ‘outstanding’ badge (Esmond, 2018; Wolf, 2011).

Vocational space in education is therefore complex. Space in FE is determined by multiple factors but frequently suggested to satisfy metrics over pedagogical advantage, shaped primarily by the national economic interest and aesthetics. Smith (2017) noted that specific practical vocational space was reflected positively, however experiences of classroom teaching and wider experiences were manifestly negative, highlighting an ‘abstract space’ of hierarchical design, homogeneity, preferences to the aesthetic, and imposed considerations by non-professionals impacting on everyday lived experiences (2017: 14).

The pressures placed onto teachers though transcend place. The macro-meso-micro pressures are exacerbated by rhythmic policy changes, both educational and social, and these rhythms flow through each element of Lefebvre’s dialectic.

### 3.6 Rhythm in Philosophy

Lefebvre suggested that to understand space, we must attend to rhythms of daily life, considering space and time at once interrelated and interdependent (2019). Elden (2007: 115) states that a ‘solely spatial approach would risk missing the importance of an analysis of rhythms’, and that the analysis is historical and moving, taking into account rhythm experienced through the body.

The term ‘rhythm’, according to Benveniste (1971), relates to the Greek term, *ῥυθμός* (*rhuthmós*), linking with dance and at its root, indicating flow, current or stream (*rhéō*) (Collins, 2022; Simons, 2019; Eldridge, 2018; Miller, 1999). ‘Rhuthmós designates the form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile and fluid, arising from an arrangement which is always subject to change’ (Benveniste, 1971: 285-286). Michon (2020: 26) refers to *ῥυθμός* as a real ‘way of flowing’.

Benveniste (1971: 281) challenges semantics behind the link between Greek and modern Western thought, specifically links between the waves and flow, noting that the sea itself does not necessarily flow (although the river and stream does). He does highlight that the movement of the waves has given rise to the idea of rhythm, and that primordial discovery is inscribed in the term itself.

Simons (2019: 62) dates the first use in the English language to 1560, following the Latin, *rythmus*. The *Cambridge Dictionary* (2023) defines rhythm as a regular pattern of change, especially one that happens in nature. *Collins* (2023) follows suit, but references change in the body, in the seasons, or in the tides, while *Merriam-Webster* (2023) states that rhythm is defined as ‘movement, fluctuation, or variation marked by the regular recurrence or natural flow of related elements’. Wellman and Sturge (2017) reflect on the natural rhythmic occurrences, citing cycles, periods and temporal relationships to which organisms are subject, while Law (2015: 201) includes night and day, life and death, hunger and satisfaction and activity and rest, therefore finding its definition in nature and natural

occurrences (Allan and Evans, 2006: 12). Warner (1988: 2) narrows the definition to 'recurrent cycles in behaviour', using a sinusoidal waveform as a reference to social interaction, noting the smoother highs and lows compared to other waveforms, such as saw tooth, and a closer relationship with biological impulses.

Although time has long been in question for philosophers, rhythm as a concept attracted increased interest in sociological studies with the acceleration of the industrial revolution and the increase in mechanisation, industrialisation, and capitalism (Lyon, 2021; Alhadeff-Jones, 2017). Kirsch (1995) links this technological progression to the production of space, 'commensurate with the rhythms and territories of production, exchange, and consumption and the boundaries of nature' (Kirsch, 1995: 548).

Technical acceleration has forced the compression of time and has fundamentally changed how humans are 'in-the-world', with the acceleration of transport and communication even prior to the industrial revolution in the form of roads and canals creating a disentanglement from time and space (Rosa, 2013: 97). Martin and Miller (2008: 145) align industrialisation with time and space, with the claim that the establishment of the factory system and competitive markets introduced time as 'part and parcel of social regulation'. They state that space has an 'ontological reality, yet its relevance in contemporary social and political life is also a product of the modern era'.

Crespi and Manghani (2020) succinctly document a genealogy of rhythm. Their analysis of rhythm as a philosophical interest starts with Benveniste's etymological examination, moving through Laban and his concept of Eurhythmmy and Kakorhythmmy, which bear resemblance to Lefebvre's own rhythmic characteristics. They explore Bachelard's critique of Bergson, who was notable for his contribution to time and space in philosophy, particularly his view on duration as a continuous flow. Bachelard is notable as one of the few influences referenced by Lefebvre (2014), specifically his book of 1931, *La Rythmanalyse: Société de Psychologie et de Philosophie*. Although not mentioned by Crespi and Manghani, Jaques-Dalcroze's (1931) contribution to rhythm came through an analysis of musical education, suggesting that prior to learning an instrument, students should possess an ensemble of physical and spiritual resources and capacities, citing the consciousness of sound. This should be through ear, voice and sound alongside bone, muscle, and nervous systems - the development of consciousness of bodily rhythm, the theory aligning with, or perhaps influencing Lefebvre's notion of the body as the locus of rhythmic analysis (2019). There are other similarities, for example Jaques-Dalcroze brings in the perception of rhythm through movement, a body in motion through time and space (1931). This perhaps is where the comparison separates, with Lefebvre warning against reducing rhythm to movement. Bode's analysis of Karl Buecher, an early proponent of rhythm in

social science, challenges his perspective of rhythm, stating that the conversion of movement into mechanical action destroyed rhythms, focusing on the quantitative rather than qualitative. The faster the machine and the person works, the bigger the economic effect and the more 'destroyed the rhythm' (Bode, 2014: 61). Crespi and Manghani (2020) continue with their genealogy, citing Foucault's postmodern influence on rhythm, specifically through the 'docile body' concept highlighted in *Discipline and Punish* (1977: 135). Foucault's concept, aligning with Lefebvre's concept of 'dressage', describes a manipulable body that can be used, transformed, and improved. Here Foucault focuses on rhythm and repetition, citing examples such as the march of the army to the beat of the drum through a variety of rigid, rhythmic steps (2020: 43), where repetition is pushed to the point of 'automatism and the memorisation of gestures' (Lefebvre, 2019: 48).

They conclude their genealogy through Barthes' drawing upon Benveniste's concept of rhythm as a form of 'flow', linking rhythm to both a 'co-ordinating temporality and as a form related to issues of space and proximity' (2020: 44). Their penultimate destination is with Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze identifies two types of repetition: cadence and rhythm. The former mere repetition, the latter as a 'dynamic, vitalist force giving birth to the emergence of the new, of the event' (2020: 46). Crespi and Manghani (2020) complete their genealogy with Lefebvre, noting the contradiction with Benveniste's earlier etymological study.

The study of rhythm as a sociological phenomenon was considered by Lefebvre as the culmination of his study of the everyday. The next section looks deeper into the analysis of rhythms, introducing Lefebvre's rhythm analytical theory.

### 3.7 Analysing Rhythms

Lefebvre considered *Rhythm analysis* to be the de facto fourth volume of his occasional series the *Critique of Everyday Life* (1992: 2; 1991: 405) (henceforth *Critique*). It was published posthumously in 1992 and translated into English by Elden and Moore in 2004.

An initial rhythmology or a sociological 'rhythm analysis' was introduced by Lefebvre in the second volume of *Critique* (2014: 526). The term was first suggested by dos Santos and referred to by Bachelard as a means to 'examine rhythms to reconcile and lighten the ambivalences that psychoanalysts find in the disturbed psyche' (1958: 65). There is much of Bachelard's influence in Lefebvre's work on rhythms. Bachelard was interested in the analysis of duration and posited rhythm as the fundamental concept of time; that the 'phenomena of duration are constructed by rhythms' (2016: 14).



Rhythm and space form part of Lefebvre's analysis of the everyday. His early interest in rhythm appeared in *Dialectical Materialism* (1940) where he determined that '[human's] world thus appears as made up of emergences, of forms and of rhythms' (1940: 130). In *Critique* volume I (1947), Lefebvre highlighted the impact of the growth of the urban and the technical on an individual's physiological functions, claiming that people have 'not yet 'adapted' to conditions of life; the speed of sequences and rhythms' (2014: 140). The rapidity of progress discussed in chapter two through increasing industrialisation and globalisation suggests foundation for Lefebvre's claims (Rosa, 2012). In *Critique* volume II, the concept is expanded, bringing in repetition. Lefebvre grounds cyclical time in the cosmic, the rhythms of nature, an organic cycle of birth to death - a series of repetition holding sway over human life. The cyclical is 'social organisation manifesting itself, the linear is the daily grind, the routine' (Lefebvre, 2019: 40).

Rhythm therefore has repetition, yet Lefebvre notes that with every new day we see a new cycle, a difference in repetition without returning to its point of departure. No return is 'absolutely exact, there is no purely repetitive process' (Lefebvre, 1976). He uses an example through the term, 'A = A', where the second A is different by way of it being second (2019). He subsequently posits that difference induced or produced by repetition constitutes the thread of time (2019: 17). Lefebvre notes that industrial techniques have shattered cosmological cyclical time, subordinating this to a linear time, yet without losing the cyclical time scales that overlap them (2019). Harvey (1989: 228) draws upon mediaeval merchants constructing measures of time 'for the orderly conduct of business', symbolised by the clocks and bells calling workers to labour creating a 'chronological net' in which daily life was caught. Natural customs, such as sleep, rest, socialising and eating all remain deeply rooted within a biological and physiological life, intersected by Lefebvre's linear focus on production. He notes that part of the critique of everyday life is to 'study these timescales within the linear time of modern industrial society, examine the defects and disquiet, and consider what metamorphoses are possible in the everyday because of this interaction' (2014: 525-526).

Lefebvre recognises an historic imprint of rhythms, but notes they tend only to see the effects of impersonal laws, without 'coherent relations with actors, ideas, and realities' (Lefebvre, 2019: 16). He also notes measure as being part of the rhythm, stating that 'where there is rhythm, there is also measure' (2019: 18). Rhythm reunites quantitative aspects and elements. These quantitative elements, such as the 'tyranny of clock-time' (Alhadeff-Jones, 2021: 22), impose themselves on the natural bodily rhythms, such as the heart, hunger, and thirst (Lefebvre, 2019: 19). Within the analysis of rhythms, we return to Lefebvre's tri-dimensional dialectical approach. Concerned with dualities, such as life and death and heaven and hell, alongside reductive outcomes of classical analysis, Lefebvre suggests an interactional third term. Believing that Hegel's and Marx's dialectical analysis

has now been understood within metaphysics, a similar approach to his spatial dialectic is suggested, again with the notion that there is not a synthesis with regards to the Hegelian suggestion, instead leaving the terms distinct. Lefebvre posits the trinity of time-space-energy or melody-harmony-rhythm as distinctive elements of analysis (2019: 22). He states that where there is 'interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm' (Lefebvre, 2019: 25), that combines in dialectical interaction through another trinity, listed below, until it reaches a conclusion:

1. Repetition (of movements, gestures, actions, situations, differences),
2. Interference of linear and cyclical processes,
3. Birth, growth, peak, then decline and end.

Lefebvre referred to this rhythmic analysis as *Rhythmanalysis* (2019). The element of repetition, alongside the identification of linear and cyclical processes, featured in *Critique* volume II, with the former alongside another theory, that of 'moments' (2014). The theory of moments was a thread throughout Lefebvre's notion of rhythm (Dakka, 2021; Chen, 2018; Merrifield, 2006). The Lefebvrian moment represents 'the attempt to achieve the total realisation of a possibility' (Lefebvre, 2014: 642). During a certain space and time, the moment disrupts linear duration, it is an opportunity to be seized and invented, 'both metaphorical and practical, palpable, and impalpable, something intense and absolute, yet fleeting and relative' (Merrifield, 2006: 28). All 'the content of moments come from everyday life and yet moments emerge from everyday life in which it gathers its materials of the material it needs' (Lefebvre, 2014: 640). The moment has a form that imposes itself in time and space, becomes a form in itself, defining itself absolutely (2014: 641-642). Moments are 'significant times when existing orthodoxies are open to challenge; moments of crisis, of rupture, of radical recognition of possibilities' (Lefebvre, 2019: 4; Lefebvre, 1991: 429). Lefebvre (1969: 124) considered the French student revolution in 1968 a moment, referring to the rupture the events produced on the superstructure when the hidden contradictions revealed themselves.

Rhythmanalysis allows the study of rhythms to recognise a moment in its lived diversity. It is foremost a 'method and a way of attending to cultural phenomena' (Chen, 2013: 2), with the potential to offer a 'unique way of recognising normative discourses and the nature of cycles and rhythms that underpin human experience' (O'Connor and Fotakopoulou, 2022: 10). Rhythmanalysis presumes a sensitivity to moments, to distinguish their singular existence and to restore them to a constellation (Chen, 2018: 24). Although still largely experimental, rhythmanalysis has been used in cultural studies, geography, production, and urban studies to explore the intricacies of space as it is produced and experienced in everyday life (Farrington, 2020: 4). Glenney and O'Connor (2023: 174) suggest that rhythmanalysis comprises a set of methods; and these will vary according to the project at hand and

the questions it asks, inviting a 'conceptual promiscuity, thinking in unison and mixing disciplines and methods'. Chen refers to this as a 'mode' of analysis (2013: 2). In this sense, rhythmanalysis has much in common with ethnography, sharing some of the methods used in ethnographic research, especially observation (Lyon, 2021: 5; Lefebvre, 2019), as well as shared phenomenological approaches.

Lefebvre's proposed methodology is rarely clear, however as part of his analysis he drew on a set of rhythmic characteristics used to describe and categorise rhythmic occurrences. These bear more than a passing resemblance to examples explored earlier by the likes of Laban and Jaques-Dalcroze and it is these I explore next.

### **3.7.1 Rhythmic Characteristics**

The notion of rhythm brings with it some 'complementary considerations' (Lefebvre, 2019: 25). Lefebvre suggests four conceptual states associated with the analysis of rhythms, with specific relevance to his insistence on the body and bodily state of rhythmic understanding as the loci of measurement. These are:

1. Polyrythmia
2. Eurythmia
3. Arrhythmia
4. Isorhythmia

Of these, isorhythmia, the equality of rhythms, is rare (Lefebvre, 2019: 77). It demonstrates a full equivalence between rhythms, repetition, and frequency (Alhadeff-Jones, 2019: 172). Lefebvre refers to the conductor's baton and the remarkable coordination of rhythm extending across all the performers of the orchestra (2019: 78). Use of the term is rare in literature and appears less frequently in Lefebvre's work and, in this work, I follow suit, and focus on the remaining three.

Polyrythmia, eurhythmia and arrhythmia represent 'three distinct ways to express how the experience of space and time may interact with educational processes' (Alhadeff-Jones, 2019: 176). It follows that the rhythm analyst should then understand the intention of each concept prior to carrying out research and each is worthy of brief analysis.

### 3.7.2 Polyrhythmia

Because of their resonance, regular rhythms reinforce structural symmetries, thus everyday living patterns present [us] with a 'good and thoughtful life in harmony with the seasons and shaping land according to the rhythms of labours' (Bachelard, 2016: 171). The everyday then 'reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia' (Lefebvre, 2019: 25). Every animate body is polyrhythmic, composed of 'diverse rhythms, with each part, each organ or function having its own in a perpetual interaction that constitutes a set or a whole' (Lefebvre, 2019: 96). The body, the locus of Lefebvre's measurement, is the polyrhythmic state, whose rhythms include heartbeat, breathing, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and sleep (Lefebvre, 2019). Each of these may display irregularities, or changing characteristics, but 'cannot be denied to exist' (Simons, 2019: 64). Polyrhythms are the 'natural outcome of several voices or instruments singing or playing together in non-unison' (Simons, 2019: 73), found in environments where uncoordinated, yet heterogeneous rhythms co-exist simultaneously (Alhadeff-Jones, 2019: 174). Christie considers spatial practices as polyrhythmic, each following its 'its rhythm which may cut across, interrupt, or be interrupted by another in a hypercomplexity which is not simply random' (2013: 777). Elden's (2007: 112) earlier example of a leisure park suggests a polyrhythmia, where different actors perceive different opportunities and individual pursuits, through different elements of the park layout and different equipment, at times as intended by the conceived space, at other times contrary to the intentions of the planners.

The body, social lives, and nature are thus polyrhythmic, filled with a multitude of different rhythms, co-existing and interacting with each other (Bristow et al, 2019; Wozniak, 2017). Where these unique and diverse rhythms unite and produce a state of health in the body, or an ensemble in social settings or in nature, Lefebvre introduces the concept of eurhythmia (2019).

### 3.7.3 Euryrhythmia

Jaques-Dalcroze's theory of eurhythmics (1931) foregrounds Lefebvre's symphonic observations of nature. He speaks of listening to nature and discerning a colossal harmony of sounds and rhythms, determining a whole polyrhythm of incomparable richness (1931: 145). Eurhythmia presupposes the polyrhythmic association of different rhythms with one another, creating a eurhythmic state, a state of good health (Lefebvre, 2019: 77-78). Eurhythmia evokes a harmonic response (Alhadeff-Jones, 2019: 175), a bundle, bouquet, or garland of different rhythms co-existing in a metastable equilibrium (2019: 30).

Alhadeff-Jones considers that eurhythmia and rhythmic resonance 'require the capacity to produce a shared space and time that leads to the amplification or the emergence of specific feelings, behaviours, or thoughts' (2019: 175). This is often evident in staffrooms and classrooms, where shared identities and cultures collide, collude and merge, bringing spatial practices alive. A large organisation such as a college relies on a wholly eurhythmic existence, as multiple actors transition perceived, conceived, and lived space at different times, and sometimes liminal ground between, yet still maintaining a harmonious whole. It is no longer enough under neoliberal frameworks and privatisation to focus on teaching practice alone, and organisations are often pulled in multiple directions by multiple stakeholders, with potentially conflicting interests (Bathmaker, 2013). For example, teacher expectations transcend simply teaching. Additional expectations, for example interviewing potential new students, chasing poor attendance, or booking exams, have become responsibilities that each teacher must manage alongside that of designing and delivering a curriculum.

With increasingly wider responsibilities outside of the teaching role, rhythmic disruption is inevitable as expectations start to develop in liminal overlaps, where the teacher's perceived space is in tension with the conceived. It is through this discordance we begin to encounter arrhythmia.

### **3.7.4 Arrhythmia**

The significance of rhythm can perhaps only be 'fully appreciated once it is disrupted'. When a polyrhythmic state collapses, it produces arrhythmia (Bristow, 2019: 242). The term, from the Greek word, *arruthmia*, meaning 'lack of rhythm' (Bristow et al, 2019), is the breaking apart of rhythms (Lefebvre, 2019). Pure discontinuity would not be rhythm, but rather the destruction of rhythm (Bedetti and Meschonnic; 1988: 102), arrhythmia reigns when a circumstance is no longer sustainable (Chen, 2020).

Lefebvre uses multiple terms to describe arrhythmic moments, including a disturbance, a disruption, broken rhythms, rhythms in conflict, and altered rhythms (2019). Alhadeff-Jones characterises arrhythmia as the 'provisional or permanent lack of synchronisation between rhythms' (2019: 173).

Bristow et al (2019: 244) suggest an expansion of arrhythmia within the academic field, linking lack of wellbeing, workaholism and burnout as key examples of the impact of 'academic capitalism'.

Increased bureaucratization and standardisation of working practices, along with increases in administration, have created a 'temporal rigidification' and the introduction of fast-paced rhythms (2019: 244). The challenges facing FE are numerous, budgets have been devastated since 2012

(Sibieta et al, 2021) and the sector endures continuous unabated reform. Other examples include the impact of COVID, highlighted by Gadsby and Smith (2023: 10) as a 'a period of time marked by the disruption of normal of the rhythms of the teachers' everyday'.

Instances of arrhythmia permeate literature on FE. Continued policy reform often works from a macro level through to the micro, where teachers are forced to adapt accordingly. The identification and analysis of arrhythmic occurrences form a substantial part of the findings of this thesis and are discussed in more depth in later chapters.

### **3.8 The Rhythmanalyst**

Lefebvre was not modest in his intention for rhythmanalysis as a methodology, stating, 'it proposes nothing less than to found a new science, a new field of knowledge: the analysis of rhythms; with practical consequences' (2019: 13). Furthermore, his ambition was equally evident, stating that '[R]hythm analysis might eventually even displace psychoanalysis, as being more concrete, more effective, and closer to a pedagogy of appropriation' (1991: 205).

Lefebvre refers to the rhythmanalyst to be able to call on their senses, to go beyond the limits of psychoanalysis and think with their body and not in the abstract. In this he channels Dos Santos and Bachelard, where psychoanalysis offers a 'gloomy view of the immutable power of the unconscious, [while rhythmanalysis] corresponds to a theory that believes in, and in turn strengthens, the human capacity of transformation and renewal' (Brighenti and Kärrholm, 2018: 5). In analysing rhythms, the rhythmanalyst would draw on vision, sound and smell, but more importantly would be able to 'listen' to the world, but first listening to their body; learning rhythms from it, 'in order to re-present it in its entirety in the interpretation, taking their own rhythms as a reference' (Lefebvre, 2019: 29-31), centring the body as a source of epistemological data (Nash, 2020: 18). They become a documentarist who not only hears the 'cries' but also the 'murmurs', the 'noises' and the 'silences' that characterise a place (Chen, 2015: 51). They must then 'simultaneously catch a rhythm and perceive it within the whole, arriving at the concrete through experience' (Lefebvre, 2019: 31). They would draw on their breathing, circulation of the blood, the beatings of the heart and the delivery of a speech. The body, having the capacity to access the relationship between people, place, and time, brings it back into theoretical and empirical research on space and time (Lyon, 2021: 11; Anderson, 2004).

To be able to analyse rhythms, Lefebvre suggests the rhythmanalyst is simultaneously situated inside and outside, a Parisian balcony in his example (2019: 31):

There they must grasp a rhythm, to let themselves go and abandon oneself to the duration, to be grasped by the multiplicity of noises, murmurs, and rhythms, including full awareness of

their own bodily rhythms. They hear the wind, the rain, the storm, yet should also consider a stone, a wall, a trunk, and overlap the rhythms with their differing measures, some slow, some fast, yet simultaneously catch the rhythm within the whole.

There is some ambiguity here as to Lefebvre's use of the term 'grasp'. Lyon's (2019: 67) approach for example considers this to include elements of ethnography, such as 'hanging out' with the workers in a fish market, where interaction occurred with those under observation. I believe Lefebvre's use of the term 'grasp' more broadly suggests a reference point from which rhythm can be measured, an alignment or recognition of an individual's own bodily rhythms that expose rhythmic observations more lucidly. As Lefebvre (2019: 32) suggests, a rhythmanalyst must make themselves more sensitive to time than spaces, 'to listen to a house, a street or a town as an audience listens to symphony'.

Rhythmanalysis clearly has qualitative roots as a methodology. Lefebvre alludes to an 'interdisciplinary approach without omitting the spatial and places' (2019: 32) but notes similarities for example with phenomenological approaches, albeit as tools in the process as opposed to a distinct methodology (2019). His own rhythmanalysis of a Mediterranean City penned the rhythmanalyst as neither psychologist, sociologist, anthropologist, nor economist, but bordering on each in turn, using tools from each while adopting a transdisciplinary approach (2019: 94). He includes drawing on quantitative elements, including physics and mathematics, in the analysis of rhythm (2019: 32). He suggests a marked link beyond ethnographical and phenomenological observations and draws on poetry and the arts in the analysis of rhythm, stating that '[the rhythmanalyst] seems close to the poet, that art and theatre have always brought something to the everyday, but not reflected on it' (2019: 35). Chen (2015) does much to link rhythmanalysis to phenomenology, suggesting similarities between each. She highlights that that they resist abstraction and simplification, they break the problematic of subjectivism and objectivism and that they reinstate sensual experiences as central to their operation, suggesting that the link between the rhythmanalytical and the phenomenological is potentially closer than Lefebvre initially suggests.

The rhythmanalyst then is a multifaceted observer, not just of time and experience, but of the rhythms that dominate the everyday. They use their body as a central tool to learn and in time, analyse and measure rhythm, determine polyrhythms, uncover elements of eurhythmia and instances of arrhythmia that interact, dissect, and document and uncover the familiar and unfamiliar in the everyday. Lefebvre links rhythm to dressage, stating it determines the majority of rhythms (2019: 49). He suggests that the power and realisation of pedagogy is through these rhythms (Hopwood, 2014). This interpretation of dressage as a concept has much in common with the development of the vocational learner, particularly the repetitive practice of developing motor skills toward a mastery of

subject, such as within construction where a plasterer improves through time, practice, and experience. The rhythmic model establishes itself over the course of dressage, convenient for educational establishments. Learning ‘has its own rhythm, which educators know, and it is through rhythms that this model establishes itself’ (Lefebvre, 2019: 50).

Lefebvre’s analysis of dressage was similar in concept to Foucault’s. In his analysis of Western penal systems, Foucault (2019) analysed the concept of the ‘docile body’. Using the soldier as a centre of focus, Foucault noted that discipline in the classical age discovered the body as object and target of power, allowing the body to be ‘subjected, used, transformed, and improved’ (2019: 136). Foucault suggested that this form of dressage develops a blind obedience through a correlation of the body and the gesture, creating a form of control (2019: 152). Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of ‘habitus’ similarly suggests the shaping of the body through a socially-derived set of techniques, habits and practices of class, gender, ethnicity and nationality, determining an inherent, ‘second nature’ (Dakka and Smith, 2019; Moravec, 2022: 58).

The suggestion that dressage and vocational education are linked is implied through Lefebvre’s analysis. The act of learning through repetition is a core tenet of vocational education, however all teaching contains at least elements of rhythm, from simplifying organisational complexities into routines, through to ensuring learning environments are predictable, welcoming, and enabling. Teachers organise and orchestrate learning through variations, repetitions, and the introduction of new material (Mathison, 2015). Identifying rhythms presents some challenges. In certain instances, rhythms are obvious, for example the ringing of a bell at certain points to indicate the end of sessions. In others, we have to determine rhythm.

### **3.9 Opportunities and of Limitations of Rhythmanalysis**

Lefebvre’s intention for the rhythmanalyst is overlaid with grandeur. Aside from the intention to found a new science, he suggests that it could ultimately sit alongside psychoanalysis as a means to ‘listen to the world’ (2019: 29). Despite these claims, in many respects rhythmanalysis remains an experimental methodology, and I find a lack of reconciliation in literature a challenging element, contrary to Lefebvre’s intention that philosophical theories become a tool for change.

Chen (2017, 2013) and Lyon (2021) have produced enlightening studies on the analysis of rhythms, building on Lefebvre’s shorter suggestions from *Rhythmanalysis*. Other examples include researching synchronicities in children’s everyday lives (O’Connor and Fotakopoulou, 2020), education in South Africa (Christie, 2013), low carbon futures (Walker, 2020), debt dressage (Wozniak, 2017), and London (Nash, 2020; Chen, 2013). Lyon (2021) shares her experience of a practical example of a



rhythmanalysis of Billingsgate Fish Market. There are some interesting points to note about her approach to the methodology. Utilising time-lapse recording, similar to that utilised by Dakka and Smith in their examination of a Midlands university (2019), she documents much in the way of rhythmic analysis of the workings of the market. Supplementing the recording is interaction between the rhythm analyst and the workers. Superficially, much rests on the analysis of the time-lapse recording, but these interactions are also key to the wider analysis, bringing substance and perspective to her interpretation.

As a methodological tool to document everyday life, I believe rhythm analysis adds to sociological research tools. I think Farrington's (2020: 4) comments on the uses of the methodology to support a praxis that helps users in everyday rather than 'how well it informs the systematic study of capitalism at a more abstract level' is a valid observation and more relevant to my own approach. The malleable nature of Lefebvre's proposed methodology though allows for differences in analytical attention, for example, O'Connor and Fotakopoulou (2020: 10) open the potential for rhythm analysis to:

offer a unique way of both recognising the normative discourses and institutions which dictate contemporary everyday life whilst also attempting to understand the timeless nature of the cycles and rhythms that underpin human experience.

The approach by Bristow et al (2019) differed, instead focussing on academic arrhythmia, highlighting examples of mechanistic practises increasing rhythmic frequency, such as performance management techniques designed to 'quicken the pace', produce faster turnaround of work and better prepare themselves for the increasing bureaucratic burden within academia.

Ford (2022) considers Lefebvre's theory as no longer a sufficient response to capitalism. Changes to the mode of production since Lefebvre theorised the concept of linear and cyclical clashes have resulted in a shift where capitalism rhythmically incorporates both. Ford identifies the abstract determinations of linearity and an open determinacy of the cyclical, resulting in the rhythm of capital sounding louder and deeper (2022: 2). The expectational immediacy of twenty-first Century interconnectedness suggests that, materially at least, differentiated cycles are less significant than when Lefebvre first considered them, creating an arrhythmic occurrence within itself. Arguably this interconnectedness has increased abstraction further. Ford (2022) suggests that we might instead move to an 'arrhythm analysis', a form of listening as not-listening, to try to listen to that which can't be heard.

While these may indicate some limitations of rhythm analysis, they may also prove how pliable an approach it is. Many examples involve physical locations, perhaps after Lefebvre's first exploration of

Parisien streets and Mediterranean cities, but some have taken the concept further. Edensor and Holloway (2008) analyse the rhythms of a coach tour in Ireland, focussing on the tour itself rather than the place. They highlight a spatio-temporal element, not just exploring how rhythm passes through a place, but how the passing through space contributes to the creation of rhythms, with humans acting as the 'rhythm maker' (2008: 424). Their analysis of rhythm and arrhythmia placed tourists within a rhythmic machine (a coach), through a series of contrived performances, often through abstracted experience within an air-conditioned bubble. The controlled, almost orchestrated movement of the body through the tourist experience displaying rhythmic repetition, but in line with Lefebvre's suggestion, is never the same. Dakka and Wade (2018: 194) explore academic writing through rhythmanalysis, examining the competing pressures, suggesting that writing might be a 'rhythmic occurrence, enmeshed in the everyday, as a time written into everyday life'. Their suggestion aligns with Ford's view of rhythmanalysis and Lefebvre's intention of challenging the rhythmanalyst to reach a eurhythmic state through the body, but using the body to occupy and expand, to become those cracks and interstices of resistance, subverting and disorienting dominated spaces. They suggest that resistance itself is an arrhythmic intervention, rupturing rhythmic flows (2018: 195).

Literature suggests that the opportunity to use rhythmanalysis effectively is not confined to physical experiences, nor is it confined to a singular outcome; neither a reflexive semi-ethnographical, phenomenological study, nor brutal empirical critique of capitalist expansionism. It is supple enough to serve a multitude of research opportunities and within that, the opportunity to observe, absorb and document rhythmic instances with a view to identifying opportunities for change.

### **3.10 Concluding Remarks**

Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis enables a wide examination of lived experience. The flexibility of the methodology allows for both an ethnographic and phenomenological approach, with a particular focus on the body as a rhythmic reference, practically allowing wider senses to be called into the analysis. Lefebvre's approach may not be immediately accessible, but through his rhythmic characteristics, I later move to isolate and define rhythms in the lived vocational social space. As Lefebvre stated, the difference induced or produced by repetitions constitute the thread of time (2019: 17), and it is through these threads we can document both the past and the present and perhaps better influence the future.

## Chapter 4: The Production of the Vocational Teacher

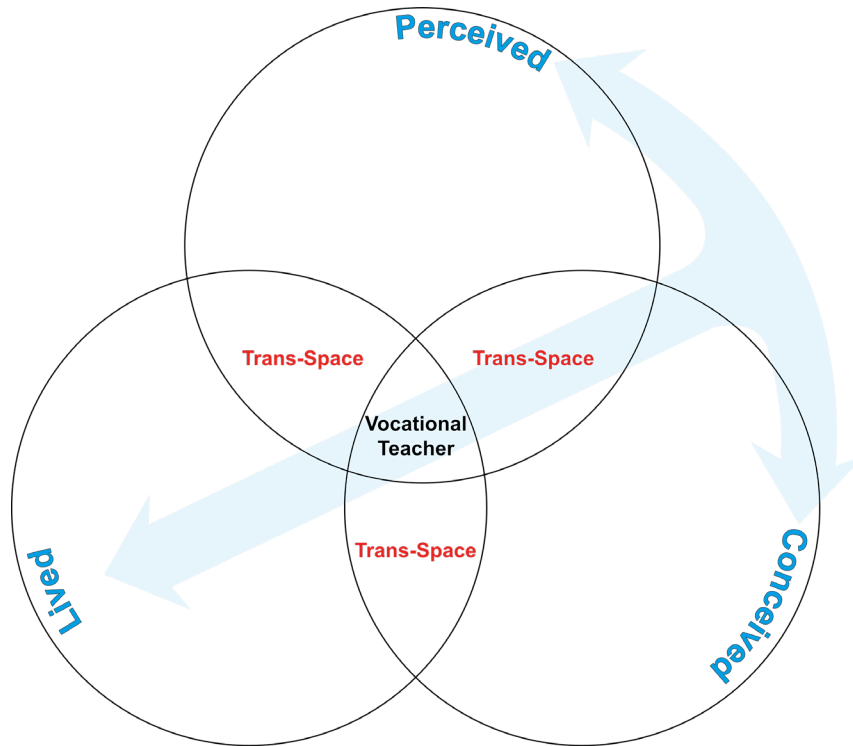
### 4.1 Introduction

This thesis explores how the vocational teacher is produced through historical rhythms of policy and reform. I deliberately reference a 'teacher' in this thesis as opposed to the more traditional 'lecturer' as I believe that a fundamental shift, explored through literature, suggests that they have transcended the traditional connotations of a lecturer who didactically imparts information from the front of a classroom.

As explored in the previous chapter, Lefebvre posited the 'production of space' (1991), using a tri-dimensional dialectic to explore the process of the production of space within a historical period. While Lefebvre's exploration of space was primarily associated with analysing how humans create a 'social reality,' and 'a set of relations and forms' (1991: 116), there is some resonance with Hall's suggestion of the '*production of self*' (1996: 13, emphasis in original), which enhances Goffman's (1959) theory of the 'performance', explored later in this chapter.

Through this thesis, I develop Lefebvre's tri-dimensional dialectic to explore how the dual professional is conceived and perceived in the vocational space, how the abstract conception is formed, and how lived spaces of contestation combine to produce the 'vocational teacher'. Incorporating Wade's (2008: 280) suggestion of trans-space into Lefebvre's dialectic, 'the rapid and fluid movement between different types of space, often without one being aware of the fluctuation', I examine each element of the triad individually and in the context of vocational education and teachers. Rather than following Lefebvre's original intention of the dialectic to decode geographical space, I move to repurpose the dialectic to instead determine how the vocational teacher is produced, moving the dialectic to focus on the production of the 'self' as opposed to 'space'.

To assist understanding in this analysis, I have adapted the diagrammatic translation of Lefebvre's dialectic to incorporate the concept of trans-space, placing the vocational teacher at its core (figure 2). As I develop the thesis and analyse the data through Lefebvre's dialectic, I add contributions from participants into this diagram, building finally to a complete model.



*Figure 2 - Production of the Vocational Teacher*

## 4.2 The Vocational Teacher in the Perceived Space

I believe that the vocational teacher enters education through the perceived space and use this entrance point as the introduction to the production of the self within the dialectic. FE holds an attraction to the vocational teacher, in many instances through what Page (2013: 823) clinically observes as an 'educationally redemptive' experience, with many having performed toward the lower end of compulsory education and finding faith and belief in the vocational education that followed (Le Gallais, 2006a). Experiences in FE for many are positive, potentially driven by a 'second chance' option after school 'failures' alongside better support, better relationships, and smaller class sizes (Anderson and Peart, 2015). Avis and Bathmaker (2006: 175) consider FE to offer an 'adulthood' that enabled a better educational engagement than had often previously been experienced, and in some instances, is 'life changing' (Mckelvey and Andrews, 1998: 361; Le Gallais, 2006a: 164). Furthermore, it is more

common for industry professionals to move into FE based on their industrial expertise and the training they received attending college, acknowledging 'a debt of gratitude' to the sector (Page, 2013: 821; Le Gallais, 2006a: 165).

In their examination of the recruitment of teachers from industry, Strebler et al (2005) highlighted perceptions of working within a college formed from previous experiences. Amongst the positives were the ability to be able to pass on knowledge to a new generation, to teach adult learners, to help students with problems, and to be appreciated for their efforts. In an earlier study, McKelvey and Andrews (1998: 361) highlighted a slight increase in job security and the 'desire to pass on knowledge or love of a subject or vocational skill and expertise' - elements reinforced by Le Gallais' study (2006a). For many vocational teachers, entry into teaching is rarely part of a longer-term plan. It can be accidental through an opportunity at a particular moment of time (Smithers, 2018; Page, 2013; Gleeson et al, 2007: 449; Le Gallais, 2006a) or through opportunities gained through part time engagement alongside the day-job, referred to by Gleeson and James (2007: 733) as the 'long interview'. Le Gallais' (2006a) participants unanimously stated they had no prior desire to enter teaching.

Perceptions of teaching rarely match the reality (Bergmark et al 2018; Avis and Bathmaker, 2005; 2006). Disillusionment with bureaucracy, systems and general administration can be something of a shock, alongside the often-unsociable working hours, lack of professionalism, and poor management practices (Page, 2013: 829; Avis and Bathmaker, 2007; Strebler et al, 2005). Despite some believing that teaching would be easier, expecting fewer hours, lower workload, and less stress (Page, 2013), excessive paperwork and long hours feature throughout literature, with Strebler (2005) citing the first two years as the most difficult.

It is unclear what the impact this has on retaining new teachers. Sibieta and Tahir's (2023) quantitative report for the Institute of Fiscal Studies found that a quarter of college teachers left the profession after only one year, increasing to half after three years, the largest proportion leaving education altogether. The underlying suggestion relates to pay, where they highlight the gap between the school and college sector and a median salary fall since 2010 of 19%. Hanley and Orr's (2019: 108) study determined that applicants were 'not only expected to take a wage cut, but often required to fulfil a more onerous role', with a 'whole heap of bureaucracy and things which are attached to teaching'.

The perceived element of the vocational teacher often differs from the reality of the role. The expectation is not just an expertise in their vocation, but also a mastery of teaching. In literature, this is sometimes referred to as the dual professional.

### 4.3 The Dual Professional in the Conceived Space

The expectation of professionalism in both teaching and vocational subject area is a conceived expectation placed on the vocational teacher. For example, in the *Post-16 Skills Plan and Independent Report on Technical Education* (2016), the Government state a significant requirement for the successful delivery of technical education is to have an expert teacher who should have ‘well-developed pedagogical skills, mastery of their field, and up-to-date industry experience’ (Sainsbury, 2016: 66). Governmental organisations, industry reports, and educational foundations often reference these as ‘dual professionals’ (e.g. ETF, 2018; CAVTL, 2013; IfL, 2012).

Many FE teachers have established a profession prior to entering teaching, giving them the expertise and credibility required for their role (Robson, 1998b: 44). Early use of the ‘dual professional’ label appears in Robson’s (1998) condemnation of post-incorporation FE. In identifying the dual professional, she identified failures of the developing ‘managerialist culture’ in FE to support development of the teaching identity beyond that of their original profession. The phrase is thought to have found wider and more formal recognition in FE through the Institute for Learning (IfL). The IfL suggested dual professionalism being an individual with ‘deep knowledge, conceptual understanding and expertise in teaching and learning processes and contexts, matched with expert subject knowledge and skills’ (IfL, 2012: 2). The IfL started as a voluntary body formed in 2002 with the aim of acting as the professional body for teachers and trainers in the lifelong learning sector, eventually becoming the enforcing body for mandatory teaching qualifications in 2007. Teachers were required to register with the IfL, conferring a licence to practise and a commitment to undertake continuous professional development (Plowright and Barr, 2012).

This conceived space clashed with the perceived, creating a tension and a frustration amongst vocational teachers (Plowright and Barr, 2012), as the inference was that a ‘professionally qualified’ teacher was the solution to developing the next generation of skilled workers. For many, including myself, this was patronising, as we felt vocational experience, skills, and qualifications were the most significant factors in educating students for industry. Furthermore, the large majority were not prepared to personally pay for this perceived ‘privilege’ as the government demanded (UCU, 2011). Regardless, the plan was to have all teachers fully trained by 2010, with new full-time entrants to be qualified within two years of starting (Lucas, 2006; IfL, 2009). However, by 2012, the requirement under the coalition government was repealed and became voluntary, suggesting that teacher learning, development and qualifications should be sector-led and determined by the employing educational institute (Kirk, 2019). Despite the ETF’s recommendations for individual personal development (CAVTL, 2013), Kirk (2019) found that many of her participants received little in the way

of vocational upskilling to support respective trades or professions, and the maintaining of industrial currency was often through individual endeavour, rather than organisational encouragement. Broad's study (2013) of occupational development found that occupational expertise was not valued by organisations, and workload increases meant that time to develop was rarely available.

Robson (1998: 603) lamented the lack of support for a full professional identity for the FE teacher and the prioritisation of the first occupational identity, stating that the dual professional should be a source of strength, yet the competing identities can result in confusion and anomaly. Perhaps even more disquieting, despite attempts at formal recognition, Kirk (2019) and Le Gallais (2006a) discovered that almost every participant in their similar analyses had not heard of the term, 'dual professional'.

Almost all prominent contributors to the discourse on dual professionalism for vocational teachers agree that there should be more recognition and support for practising professionals. Aside from the short-lived expectation between 2007 and 2012 for teachers in FE to be qualified, there has been little attention on the competing identities and cultures found throughout vocational FE. It is often these identities and cultures that separate vocational teaching from that of the more academic, 'straight from university into teaching' individuals (Kirk, 2019; Le Gallais, 2006a; Robson et al, 2004).

While dual professionalism has significance to vocational teachers, outside of FE the term is less recognised. Two areas where the phrase does occur are within higher education and within medical professions. There are parallels between nursing and teaching that occur within the literature. Adams (2011: 887) discusses the nurse educator and notes that both identities have 'laboured under the historical weight of generalisation, misrepresentation and the view that society has of these practitioners as paragons of virtue'. Adams considers a challenge to professionalism across both fields in an assumption that both elements of nurse educators are altruistic pursuits (2011), a notion reinforced by Stoddard and Brownfield's (2016) examination of clinician-educators. Interestingly, counter views of professionalism are offered by both, with the former claiming nurses and teachers have a consistently high public view, with the latter concerned with the erosion of confidence. That Adam's source is from 2008 may reinforce the rapid decline in the succeeding decade highlighted by Kraft and Lyon (2022). Adams (2011) is committed in her belief that the nurse educator sees themselves as a nurse first and foremost above that of a teacher. This, in her opinion, creates a 'role crisis' (2011: 889), referring 'not only to a crisis in professionalism, but also the absence of a role identity'. The resultant situation is where they are neither nurse nor teacher, blurring roles, boundaries, and designations, and unable to authenticate their professional status. Hackett et al (2016) identified similar limitations, with almost identical language. Their study concluded that, although the roles

were viewed positively, expectations on the role should be better managed to enable wider support. Whilst they were generally positive about the role, they considered a collaborative approach with the organisation and relevant HE authority would better bridge the theory-practice gap.

Stronach et al.'s (2002) investigation of teachers and nurse identities found differences in approach to professionalism. They counterclaim notions of dualism, instead identifying mini-narratives of identities, referred to as 'shards', where professionals presented a shifting and unstable state of being. These ranged from pressured individuals, the subject specialist, and the convinced professional in teachers, to the 'blurred role' of the nurse, the bed manager, and the evidence-based practitioner. They concluded with teachers experiencing their professionalism as something they had lost, with nurses as something they had failed to find - 'a professional' is plural and 'the professional' a false singularity (2002: 117).

Despite formal attempts at recognition through government-sponsored federations, there are questions as to whether either teaching or vocational specialisms are considered in themselves a profession or the practitioners professionals. The question of identity through professionalism is of interest to the production of the vocational teacher, however before exploring identity, I briefly explore how 'professions' relate to vocational education and whether or not we consider the extent to which the notions of dual professionalism and the dual professional are meaningful.

#### **4.3.1 Where does professionalism sit?**

The term 'dual professional' fundamentally suggests that an individual has two professions. This could perhaps be described in post-modernity as a 'multiple-professional' (Crawley, 2014: 121) as the rapid acceleration of technology presents a more uncertain future, and the impact of generational events, such as the global financial crash in 2008 and COVID in 2020, continue to heavily influence policy and wider discourse. The 'job for life' phenomena experienced by previous generations has changed, with up to 46% of people in 2017 admitting to quitting a job and retraining, and nearly a quarter of workers involved in the 'great resignation' in 2021 (Britland, 2017; Brignall, 2021). Whilst we refer to the dual professional phrase here specifically in terms of vocational education, arguably this seems more relevant to society than ever before.

The term 'profession' is loose and often interpreted differently within different contexts, ranging from Stronach's (2002: 110) statement that 'the 'professional' is a construct born of methodological reduction, rhetorical inflation, and universalist excess', to Carr's (2000: 21) opening statement as someone who 'gets paid for what they do'. Clearly then defining the terms 'profession' or



'professional' is challenging. Whitty (2000: 281) notes that sociologists of the 50s and 60s compiled lists of characteristics that any group classifying themselves as professional should have, determining amongst others 'code of professional conduct oriented towards the 'public good' and a powerful professional organisation'. Collins (2023) defines a profession as 'a type of job that requires advanced education or training'. Hoyle (2008) highlights the aspirational nature of the term, linking it to psychic rewards of remuneration, congenial work conditions, and self-worth. Carr (2000) links the term to specific occupations, such as a doctor or lawyer. These occupational definitions are expanded by Gleeson (2006), further separating professionals into public services, including civil servants and nurses.

Hoyle (2001: 145) examines teachers and the term profession in some depth. He notes a classification change by the Office of National Statistics in 2001 resulting in the designation of teaching as a formal profession however equally states that there is 'unlikely to be a universal, unequivocal acceptance of teaching as a profession at a semantic level', and that neither the public nor the key reference groups are likely to be impressed by this fact. Robson et al (2004: 185) agree, stating that arguments thus far have been unproductive and chiefly confined to schoolteachers as opposed to FE teachers. Whitty (2000: 282) though determines the fluidity of the term and suggests the fact that we talk about the 'teaching profession', means that regardless of criteria, teaching is a profession. Clow (2001) argues against the professional definition, focussing on the right to teach in FE without a relevant educational qualification. Although this briefly achieved attention in FE in 2007 with the introduction of mandatory teacher qualifications, this was repealed in 2012 and the requirement to hold a teaching qualification removed, potentially de-professionalising teaching. Hoyle (2008: 289) is critical of both the Conservative and New Labour governments in the de-professionalisation of teaching through educational reform, as self-regulated bodies were replaced by a mixture of managerial and market forms, resulting in a loss of teacher autonomy. Robson et al (2004: 186) also cite this lack of autonomy over what is taught as reducing professional credibility, with the individual lacking a personal pedagogy tied to professional values and culture, exacerbated by the shift toward measurement of individual learner competency explored in chapter two. A final consideration around language are the terms 'professionalism' and 'professionality'. Gleeson and Knights (2006) split the definitions, linking the former with the managerial elements of the professional, or structure, and the latter with the individual identity, or agency.

With a specific focus on vocational teachers, there are questions as to whether the vocation itself is considered a profession. Sarastuen (2020) specifically focuses on the term 'vocational worker' making the transition into the teaching profession, suggesting that vocational workers do not fall under the 'professional' category. Le Gallais acknowledges this, suggesting that lecturers transitioned from a

*trade* to a profession (2006a: 17, my emphasis), although she further states that the lecturers possessed many elements associated with a profession, including the development of specialised knowledge (2006a: 223). Evett (2003: 400) disagrees, stating that the advanced division of labour within modern societies, along with economic realities, suggest that non-professionals must place an element of trust in professional workers, including electricians and plumbers alongside doctors and lawyers. Robson et al (2004) also bring into question professionalism, linking prior industrial experience alongside the teacher professionalism into wider discourse. They specifically highlight the difference between a schoolteacher and a FE teacher, using the example of the former dealing with parents while the latter deal with employers. Although outside of the scope of this thesis, the expectations in 2024 have shifted considerably and vocational teachers in FE have less exposure to industry and more to parents and other external stakeholders, including social workers and safeguarding agencies, as rates of probable mental disorders have increased in 17–19-year-olds from one in ten to one in six between 2017 and 2021 (People, 2021).

A final consideration here when exploring professionalism is an observation by Evans (2008: 24-25), linking professionalism to a culture that ‘delineates the work, roles and responsibilities, key functions and remits, range of requisite skills and knowledge, and the general nature of work-related tasks’. She posits that professionalism is seen as the ‘identification and expression of what is required and expected of members of a profession’ (2008: 25).

Professionalism to some indicates a belonging to a specific, similarly trained and experienced group. As such, I move to explore vocational identities and further examine how these identities often shape within these collectivities and how common experiences form part of both the individual and a shared communal belief.

### **4.3.2 How Identities Shape the Vocational Teacher**

As my repurposing of the tri-dimensional dialectic aims to explore how the vocational teacher, or the self, is produced through the perceived, conceived, and lived elements of Lefebvre’s theory, identity has an important role in how the teacher is produced. I acknowledge that identity is a large and complex subject, however I believe it requires more than a cursory exploration and plays a significant part in the formation of the vocational teacher through Lefebvre’s dialectic.

The teaching of a vocational subject focusses on knowledge and skills acquired from occupational experience, rather than knowledge gained at university (Fejes and Köpsén, 2014). Much of the focus on vocational education is through teacher training or pedagogy (e.g. Kirk, 2019; Reddy, 2014; Lahiff,

2014), students (e.g. Dobraszczyk, 2021; Egan, 2016; Dalby, 2014), or from the perspective of middle managers (Page, 2013). Le Gallais' (2006a) research provides a rare backdrop to this thesis, focussing on vocational teachers in construction, predominantly employed for their industrial experience (Le Gallais, 2006: 36; Page, 2013). Le Gallais explored identities in flux, suggesting that their vocational background was their dominant identity.

As a starting point, Jenkins (2008: 5) defines identity as the 'human capacity – rooted in language – to know 'who's who' (and hence 'what's what'), knowing who we and others are and think, as individuals and as members of collectivities'. Collectivities around dual professionalism share common educational backgrounds, vocational experience, and professional training, often alongside registration with professional societies and associations (Evet, 2003: 401). Durkheim (2005) claimed that sociology cannot itself deal with groups without tackling the individual, yet often we find the two interlinked. As Orr and Simmons (2010: 80) note, 'identity is only meaningful within a social space through relating to others', supported by Wenger (1998: 145), who states that identity consists of 'negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities'.

Carr (2000) separates the skill and experience associated with vocational education from the wider performative elements of teaching, highlighting a dramatic dimension more closely linking it to a performing art rather than a skill. Goffman (1959: 32) posited that identity is part of a performance, a front either intentionally or unwittingly employed by an individual during this performance for the benefit of others within a social group. Working within teams provides an extension of this performance to others within that team, forcing a set of social norms to often be displayed within that team that is externally played out to those outside.

Hall (1996: 2) considers identification in preference to identity, suggesting 'recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group'. It is this personal dualism that Durkheim (2005) explores, dividing the person between the individual and the social – an extension of society, the latter a collective shared with others. Goffman (1956) identified that when actors gather in teams, there is a tendency to perform for each other, forming a bond of reciprocal dependence. This team or collectivity is often joined by an intersubjective significance, however small, which in the context of this thesis could be a specific vocational team, such as in Le Gallais' (2006a) case study of construction teachers, making much of the working-class background they professed to share. Le Gallais heavily referenced Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, an unconscious formation of being through social interaction from early childhood, in the formation of teacher identity, where similar socio-economic experiences and traditional apprenticeships created a

reciprocal understanding, portrayed through Goffman's performance theory, and reinforced through actor relationships within teams.

From a teaching perspective, the performance must be maintained – the perception of the identity of both individual and the team intrinsically linked. Le Gallais' (2006a) case study demonstrated that most participants still occupied the point of reference of their original profession rather than as teachers, with the credibility of the team bound to their prior industrial and commercial experiences. This example is perhaps best played out through an observation from a participant in Le Gallais' study, claiming that teachers who came straight into teaching without industrial experience earned little respect from 'the lads' (2006a: 193), a phenomenon I have encountered personally at multiple organisations. This creates the formation of cliques - situations where teams form within teams (Goffman, 1959). New teachers questioned the experience of the 'old hands', having spent much time away from industry, considering their recent trade experience to hold advantage within the performance team. As Goffman highlights, this clique often co-operates with the performance regardless, tactfully concealing their exclusiveness from non-members (1956: 84) but advertising it 'snobbishly' to others, also exposed by Le Gallais (2006a).

Sachs (2001: 153) defines professional identity as a 'set of attributes imposed upon the teaching profession, either by outsiders or members of the teaching fraternity itself'. Gleason (1983: 914) cites Erikson (1959), admitting that identity is hard to grasp, as it is a process in both the core of the individual and the core of their communal culture, a dialectically-derived ultimate identity. In Le Gallais' examination, all but one of the construction lecturers related their sense of professionalism back to their trades, with which they identify over and above their teacher identities (2006a: 225). As Orr and Simmons (2010: 5) note, by consequence, their status as a 'professional teacher' is not what gives them their identity and self-esteem (Le Gallais, 2006a: 231), suggesting that attitudes had not moved since Robson (1998) posited a similar question. Clow (2001) notes similar, referring to them as 'ex-officio' Professionals, a professionalism entirely based on their previous role rather than that of a teacher, their prior profession being the one they recognise.

Kirk's (2019) later research suggests that attitudes may have not changed, and that since incorporation in 1992, there is still a reluctance to develop as dual professionals. Both Kirk (2019) and Le Gallais (2006a: 197) claim that their sense of collective identity is so strong that, even when they left their trade to enter teaching, they are still psychologically bound to it. Tyler and Dymock's (2021) analysis of professional identities in vocational education in Australia draws heavily on UK research, but almost uniquely contradicts the finding of Le Gallais and Kirk, with all participants considering themselves professionals. Suggestions that this alliance changes with length of teaching experience

are less well documented (Fejes and Köpsén, 2012), with only Smith (2018) linking the two. In Le Gallais' (2006a: 192) study, all but three of the lecturers felt capable of returning to their respectful industries, a phenomenon later coined by Esmond and Wood (2018) as, 'morphostasis'.

While identity is complex, literature suggests that it is a fundamental consideration when discussing vocational teachers and has a strong influence on the perceived element of Lefebvre's dialectic. Previous literature overwhelmingly suggests an alignment with their previous occupations and identity over that of a teacher, creating an anchor point into Lefebvre's dialectic.

## 4.4 The Third Space as the Lived

Lived space, or *espace vécu*, forms the third element of Lefebvre's dialectic. Lefebvre (1991) considered lived space that of everyday life. The dialectical interaction between the perceived, the often-altruistic reasons for entering teaching, and the conceived, the notion of the dual professional expertly navigating vocational and teacher identities in amongst a political and bureaucratic environment, can result in tension. Kirk's (2019) thesis alludes to this - *A Plumber Who Teaches or Teacher of Plumbing?* - in which she explores struggles faced by plumbing teachers attempting to adapt to organisational professional development.

The notion of the dual professional may be reductive in understanding this tension, as new pressures demand more of the vocational teacher. Gleeson and James' (2007) examination of professionalism suggest that FE teachers are becoming learning professionals, and the dualism is a link between being a professional specialist at the same time as being a professional teacher, occupying the trans-space between the perceived and the conceived. Lefebvre (2019: 20) questions dualities, preferring a tri-dimensional dialectical approach to analysis through Hegel, notably: *thesis–antithesis–synthesis* (italics in original), sanctifying the third term, stating that 'dialectical analysis observes or constitutes the relations between three terms, which change according to circumstance: going from conflict to alliance and back again' (2019: 21). Lefebvre's dialectical analysis suggests more of a reflexive, mutually influential dialectical interaction rather than a resultant synthesis.

Rhythms of history and policy have resulted in the teacher combating a bureaucratic mix of reform and neoliberal frameworks alongside teaching commitments (Ball, 2003). Gleeson and Knights (2006) agreed, positing that dualistic thinking tends to 'depict professional practice as either self-serving or in the submissive service of neoliberal reform' (2006: 291). Sachs (2010: 151) sceptically notes the claim that, 'efficient management can solve any problem', resolving that neoliberal policies have

produced conditions for an alternative form of teacher professional to emerge, in line with allocation of funds (2010: 152).

Macro policy influence contrasts with a dualism. Lucas, Claxton, and Spencer (2012) highlighted an impact of managerialism being the unhelpful perception that vocational expertise alone is an adequate basis for teaching, resulting in no requirement to hold teaching qualifications. Evidence suggests that failure to develop the teacher has a detrimental effect on students, for example Berliner's (2004: 26) widely cited paper explores teaching expertise, determining that expert teachers have 'learned the skills required to increase their students' test scores beyond that of non-expert or less-accomplished teachers'.

A third space or concept has become more widely used in literature. Smith (2018), Kirk (2019) and Spours and Hodgson (2013) for example all reference some form of a trinity. Smith (2018) proffers the 'dual professionalism plus' concept, with additional assumptions of responsibility and autonomy to choose developmental actions to best support successful achievement and positive experience of students. Others refer to a 'triple professional' (Woodley; 2021; Smith, 2018; Spours; 2015), Tyler and Dymock's (2021: 9) participant for example stated that he was a 'tradesman and a teacher', but not working as a tradesman, entering that 'grey area in between'. Page's (2013) view differs slightly, with a further element of professionalism forming a third identity, that of the in-service teacher trainee, experienced by vocational teachers entering teaching directly from industry. Gleeson et al (2005: 446) split the dualism of those framed by external cycles of policy and funding against those searching for stronger identity and meaning within their work contexts.

Outside of FE, in their examination of the clinician-educator, Stoddard and Brownfield (2016) move to suggest that collaboration with education professionals is an alternative to dual professionalism that provides a more efficient means of developing an individual whilst remaining current in their specialist discipline. They highlight the increased responsibility of both the professional educator and the clinician potentially forcing a collaborative approach to maximise effectiveness in both. They also, alongside Reay (2022), suggest that teachers are suffering from the effects of a low-trust culture and the infantilising of a profession, eroding public confidence. This appears elsewhere in the literature, evidenced through multiple examples of reform and restructure of FE, with a stark example found in Bathmaker and Avis' (2013: 741) study where a plumber retraining as a FE teacher stated: 'you're more valued by people in this society as a tradesperson than as a teacher'.

### **4.4.1 The Reflexive Individual**

The repurposing of Lefebvre's theory to focus on the self rather than physical space requires the reinforcement of his intention that the dialectic does not end in a summation in the form of a synthesis, but rather remains fluid and inconclusive. This acknowledgment suggests that a vocational teacher remains malleable rather than static within their roles. With the introduction of the study programme, it is increasingly common that teachers deliver outside of their trade-specific skills. Esmond (2017: 239) refers to this as 'subject mobility', where shortages in skills have meant vocational teachers adapting their skillset to suit. Professional expectations also transcend pedagogy, with wider pastoral elements becoming more commonplace, perhaps summed up by Gleeson and James' (2007: 457) discussion with a teacher stating that '[they] are now hardly a teacher and feel more like a welfare officer'. Their experience of the changing mission and culture of FE has shifted the balance of this duality (Le Gallais, 2006a: 253).

I consider reflexivity as an important consideration for adaptation. Whilst there are many theories and definitions on reflexivity, Giddens considered in modernity that 'reflexivity takes on a different character. It is introduced into the very basis of system reproduction, such that thought and action are constantly refracted back upon one another' (1990: 38). Lefebvre's dialectic, in so much as avoiding Hegel's final synthesis, links to Giddens' reflexivity, as teachers oscillate between the perceived and conceived spaces, consciously and unconsciously occupying trans-space as each influences the lived, which itself reciprocally influences the others. This results in what I refer to as a reflexive individual. The ability to apply this reflexivity is suggested by Rasheed-Karim's (2022: 240) report on wellbeing of teachers in FE. While reporting issues of burnout, they found that 'older teachers may have developed strategies to separate working life from home life and may be less prone to emotional labour and symptoms of burnout', suggesting experience may be a significant element of the ability to adapt. As Orr (2020: 512) states, 'colleges are very good at absorbing change and coping with instability', and it is teachers who are those most often placed at the centre of this absorption.

## **4.5 Concluding Remarks**

Although the concept of the dual professional endures, it appears more frequently in grey literature and reports than in the everyday language of teachers, firmly placing it in the conceived space. Literature suggests that much of the individual identity of vocational teachers is formed through a combination of personal experience and a wider collective engagement, with an allegiance to those

who have had similar lived experiences, social backgrounds, and spatial practices. It also suggests, relatively convincingly, that it is this allegiance with which vocational teachers identify, rather than their more recent educational training and experience, although there is evidence that this, at least in some instances, is changing.

Vocational teachers must adapt to the accelerating rhythmic disruption in the conceived space. This includes frequent qualification reform, curriculum restructures, and internal and external pressures, such as Ofsted scrutiny. Professional organisations and governmental bodies presume the 'dual professional' element of the vocational teacher, itself a conceived expectation, yet perceived expectations of the vocational specialist produce a tension and often frustration in the everyday lived experiences of FE teachers. The elements required to produce the vocational teacher in the vocational space require an increased reflexivity beyond the expected requirements for entry into vocational teaching. The individual and personal cost of this reflexivity in the everyday lived experiences of vocational teachers though often remain unheard.

As I move to adjust the original intention of Lefebvre's dialectic away from the production of physical space to the production of the self in the form of the vocational teacher, this asks questions of how the individual adapts to the rhythmic changes imposed on them through macro and meso reforms. Looking at individual identity in isolation is not enough to determine how the vocational teacher is produced. By using the elements of Lefebvre's non-conclusive dialectic as a singular construct, we can better determine how the vocational teacher is formed.



## Chapter 5: Methodology and Methods

### 5.1 Introduction

The research questions explore how history, policy, and reform creates the vocational teacher, through an analysis of space and time. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and field observations within a practical environment. The intention is to contribute to a growing body of research in FE exploring everyday experiences of vocational teachers and contributing to what Lefebvre referred to as 'the undertaking of a vast survey...called: *How we live.*' (2014: 216. Emphasis in original). In this chapter, I justify the research approach, exploring philosophical foundations, followed by the research design and structure and finally how the data was analysed through reflexive thematic analysis.

### 5.2 Ontological and Epistemological Position

Ma (2016: 19) argues that methods of data collection and analysis are to be predicated on and underpinned by methodological principles. Ontology is the philosophical study of being, it describes what can be known (Berryman, 2019: 272). It asks philosophical questions, such as: 'what can be said to exist? What is there to be known? What is the nature of social and physical phenomena' (Ma, 2016: 22)? Ontology determines whether we think 'reality exists entirely separate from human practices and understandings or not' (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 27). Ontological perspectives across educational research generally fall into positivist and interpretivist categories, or quantitative and qualitative approaches respectively, although a third 'mixed methods' approach, where the two are combined, is also often referenced (Komorowska, 2016; Bryman, 2006; Axinn and Pearce, 2006; Pring, 2000; Crotty, 1998; Gage, 1989).

For positivist ontology, the world is considered to operate in a systematic and lawful manner, separating truth from human consciousness. The positivist approach believes it theoretically possible to find cause and effect relationships between phenomena by repeated observation, therefore that truth is discoverable and objective. The positivist will ask questions that can be quantified, often using numerical data to test against a theory or hypothesis (Berryman, 2019; Johnson and Christensen, 2017; Ma, 2016).

Interpretivist research has roots in Weber's notion of *Verstehen* (German for understanding), commonly defined as 'understanding of subjective meaning of social action' (Herva, 1988: 151; Goodyear, 2014). Yin (2016: 9) considers the most defining aspect of qualitative research to involve

the 'study of people's lives, as experienced under real-world conditions', and further notes an acknowledgment that multiple sources of evidence is another defining feature. This resonates with Lefebvre's (2019) intention for rhythmanalysis to be an 'interdisciplinary' approach.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, or 'the ways of knowing what you know and how your research is intending to arrive at its findings and conclusions' (Yin, 2016: 15). Understanding ontology and epistemology can be challenging. Various sources contradict, complement, merge, eliminate or disregard classification completely. For example, Ma (2016: 23) simplifies ontology into two positions: the positivist and constructivist, Bryman (2014) refers to objectivism and constructionism while Ritchie et al. (2015) outlined realism, materialism, and idealism as ontological positions. Crotty (1998) refers to epistemology as objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism, while Braun and Clarke (2013) cite positivism, constructionism and contextualism as epistemological positions. Crotty further argues for the removal of an ontological perspective unless the research specifically calls for talk about 'being', reflecting here on Heidegger. Instead, he prefers the use of the 'theoretical perspective' to cover the ontological aspect of the research (1998: 11), suggesting the following framework for research design:

1. Epistemology
2. Theoretical perspective
3. Methodology
4. Methods

Fundamentally, my research sought to explore the impact that external influences have on the everyday working lives of vocational teachers and how these factors shaped them. I intended to represent the views and perspectives of the participants' experiences through their own voices and to allow them the opportunity to openly discuss the challenges they faced in their everyday roles, navigated through perceived, conceived, and lived space. The primary means of capturing data was through interviews and an observation, and although Lefebvre (2019) proposed the foundation of rhythmanalysis as a new 'science', I believe that there have been enough examples in praxis to suggest that this is a qualitative approach as opposed to a quantitative approach.

Crotty's framework aligns and presents a hierarchy to the research design process, allowing the researcher to explore their methodological principles in a more structured approach. It is for this reason I adopt his framework in analysing the research design, starting with the epistemological perspective. Braun and Clarke (2013: 30) state that a constructionist position assumes that there is no single knowledge or truth, that the world is constructed through various 'discourses and systems of meaning that we reside in', the social and cultural contexts. It is worth noting that constructionism

and constructivism seem relatively interchangeable, Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) for example draw on Crotty, yet interchange terms as if they were identical, as does Bryman (2012). While Crotty acknowledges a difference, Rob and Rob (2018: 276) explore these in more depth, stating that the while the constructivist generates knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and ideas, the 'constructionist further co-creates knowledge by interaction with other individuals within a specific social community', a view reinforced by Braun and Clarke (2022).

Closely tied with constructionism is the theoretical perspective of interpretivism. Interpretivists will design the qualitative research questions that seek to understand the how and why (Berryman, 2019). Interpretivism sought to counter modern positivism introduced by Augustus Comte (2009 [1865]). Linked first to Dilthey and then to Weber (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Crotty, 1998), the concept of *Verstehen* emphasised the importance of 'understanding' and of studying people's 'lived experiences' within a particular historical and social context, bringing in Lefebvrian notions of time and lived space. Therefore, the interpretivists aim is to uncover this lived experience, to explore, in as much depth and detail as is possible their thoughts, observations, and feelings (Gordon, 2016: 74).

The third element of Crotty's framework introduces methodology, in which I used Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis and his tri-dimensional spatial dialectic to analyse and interpret rhythms within vocational space. The final element is the practical means to gather data, in this instance through interviews and field observations explored further in this chapter. Therefore, using Crotty's framework, I summarise the approach to my research as follows:

1. Epistemology – Constructionism
2. Theoretical perspective - Interpretivism
3. Methodology – Rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre's spatial dialectic
4. Methods – Interviews, field observations

Having established the theoretical framework, I next move to how I designed and collected data relevant to the research questions.

## 5.3 Research Design

### 5.3.1 Interviews

#### 5.3.1.1 Go-Along and Walking Interviews

Having established an interpretivist framework and qualitative methodology, I chose the go-along, semi-structured interview approach to capturing primary data. Walking and go-along interviews have been used in a variety of disciplines, including social sciences and ethnography (Garcia et al, 2011; Carpiano, 2008). Carpiano (2008: 264) defines the go-along method as ‘a form of in-depth qualitative interview method that, as the name implies, is conducted by researchers accompanying individual informants on outings in their familiar environments’. Burns et al (2019: 16) suggest that ‘When a researcher is interested in features of space or place...the go-along interview provides an insightful method that facilitates close association with the research setting’. As ‘place’ for a vocational teacher is often reflective of perceived space and considered an important aspect of their professional identity, I conducted all interviews within their everyday vocational teaching space, including workshops, salons, and a kitchen. I believe that this allowed for the capture of richer data, as many discussed the importance of the environment to them and the students and the impact and input it played in student development.

Whilst much modern interest and creativity surrounding mobile methods is attributed to Sheller and Urry’s conceptualisation of the ‘New Mobilities Paradigm’ (2006), from a social and anthropological perspective the phenomenological instances of Heidegger’s, ‘Being-in-the-World’ (1988 [1927]), Bergson’s (2008 [1910]) ‘Duration’, and Merleau-Ponty’s (2008 [1945]), ‘Being’, had started a series of works that had posited the spatial elements of the human condition long before their original article (Anderson, 2004). Sheller and Urry (2006) proposed the New Mobilities Paradigm to better interpret a world frequently in motion. They reinforced the use of the term ‘paradigm’ in a follow up article published in 2016, as described by Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Randell (2020) is though critical, questioning the alliance to Kuhn’s definition, arguing that the use of the term in this instance reduces the richness of a diverse and multidisciplinary approach to a singular theoretical entity and should not therefore be classed as a paradigm (2020: 220). Merriman (2014) also expresses concerns, highlighting that creative methods of data capture are not always necessary, and traditional methods that may be more appropriate to the situation may be ignored. Instead, Merriman urges a more balanced discussion of the advantages and powers of ‘mobile methods’ and to ‘maintain a plural sense of what mobilities research is and can be’ (2014: 183).

The choice of the go-along interview did present some challenges. In two instances, noise generated from machinery created difficulties in both hearing and recording, reducing the ability to move through practical places. This led to finding quieter areas to conduct the interview. In another, student interruptions prolonged the interview. The benefits though outweighed the negatives, providing rich vocational context and helping reduce power issues between interviewer and interviewee.

### **5.3.2.1 Structuring the Interview**

The good interviewer draws out from the person interviewed the deeper significance of the event (Pring, 2004). There is a consensus within literature that interviewing falls into three categories: structured, semi-structured and unstructured, although some authors such as Cohen et al (2018) suggest these could be split further. Structured interviews are often used within positivist frameworks where the researcher seeks to maximise the reliability of key concepts through a clearly specified set of questions (Bryman, 2012). Under a qualitative framework though, the structured approach does not allow for dialogical potential inherent in conversation (Brinkmann, 2006), of which this research was interested in. This left two potential approaches. The unstructured approach has the greatest flexibility and can often be just a single question that is explored through conversation, such as an interview around life stories (Cohen et al, 2018; Bryman, 2012; Brinkmann, 2006). Within the unstructured method, the interviewer controls the interview content, sequence, and wording. Brinkman (2006: 18) warns that there are no such things as non-leading questions, even in unstructured questioning, and that it is preferable in any circumstance to lead participants to talk about themes as opposed to opinions on themes. Cohen et al (2018) warn that careful planning is important, regardless of approach.

Both Wengraf (2001) and Brinkman (2006) propose that the simplification of interviewing into three categories is potentially misleading. They suggest that there is a continuum from relatively structured to relatively unstructured, or from unstructured through lightly, heavily, and fully structured. Wengraf (2001: 60) suggests that even lightly structured interviews are appropriate for testing highly developed theories, particularly if the data gathering schedule precludes the heavier approach. Brinkman (2006) also argues that a completely structured interview is difficult to achieve, that participants will always say something that spills beyond the planned structure, and that these can be key to understanding answers to the structured questions. Seidman (2013: 94) suggests that interviewing is both a 'methodology and a social relationship that must be nurtured, sustained, and

ended gracefully'. Within this communicability lies in the centre the ability to listen, perhaps the most important skill in interviewing (Cohen et al, 2018; Seidman, 2013: 78; Yin, 2011).

Given the nature of the research questions and the qualitative nature of the research, the approach I adopted was the semi-structured approach (see appendix 1). I believe the suggested continuum of structure allows for the freedom to keep responses oriented toward the research questions while allowing the flexibility to be able to listen, probe, explore, and gather richer data where it naturally occurs.

There are pitfalls with using in-depth qualitative interviews that I took into consideration, including confidentiality, objectivity, and time commitments. I endeavoured to focus my analysis on the words of the participants and discard subjective elements, such as appearance, attitudes, or values, where they were not appropriate.

### **5.3.2 Site Selection**

The chosen site was a college based in the Midlands. The College has approximately 15 000 students, of which circa 4000 are full time, based primarily across the North Midlands. Full time students entering the college are in the lowest quartile with regards to secondary literacy and numeracy achievement (LG Inform, 2022), consequently, many are forced to study maths and English alongside their chosen vocational programmes. Unemployment and child poverty is high, with more than one in five of the population living in income deprived households (Gov.uk, 2019) and almost every indicator of the deprivation index below the English average (Public Health England, 2019). The college is broadly representative of the local area, and while most students are classified as White British, approximately four in ten are from ethnic minorities. All qualifications offered fall into the vocational or technical category and the College asserts a uniquely vocational and technical status, having removed academic provision some years prior.

There are two reasons for this selection. The first is accessibility, which raises questions of insider status. The second is the uniqueness of curriculum offer. The specific non-academic focus of the College allowed a large sample to draw from, increasing the likelihood that teachers deliver only vocational programmes.

#### **5.3.2.1 Insider Status**

Within the College I hold a senior role as a Director of Faculty, with the responsibility of circa 160 teachers across multiple disciplines. Furthermore, my background is vocational in nature, in so much

as I am a teacher and an electrician and have experienced both working in construction and education. This creates an 'insider status', which can have complicated power and supervisory implications that Yin (2011) suggests should be part of a disclosure about the affiliation. While many now acknowledge that bias within research is difficult to avoid, I believe the researcher's positionality should be declared to forewarn readers of their biases and assumptions and how these may have influenced the subsequent findings (Newby, 2014; Bryman, 2012).

Insider status is often contrasted with 'outsider status'. Chhabra (2020: 308) suggests a caution around the 'comprehending and interpreting of the knowledge-claims exclusively emerging out of individual experiences', that there is the potential that group-identity can produce an epistemological trap, blurring boundaries (Fleming, 2018). Chhabra's inference here is that data production may be influenced by individual values, as opposed to empirical fidelity, and an insider may take much for granted in terms of data collection that an outsider might include. Chhabra (2020: 308) further contrasts that outsider researchers experience more freedom from loyalties and identities, potentially allowing a greater degree of novel questioning and greater challenge. Saidin and Yaacon (2016) suggest that insiders may also be blindsided by some issues in their research and dismiss certain issues that outsiders may find significant.

There are advantages to being an insider, for example they can bring with them implied knowledge critical to the understanding of the situation or experience (Cowling and Lawson, 2016). My role gives me a macro perspective that teachers are often unaware of and having worked at the College for over 10 years, my status also lent me an element of trust that led to an openness and willingness of participation that may have proved difficult elsewhere. This resulted in more volunteers than planned due to my professional nature and reputation, and an open, collegiate, and collaborative approach. Teachers are also aware that I have taught, and some have taught alongside me, sharing a lived vocational space, which lent a credibility that helped me to 'speak the same language' (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016: 853).

I follow here Snape and Spencer's suggestion (2003: 20) that my positionality be made clear, and I aim to provide as much information as possible to allow others to scrutinise my research. Through my analysis of data, I attempted to mitigate the insider effect. Brinkmann (2006: 118) suggests that attention is paid to mitigate bias by systematically including and examining a 'variety of different interpretations, instead of just sticking to one single reading to be confirmed or falsified'. This aligns with Brinkmann's (2006: 65) and Saidin and Yaacob's (2016) suggestion that quality research will see different interpretations of the phenomenon under study and neither perspective should be disregarded. Various authors (e.g. Braun and Clarke, 2022; Bryman, 2021; Brinkmann, 2006: 62)

suggest that objectivity and neutrality can be increased through a reflexive approach to data analysis, including through coding of data, and by acknowledging positionality and relevance to the research questions, we can reflect on where our biases may occur (Snape and Spencer, 2003). It was through this reflexive approach to data analysis where data scrutiny occurred and through multiple iterations of coding that I was able to consider my influence in the selection of themes.

#### **5.3.2.1 Positionality**

I have worked within FE for 25 years. I left school firstly onto a YTS (see chapter two), and then into an apprenticeship. I continued to work in industry part time while working in education for some years, taking advantage of annual leave to supplement a reduced income. I have since worked at multiple colleges, teaching adult and full-time learners and apprentices before moving into management roles. Although my technical background was in the electrical industry, I have taught across multiple areas and managed many departments outside of my specialist knowledge. It is through all these experiences that I believe that teachers bear the brunt of historic misunderstandings, political interference, and imperfect organisational translations of policy and through these experiences is the motivation to carry out this research.

#### **5.3.2.3 Ethics**

The immediate ethical imperative of researchers is 'not to do any harm to their informants and communities' (Druzenko and Voloder, 2014: 11). Whilst some have chosen to complete a rhythmanalysis through audio-visual means, my intention is to take Lefebvre's notion of situating the body at the centre of the experience at its most literal, partaking in direct interviews and place-based observations. Embodying the spirit of Lefebvre, I embedded the notion that the study should 'examine the details of everyday life as minutely as possible' - for example, a day in the life, or perhaps a life in the day, of an individual, no matter how trivial (Lefebvre, 2014: 216).

Prior to gathering data, I ensured that I had approval from the University Ethics Committee (see Appendix 6). The approval required a detailed application that covered voluntary informed consent from participants, including line manager agreement, data management, personal and participant physical and emotional risks, equality and diversity issues, ethical issues and participant inclusion and exclusion criteria. I ensured that all teachers were made aware of the project and intentions through the participation information sheet, shared upfront through email invitation, and again during meetings with staff.



I ensured that all participants were aware of their commitment, confidentiality and right to withdraw at any point without prejudice (Druzenko and Voloder; 2014). It was entirely possible that interviews could drift into themes that neither party could predict, therefore consent on this understanding was critical prior to interview. I also needed to be aware of the risk of being a researcher in a role of formal or informal power and mitigate the perception of implicit coercion during participant recruitment (Fleming, 2018). The go-along method allowed for a more comfortable and familiar interview environment. This, alongside the positive aspects of insider status, confirmation of anonymity, confidentiality, and their right to privacy (Brinkman, 2013), gave a level of reassurance to the participants. Following transcription, I sent a copy of the conversation to the participants, further giving them the opportunity to contest any content, add to their responses, or again, withdraw without prejudice. Consent for observations was obtained formally at the start of the session, however information was shared with the student group a week prior to the observation by the teacher using the information sheet to discuss the project and the intentions. Students were reminded at the start of the session that an observer would be present and given the right to withdraw participation at this or any future point. Observations are commonplace in FE, and students have experience of being part of the observation process, consequently, all students were entirely ambivalent about my presence. Due to the methodology, there was no direct interaction with students and no students were identified in any way from the observation.

There were two further ethical considerations, those of emotional distress and frustration amongst participants and risk that negative impacts may have on organisational reputation. I ensured through openness and transparency and a reflexive approach to the research that these risks were either avoided or pre-empted, and ensured that the research questions themselves were not organisationally specific.

### **5.3.4 Sampling Strategy**

The research has a specific focus on vocational education. In chapter two I explored the definition of vocational education with the intention of narrowing the participant selection in accordance with the research questions. Depoy and Gitlin (2011: 142) suggest setting boundaries to a study, to limit the scope to a specified group of individuals based on the philosophical approach, specified criteria, and the ability to access the population of interest.

I chose 'purposive' or 'purposeful' sampling for participant selection (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018; Denscombe, 2014). This enabled a small sample to be conducted with those

most likely to have the experience or expertise to provide valuable data on the topic. Those selected had a background in some form of vocation or profession that preceded their role in education. The questions specifically focused on vocational education and sought perspectives from those that could draw on vocational experiences.

In chapter two, I explored the differences between vocational qualifications and their technical brethren, choosing to remove qualifications such as the BTEC and the Applied General from our participant selection as they could, in certain circumstances, be delivered entirely in an academic environment. This placed a limit on the type of teacher that I could include within the sample and focussed the curriculum areas for selection.

Given the criteria, I identified the following programmes to draw a sample from:

*Table 1 – Sample Participant Selection Detail*

<b>Curriculum Area</b>	<b>Number of Vocational Teaching Staff (approximate)</b>	<b>Planned number of interviews from curriculum area</b>	<b>Actual number of interviews from curriculum area</b>
Construction	20	4	5
Engineering	7	1	2
Motor Vehicle	8	2	3
Electrical Installation	12	3	2
Plumbing	12	3	1
Hospitality	4	1	1
Hairdressing	8	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>

I interviewed 16 teachers from the selection within their practical environment. Taking into consideration practical exigencies of time (Seidman, 2006: 55), the sample felt sensible, and I believe it enough to reflect the range of participants so that others outside of the sample can connect to the

experiences of those within it. It became evident early in the process that there were similar themes and perceptions coming through the interviews, and data gathered was rich and detailed, giving me confidence that the sample number would provide the data I required.

Due to issues with staff shortages, I was unable to complete the full sample of plumbing teachers so took advantage of additional volunteers in construction and engineering departments.

### **5.3.5 Participant Selection**

Having identified the sampling frame for participants, I next devised a method of engagement. In the first instance, I engaged the line managers of the identified teachers, discussed the research and types of questions that would be asked, shared with them the participant information sheets (appendix 3), and sought permission to engage directly with their teams. I was keen to make the managers aware of potential disruption that might occur and allay fears that this might impact their weekly planning. I explained that engagement with teachers would be outside of expected teaching commitments or otherwise. The response was positive, and all relevant managers gave permission to engage with their teams. I attended team meetings for each area, where I discussed the research directly with the teachers. I received a surprising number of initial volunteers at the meetings, although I did not immediately accept participants, conscious of ethical considerations. I emailed the teams and from their responses, I was better able to select a broader representation that included increased participation from under-represented ethnicities and gender, although this was not achievable in all areas as participants in most instances were white males. All participants consented formally to engage with the research (see appendix 4).

Should there have been a shortage in volunteers, I had the option of increasing the potential sampling frame to include other vocational areas with smaller teacher numbers, such as Beauty Therapy, Cabin Crew, or Childcare or across different roles, such as apprenticeship coaches.

Table 2 displays a list of the teachers who were interviewed during the first part of data collection.

*Table 2 - List of teachers interviewed and years of teaching experience.*

Teacher	Years in teaching	Ethnicity	Gender
Ramsey	6	White	Male
Benz	8	White	Male
Brunel	8	White	Male
Dudley	9	White	Male
Lovelace	9	White	Male
Tesla	9	Asian	Male
Pinkham	13	White	Female
Leonardo	14	White	Male
Gaudi	15	White	Male
Walsh	16	White	Male
Corbusier	17	White	Male
Mansell	20	White	Male
Frieda	20	White	Female
Vidal	20	White	Female
Ringgold	25	White	Female
Edison	29	White	Male

### 5.3.6 Transcribing the Interview

Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that reflexive thematic analysis starts with wider immersion in the data, starting with transcriptions. Once all the interviews were completed, I used a combination of audio software and a word-processor to document conversations. I also included some events that occurred during the interviews, for example, in one instance students disrupted the teacher due to the ease of accessibility as we walked around the workshop area (Braun and Clarke, 2013), creating arrhythmic moments. Whilst I removed reference and their voice from the transcription, there were some examples that led to wider discussion with the teacher that I left intact as I felt they may contribute to the data. To assist with later analysis, I differentiated the speaker from the participant using italics (see appendix 5). Whilst the transcription process was time-consuming, it did enable a greater familiarisation with the data, key to the early stages of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

### 5.3.7 Observing the Field

In chapter three I explored Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis as a methodological tool for data collection. While some researchers have used video recordings (e.g., Lyon, 2016), I was determined to place myself within the environment as the central tool of data collection in the spirit of Lefebvre's own examples of rhythmanalysis (2019).

Whilst the methodology is not strictly ethnographic, I found it useful to consult literature on ethnography prior to partaking observations. Emerson et al (2011: 29) comprehensively detail the ethnographic approach, suggesting the following recommendations for successful fieldnotes:

1. Jot down details of key components of observed scenes, events, or interactions.
2. Jot down concrete sensory details.
3. Avoid characterising scenes through generalisations or summaries.
4. Capture detailed aspects of scenes, talk and interaction.
5. Record emotional expressions and experiences.
6. Use jottings to signal your general impressions and feelings.

Their suggestions align with Lefebvre's concept of rhythmanalysis. Whilst in ethnographical research interaction can be an important element, Lefebvre considers the observer's body the locus of data collection, with a focus on the lived through alignment with the body, including the incorporation of sensory detail. There is a more poetic, observational approach to Lefebvre's methodology, which underpinned and enhanced the data from the interviews.

During the interview process, I discussed with participants the potential to observe a typical day in a vocational environment, noting Merriam et al.'s (2004: 409) observation that 'during fieldwork the researcher's power is negotiated, not given'. All participants volunteered appropriate sessions to observe, presenting the opportunity to choose the most relevant. Due in part to the location of an appropriately accessible position to carry out the observation and the option to observe multiple teaching sessions within one area, I decided that the Motor Vehicle workshop, with a central store area, would offer the richest data. This position afforded me some seclusion, yet still gave me the opportunity to view almost the entire workshop space, giving me the best vantage to observe rhythm and note dialectical interaction between the perceived, conceived and lived elements of vocational space.

## 5.4 Analysis of Data

### 5.4.1 Introduction

Yin (2016) emphasises that however data is analysed, the most important part of the scenario is the part about rigour. This research focuses on vocational teachers, how they are formed, and their personal experiences in education through a constructionist epistemology. This approach has implications regarding thematic analysis, namely that in 'addition to the recurrence of perceptibly important information, meaningfulness is highly influential in the development and interpretation of codes and themes' (Byrne, 2021: 1395).

In the first instance, I considered interpretative phenomenological analysis as a means of data interpretation, however I felt the rigidity might impede some latent data analysis. I considered other approaches suggested by Saldana (2021), however after conversations with supervisors, I decided to use Braun and Clarke's (2021) 'reflexive thematic analysis' (RTA) to analyse the data. I felt this approach was more suited to the methodological underpinnings of this research and allowed an exploration into the nuances of individual experience (Lochmiller, 2021).

Braun and Clarke's initial article published in 2006 prompted an increase in the use of thematic analysis in qualitative research, they have since made further clarification, challenged misconceptions, and made recommendations through numerous papers and books (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2022: 10) keenly emphasise that RTA offers 'guidelines and a clear process, but not rules', and that these are advantages of using RTA within an epistemologically constructionist approach. The first is the 'reflexive' aspect. This approach enabled a deeper familiarisation of the dataset and the opportunity to continually revisit and challenge findings, helping to refine the data further at each point. Given my inexperience in research at this scale, the reflexive approach forced me to reconsider my approach to the data at multiple points, something Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest is useful for novice researchers. The flexibility of RTA also enabled me to consider both inductive and deductive approaches to analysis. For example, it was my intention to inductively determine the influence of history and continual reform on vocational teachers through interview and observational data but also use RTA deductively to analyse data through Lefebvre's tri-dimensional dialectic.

Whilst keen to suggest that there is not necessarily a linear approach to reflexive analysis, Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest a framework of six distinct phases of analysis.

## 5.4.2 Thematic Analysis Framework

Braun and Clarke (2021) developed a six-phase approach to analysing qualitative data using thematic analysis:

1. Familiarising yourself with the dataset – reading and re-reading the dataset to become immersed and familiar with content and making notes.
2. Coding - generating labels that capture and evoke important features of the data that might be relevant to addressing the research question. This involves two or more rounds of coding and the collation of the dataset.
3. Generating initial themes – examination of the codes to develop broader patterns of meaning or themes.
4. Developing and reviewing themes – checking the themes against the coded data and the dataset to determine that they tell a convincing story that address the research questions. Themes can be split, combined, or discarded at this stage.
5. Refining, defining and naming themes – developing a detailed analysis, the scope and focus of each theme, the ‘story’ and name of each.
6. Writing up - weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature.

### 5.4.2.1 Familiarisation

During transcription, I created initial, separate notes on observations of interest, keywords, and phrases. I then imported the transcriptions into Nvivo and began further familiarisation, reflecting on conversations with the participant. At this point, I made physical notes of repetition as reminders in the dataset and recorded some key words against the research questions and within an electronic template I had created of the Lefebvrian dialectic (see Appendix 10). Many of the earlier observations at this point did not survive thematic scrutiny and were later discounted.

### 5.4.2.2 Coding data

Following the familiarisation stage, I started coding using Nvivo software. Saldana (2021: 28) notes that a code is most often words or phrases that are ‘essence-capturing’, Braun and Clarke (2021: 53) refer to codes as an ‘interesting idea, concept, or meaning associated with data’. Saldana (2021: 28) advises the researcher to ‘Code smart. Not hard’, focussing on quality and meaning over quantity.

Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasise that their approach to coding through RTA is flexible, organic, and emergent. It was my intention to use the coding process both inductively, to draw information from the participants to generate themes, and deductively, to explore how the vocational teacher is produced. During the process, I revisited coding multiple times, both through an initial lack of confidence and uncertainty that the codes generated were relevant. I was also unfamiliar with Nvivo software but remained determined, as I understood the value of electronic data manipulation in the longer term. Whilst initially slow as I worked through multiple iterations, discarding previous versions and consigning them to experience, this process allowed me to become far more reflexive in my approach and more familiar with the process of coding and of coding smarter (Saldana, 2021). It also increased my familiarisation with the dataset, reflecting on initial thoughts and considerations from the data.

I made the decision to use Nvivo to support the coding and thematic analysis. Once I established a pattern of coding with the software, I completed three rounds of initial coding before starting to draw codes together into topics. At this point, themes started to become more apparent in the data, and I started to cluster the codes into subsections. Using Nvivo, I was able to better manipulate codes under the file structure and develop relationships between similar codes, ultimately giving me the flexibility to trial themes without disrupting original code sets and iteratively develop or discard themes (see Appendix 7).

### **5.4.2.3 Developing Themes**

Integral to the RTA process, is the initial development of themes. In developing a theme, Braun and Clarke (2022: 132) suggest four criteria for viability:

1. Can I identify the boundaries of this theme?
2. Are there enough data to evidence this theme?
3. Are the data contained within each theme too diverse and wide-ranging?
4. Does this theme convey something important?

In identifying the boundaries of the theme, I used the flexibility of Nvivo to manipulate the data while keeping the original dataset intact. This allowed me to better determine the boundaries and remove irrelevant data, tighten up codes and begin to create a structure. It also allowed me room to practise and fail as I familiarised myself with the software. Despite my initial lack of confidence, data presented ample evidence to support each theme, even after removing less relevant codes, and began to form the basis of a narrative (Braun and Clarke, 2022).



#### **5.4.2.4 Refining, Defining and Naming Themes**

A theme is defined as a 'coherent integration of the disparate pieces of data that constitute the findings' (Sandelowski and Leeman, 2012). It captures something important and represents some level of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns and meaning within the dataset (Sandelowski and Leeman, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006). The development of themes is perhaps one of the most difficult to initially grasp. Braun and Clarke (2021: 231) discuss difficulties faced by the amateur qualitative researcher in developing themes. To assist my first use of RTA, I integrated Lochmiller's (2021) use of categories within themes to demonstrate to myself and the reader how the theme is produced and relates. I included some categories in the final narrative.

Three final key themes were developed. The first was how reform had influenced teaching, the second how politics and policy had created substantial changes in vocational education and the third how student engagement had changed, specifically since the introduction of the rise in participation age to 18 in 2015.

#### **5.4.2.5 Writing up**

Braun and Clarke (2006: 93) state the write-up should tell the 'complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis'. They emphasise the need to embed extracts within the narrative to illustrate the story of the data and make the argument in relation to the research question.

Following the development of themes, I duplicated the coded data within Nvivo and re-organised the codes into theme and sub-theme sections, enabling a more efficient workflow to assist the narrative. Whilst the data presented in Nvivo did not create a natural narrative, the ability to duplicate, manipulate and organise key data, all while preserving the original data, gave the flexibility to determine a narrative (see Appendix 7).

### **5.5 Concluding Remarks**

This thesis explores how the rhythms of history have shaped vocational education, how post-2011 reform has impacted on everyday lived experiences of the vocational teacher and how these play a part in the production of the vocational teacher. The initial selection of teachers was therefore critical

to data collection, with the relevance of go-along interviews and direct observation playing an important contextual element in what are highly practical, place-based vocational programmes.

Using a qualitative approach, I examined the lived experiences of vocational teachers through a constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical perspective, using Lefebvrian concepts of the production of space and rhythm analysis, with semi-structured interviews and direct observation as means of data collection, and finally, reflexive thematic analysis as a framework to interpret the data into appropriate themes.

The next section visits the findings, separating out developed themes, discussing each through both the perspective of the participant and Lefebvre's theoretical constructs of space and rhythm.

## Chapter 6: Key Findings and Discussions

### 6.1 Introduction

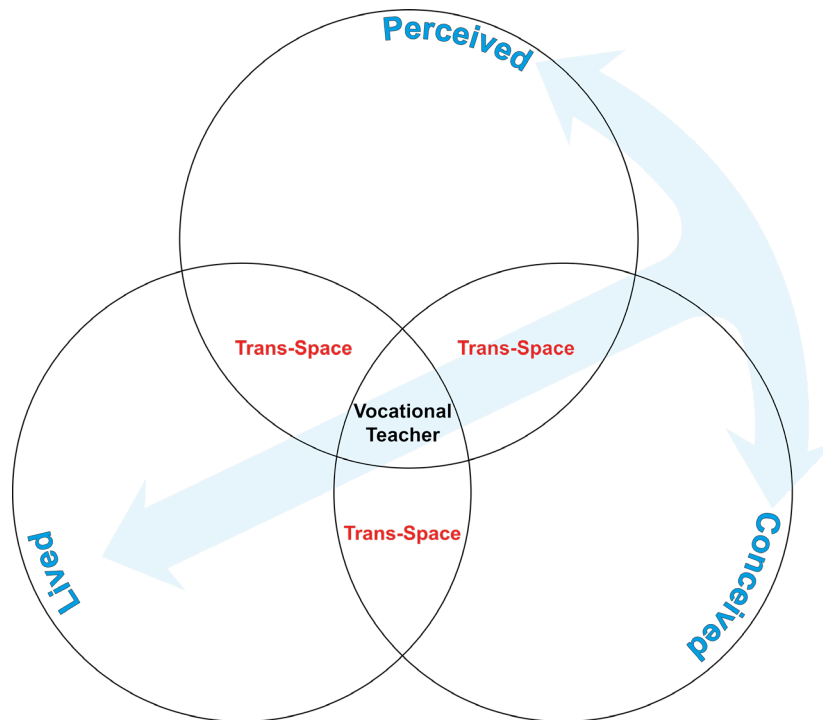
This thesis aimed to answer three questions: how history has shaped vocational education, how policy shapes and produces the vocational teacher, and the repercussions of policy and reform on vocational teachers.

In the first section, I use participants' voices to explore how the vocational teacher is produced through Lefebvre's tri-dimensional dialectic, exploring perceptions, professionalism, and identity. In the second section, I report on an extended field observation, where I observe rhythms within a practical vocational environment using Lefebvre's suggestion of rhythmanalysis, taking specific inspiration from chapter three of *Rhythmanalysis*, 'Seen from the Window' (2019: 37). Following the observation, I explore three themes that emerged from the data: rhythms of qualification reform, politics and policy, and student engagement.

### 6.2 The Production of the Vocational Teacher

#### 6.2.1 Decoding Lefebvre's Tri-dimensional Dialectic

In chapter four, I utilised Lefebvre's dialectic from the *Production of Space* (1991) to explore how vocational teachers might be produced, introducing a Venn diagram that demonstrated how each element of the dialectic overlapped and interacted, creating a liminal trans-space (figure 3).



*Figure 3 - The Production of the Vocational Teacher*

The flow of rhythm cuts through each element of the dialectic, whether it is the rhythm of policy and reform through the conceived, the expected practice of vocational delivery through the perceived, or the high and lows of achievement, enjoyment, and individual development through the lived. The dominant influence on the production of the vocational teacher is through conceived space, where abstract constructions, largely political or organisational, create a tension between individual identity and professionalism. It is this perceived element I visit first.

## **6.2.2 Experience and Altruism – The Perceived**

### **6.2.2.1 Why teach?**

Kinkaid (2020) considered perceived space as the key site in the production of space, with the body central to the theory. Simonsen (2005: 4) talks about the body as a ‘point of departure and as destination, an intrinsic part of the lived experience’. Simonsen expands:

As part of the lived experience, the body constitutes a practico-sensory realm in which space is perceived through smells, tastes, touch and hearing as well as through sight.

From a vocational perspective, perceived space incorporates a combination of bodily-driven skills honed through years of repetition, alongside lived experiences that circle professional expectations, including social interaction and interpretations of conceived spaces. Within the perceived space, the transfer of expertise wrestles with the limitations and controls of the conceived space, a contradiction that presupposes terms such as 'dual professionalism' and 'qualified teacher status', that travels with the professional as they transition to teacher.

Teachers shared a perception of what a teaching role entailed prior to working in education, yet lived experiences rarely matched these expectations (Avis and Bathmaker, 2004). Within vocational education, teaching is rarely a conscious career choice, with few relatable skills (Page, 2013), and most enter teaching through less-formal pathways than academic contemporaries. No participants stated an initial desire to teach.

Vidal described their journey into FE:

*I bumped into one of my friends who worked at the college, and she said they were struggling for staff...I started [teaching] two hours a week.*

Vidal's accidental inauguration is not unusual, as highlighted by Smithers (2018). The 'long interview' concept suggested by Gleeson and James (2008: 733), where teachers start with short, part-time hours, was reflected by many participants:

*I was doing an hour on a Tuesday...next week I did 2 hours...then [they] wanted me to do half a day, and by the end of the month...full-time (Mansell)*

*...part-time hours over twelve weeks got me hooked into disseminating the knowledge I had gained over twenty years in industry. (Corbusier)*

*One of one of my friends worked at [another] College so they offered me a few hours a week which was kind of a bit...of security...but that's what kinda, like, sparked my interest (Walsh)*

Despite this accidental entry, there was an overwhelming desire to share their experiences, to pass on knowledge and help people learn skills that are 'concretised over time' (Urry, 1995: 25). There was a passion evident through responses, a genuine desire that others may benefit from the experiences that shaped their lives, an altruism contemplated by Ramsey:

*I wanted to pass on knowledge and skills I have learnt and developed over my years spent in the industry and try and make a difference in a positive way to other's development.*

Lovelace, a more recently qualified teacher said: 'I...see it as that I'm passing on like experiences and, you know, and knowledge...'. Corbusier too was enthused and expanded on the notion:

*I was passionate about the industry and wanted to pass on my experiences and knowledge with a new generation of technicians. Knowledge can be taught, but experience has to be lived!*

Corbusier spoke about being asked to cover a complex joinery unit while on an evening course with other students as a motivational catalyst, but also developing individuals while working in industry, echoed by other participants, like Vidal and Frieda, who both explained how they had trained juniors in their salons. Vidal explained 'I decided to become a teacher as I spent many years training juniors...[I] got a lot of satisfaction from sharing my skills and knowledge with others'.

### **6.2.2.2 Stigma around Vocational Education**

There was a feeling amongst participants of a stigma toward vocational teachers by academic peers. Social opinion on British vocational education has been well documented, with the literature suggesting a potential link to juvenile penal servitude in the 1800s. Leonardo, in discussing professionalism, pondered the lack of a degree as one of the reasons why:

*[y]ou always feel teachers look down upon people like us...but they haven't got that wealth of industry experience that they're trying to pass on...you know? [they're]...very valuable, skills to have...but there is still a...there's snobbery.*

A degree was also noted by Dudley while defending their vocational experience:

*You learn Maths, English, and Science at school and then perhaps get a university degree in it. Then you go and do a teaching qualification... I think [FE teachers] have exactly the same importance, if not possibly a little bit more, because they bring in a lot of actual life skills.*

Although not directly mentioning a degree, Ramsey was more direct, with the perspective as a relatively new teacher adding to the comparison, but bringing opinions of what professionalism consisted of into the argument:

*[f]orgive me for saying this, but I feel like there's a stigma against college lecturers, and I feel like, you know, because it's not a standard profession like law or medicine, people don't always see it as a proper career...People hear 'teacher', and they think English, maths, science, don't they? They don't think cooking, construction, automotive.*

These feelings were borne from direct experience and exacerbated in some instances by professional teacher educators. Walsh expressed much frustration. Despite being academically inclined at school,

they chose a career in construction through a genuine desire to start work and earn money rather than follow an academic pathway. They passionately espoused a new-found interest in reading educational theories and implementing them in the classroom after entering education. Walsh, though, lamented the negativity surrounding vocational teachers and recalled an experience from their teacher education programme that made them genuinely feel like they did not belong:

*I went on a trip to [Local] University. I had been on the course for about two or three months and this woman sat us in her room. She said, "Stand up and introduce yourselves, and tell me why you're here." So, I did, and I told her about my background. She said, "I imagine someone with your background is really struggling on this course." I was taken aback. "Am I struggling?", I asked. "Yeah, you're struggling," she said. I could see that she had already made up her mind about me. She had already decided.*

Although this stigma was widely acknowledged, participants almost overwhelmingly considered themselves professional, meeting the expectation of their occupational reputation (Goffman, 1959). Frieda spoke about being an imposter and early career fragility after moving from being a hairdresser to being a teacher. They reflected on how several years of teaching had impacted their lived experience:

*... if you'd compared me to someone who'd been to university...and studied to be a teacher, I wouldn't [have] compare[d] myself to them. But now...I stand next to them and think that I am as good as them.*

Vidal flipped the debate, bringing mastery of the subject into conversation. They reflected on how students perceived teachers who were not vocationally competent, those who taught on the study programme yet outside of vocational qualifications, such as the GCSE:

*[students said] the English and the maths teachers aren't real. They're not real, you know what I mean? So, it's like the other way around really. Yeah, we don't see them as real 'cos the focus is on that paragraph or that maths equation...it's not on their life skills, whereas vocation-wise...something's gonna happen to you if you do that wrong...So it's a totally different teaching skill, isn't it?*

This mastery, or expertise, was an element that featured across discussions with participants: the expectation to both teach and be experts in their vocational areas features in much literature, mainly through educational bodies, such as the ETF, and through educational reform, such as the new T Level qualification. This often draws the 'dual professional' label, yet no participant recognised this attribution, firmly placing the concept into the more abstract, conceived space.

These experiences by vocational teachers form part of Lefebvre's perceived space (figure 4) where previous education, skills development, and experience form a large part of their initial decision to enter education.

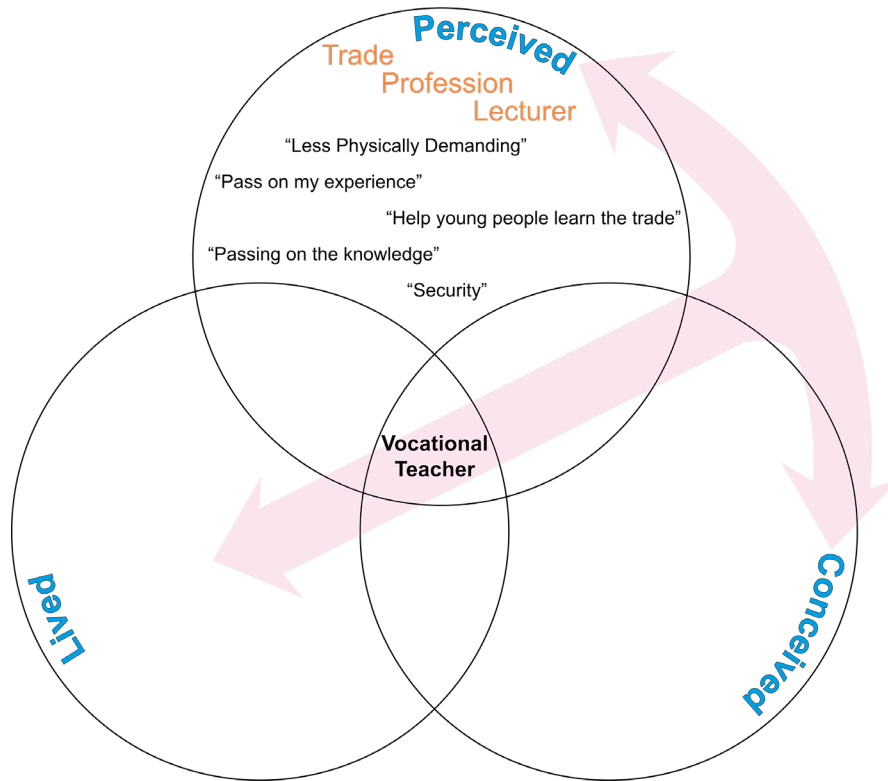


Figure 4 - The Perceived Element of the Dialectic

### 6.2.3 Profession and Professionalism - The Conceived

Lefebvre considered conceived space as the conceptualised space and the dominant space in society (1999: 38). He considered it abstract, yet playing a part in social and political practice, thus having a substantial role in the production of space.

Conceived space is in dialectical tension with the perceived. An example of these conceived spaces is the 'dual professional' concept, the notion that the vocational teacher holds both experience in their relative trade area and the ability to teach, and often required to hold qualifications in both. The phrase 'dual professional', as visited in chapter four, can be reductive and even problematic, as expectations on teachers often transcend a binary descriptor. The term appears more in the conceived space than the perceived space, expectations placed on teachers from sources outside of their own networks of influence. In conversation, only four participants had previously heard the phrase, and one interpreted it against its original intention. Despite the lack of recognition, seven of the sixteen participants still had a substantial role in industry, or continued to practise through self-



employment, a not uncommon situation across trades and professions. There are instances, with overlap, where teachers continue to ply their trade 'close to practice' in training environments that closely replicate industrial expectations. These include catering professions and salons, where the nature of the industry is less peripatetic than areas like construction, which are often transient in nature. Finally, there are instances where teachers no longer practise their skills outside of the teaching environment. This presented half of the 16 participants, who for differing reasons had left the industry behind. Discussions around professionalism evoked different responses and questioned the notion of professionalism in both trades and teaching.

In some instances, teachers reflected on their industrial skills, reserving the 'professional' label for that of the teaching element of their role. Brunel spoke at length, but was not generally able to reconcile their thinking around what elements of their role are professional:

*So teaching is definitely, definitely, a profession, and I say my background, welding, is a specific skill set. It's classed as a skilled trade.*

While Brunel considered the teaching element a profession, despite being a qualified teacher for approximately three years, they still did not consider themselves a professional, including their prior occupation, in which they linked the size of the organisation to professional status:

*I don't see myself as that, [a professional] I just see myself as passing on...I know I'm doing the job...Welding and fabricating. I never worked for big companies that probably would be seen as professional.*

When pressed, Brunel could not explain why, struggling to determine how professionalism plays out in industry. Others, such as Corbusier, did not deliberate, instead, without hesitation, considering both to be professional:

*...teaching is definitely a profession. It's something that I strongly believe you can either do or you can't...I believe the trades...[are] a profession, because it's one of those like teaching that [sic] you are continually learning as well.*

Benz also linked professional status to teaching and trades, though differentiating accordingly, stating: 'I'm a professional teacher now, lecturing, and I'm also a professional automotive technician'. Interestingly, in a parallel to comparisons between academic and vocational teachers, Mansell considered themselves an automotive technician and having professional status, implying a hierarchical 'snobbery' toward a mechanic as they had 'climbed the ranks' in industry. They were not alone in this observation. Ramsey, while very much associating professionalism with teaching, linked the notion of industrial professionalism to particular sectors of industry:

*I won't necessarily class all restaurants as a profession then, and that probably seems a bit snooty of me. How much skills and qualities do you need to work at Subway, or necessarily at McDonald's...It's more production, isn't it?*

Ramsey distanced themselves from this section of industry, instead considering themselves to be a professional chef, having spent 10 years in what they considered a professional environment prior to entering education:

*...it took a lot more, it took a lot more training, took a lot more learning. It was something that was developed over time. It's not something you could just get from reading a book or watching YouTube, you know?*

Edison elaborated. As a practising electrician, running a small contracting business three days a week while teaching for two, introduced more to the discussion. Like Ramsey's comments, Edison spoke about the perceptions of what others considered a profession.

*Yeah, yeah, I suppose the teacher would be classed as more of a professional than...an electrician, because that's like a tradesperson. But they're both professions. You know, you obviously have to be professional in both of them. Yeah, there's work ethics and rules and regulations to stick to in both, so a bit of both really, but I suppose if you were going to give it a, yeah, a professional banner, then the teacher would be under that. An electrician not necessarily would [sic].*

Edison's current experience in industry afforded them a level of granted credibility amongst their peer group. Some participants questioned this credibility of colleagues that had dissociated from their industry. Corbusier referenced his colleagues, reflecting that many of them do not remain, in their opinion, current. They refer to others not wanting to, 'keep their skills alive'. Edison suggested that only a third of colleagues maintain currency outside of the classroom. Of all the participants, Walsh though was most vociferous about maintaining industry practice:

*I think if you completely stop operating in that field. Are you still a professional in that area? Are you still? Are you still the person that should be teaching others able to do that trade if you're not doing it yourself?*

This split was noticeable across the participants. There were those who insisted only industry experience ensured professionalism, those who had the opportunity in their environment to continue to ensure their skills remained close to industry practice, and those who no longer considered they would work in industry at all. I have categorised each of these into three areas: the active, the liminal, and the latent professional.

### 6.2.3.1 The Active Professional

Of the 16 participants, Edison and Mansell most widely contested the notion of the 'dual professional'. Edison considered the totality of the role. Working part time at the college for reasons of both enjoyment and an element of stability, they reflected on the totality of their identity: 'I'm a manager, I'm a teacher, and I'm an electrician. So which hat do I wear?'.

Mansell remains heavily involved in industry and continues to run a business, but in this instance remotely, alongside a full-time teaching role. They stated, 'I wasn't just a technician...I was the owner, I was the manager, I'm still a manager of MOT testing'. Mansell passionately considered the professional element of the role, but beyond the connotation of a mechanic: 'I don't think [of] myself just as a mechanic, but I do diagnostics. I'm skilled, that's what I do'. These elements occupy the liminal space between the conceived and the perceived and challenge dualistic inference. Mansell was convincing about the importance of not limiting themselves to a single descriptor:

*I'm still on the team. I'm still servicing vehicles. I'm still doing all the things that I did before I started teaching, and that keeps me right up to date.*

Staying industrially current mattered to several participants. Able to continue to ply their trade in industry standard salons, hairdressing occupies both the active and liminal professional space. Complimentary about their fortunate resources, both Frieda and Vidal detailed the layered concept of training salons, culminating in a professional salon that also ran as a fully-fledged business, taking on external clients where more experienced students would do the work. Despite this, participants in this area continued to practice outside of the environment. Frieda spoke about the significance of remaining current within this industry, particularly if you were teaching, stating that 'I still do a lot of upskilling at home...not at work. There are people whose hair I cut 14 years ago, and I still cut their hair'. This wasn't uncommon. Vidal explained that colleagues continued to cut each other's hair in the professional salon. They reflected on their skills and experience, stating: 'I don't think you ever lose it'. Like Frieda they also worked outside of teaching, with clients spanning more than three decades.

Corbusier also maintained a customer base outside of teaching, in some instances continuing to work for clients for over thirty years.

*I know I've got colleagues here that no longer keep their skills live on a regular basis. I do regularly keep my skills live by going out and doing work for older clients that I've had for a long time.*

Along with Walsh, Corbusier considered bringing current practice back to the classroom an important element of their role. Linking the perceived with the conceived elements of the production of a vocational teacher, they display a reflexive approach to their work, considering it more than just practising their discipline, but returning their lived experiences back to the students. Corbusier for example keeps a portfolio of completed work:

*When I'm doing my jobs outside of college, I do take lots of photographs of what I'm doing now, and I introduce them back into the teaching so that it's alive.*

This wasn't shared by everyone. Tesla was steadfast in their belief that they would not go back into industry but recognised belief in their own electrical skills should it be called on: 'If somebody is in trouble, I'll always go out...[if] It's two in the morning and [they are] absolutely stuck I'll always go out'. Gaudi, also without inclination to return to their trade, considered the situation briefly, concluding: '[t]here'd have to be an extortionate amount of money [involved]'!

### **6.2.3.2 The Liminal Professional**

The liminal professional, where teachers continued to ply their trade in simulated 'close to industry' facilities, was the rarest category of vocational teacher, with only three teachers having this opportunity afforded by their trade or profession. Vocational spaces that are closer to industrial environments include hairdressing and hospitality, allowing them to continue a closer affiliation with their profession than more peripatetic and varied trades, such as construction. Ramsey compared how their educational kitchen layout related to industry:

*[s]o things like you know, you would have one chargrill. You would have one chargrill in the kitchen. You'd have, what if you see next that gas over there, one to the left of it which is a solid plate, to the solid top. And that's something you get commonly in industry as well...the dishwasher, the stove kitchen [and the addition of] a tandoor...*

Like kitchens, professional grade hairdressing training salons support student development and keep the teachers within realistic industry environments. Students' progress through the salons, developing their skills initially on training heads with the view to moving to more professional areas. At this college, facilities are excellent, directly mirroring industry, benefitting from a link with a large chain of salon owners. As Frieda commented, 'Yeah, definitely, you probably couldn't get a more realistic [environment]...yeah, we're very lucky'.

The training areas within the college are also well valued. Vidal explained how the curriculum was sequenced and how the facilities not only still met many of the requirements of industry, but at other training providers would be considered their professional salon equivalent:

*Yeah, they're not as, they're, kitted out the same. More or less the same, but it's not as glamorous up there. It's a lot more basic, but it's still very like I would imagine. A lot of people, a lot of colleges have got salons like this as their main salon.*

These environments enable some vocational teachers to remain closer to practice than others. Whilst the liminal professional is perhaps the rarest, it offers a balance between teaching practice and industrial currency.

### **6.2.3.3 The Latent Professional**

Half of the participants no longer continued to practise outside of their classroom. Importantly, this does not suggest that they are not current, which is outside of the scope of this thesis, but that they no longer physically participate in their trade or profession. These participants were more likely to refer to themselves as teachers rather than tradespeople. Benz was particularly unmoving:

*I've got to the stage now where I wouldn't want to go back. [my wife] said to me many, many times, "Oh, there's a job here. I've seen a job for a tech. They want a master technician. They want a service manager". I ain't going flipping back into this industry. I can't be doing flipping eight hours a day taking gearboxes out. There's no way, I can't, I just physically couldn't do it anymore, you know?*

Benz emphasised a similar physicality of the role as a barrier to returning to the trade, questioning their own 'physical power' as they contemplated retirement, even referring to the physical nature of teaching becoming more of an effort. This barrier was noted by those whose trades required frequent heavy lifting. Gaudi, a bricklayer, pondered returning to site:

*I couldn't go back to laying bricks. It would cripple me. My knees wouldn't stand it to start with... I couldn't go out there and earn money there as a bricklayer. I just physically couldn't.*

Tesla was similarly torn, bemoaning their age and ability. Some participants struggled to engage with their trade or profession due to the nature of their industry. Brunel identified as a teacher above that of an engineer, although maintained that they were still able to do the job, in this instance welding, stating: '[i]f you put me back in a welding pen and fabrication, I'll still be able to stick things together'. Interestingly, Lovelace did continue to work in industry outside of their engineering background, but in an unrelated construction-based trade, taking advantage of a shortage of skilled labour and greater control over their working week. Brunel considered their skills and how they had developed within education to feel more like an engineer, learning how to use a far wider variety of machinery as a

result, benefitting the students directly.

Dudley's background was varied, starting off as an engineer, working in a lead role for a manufacturing company, but retraining later in life as a plumber and heating engineer. Able to adapt the skills developed as an engineer, they started working casually for a friend who installed kitchens and discovered a penchant for the plumbing element. Disillusioned at their early career, having seen and overseen manufacturing moving to Europe and beyond, they decided to follow a vocation, retrain, and start working for themselves. After forging a second career, they decided to enter education:

*I felt that it would be more challenging and rewarding than the careers I had previously. I also felt that as it is less physically demanding, I would have a more comfortable old age.*

Dudley mused over the decision, considering whether they would go back into either previous trade. They considered work completed at the college to develop training rigs for modern air source heating systems:

*If I had the choice to, apart from my knees not being as good as they used [to be], if I had the choice between working on the tools and teaching, it's very close, but I do think the teaching side of it just edges it slightly.*

Identity played a large part in how the vocational teachers viewed themselves and plays an important part in how the vocational teacher is produced.

The expectation that vocational experts hold a 'dual professional' status rests firmly in the conceived space, along with other abstract elements of educational influence (figure 5). As the teacher passes through the dialectic and the perceived and conceived space exert a reciprocal influence, the consequence is played out in the lived space.

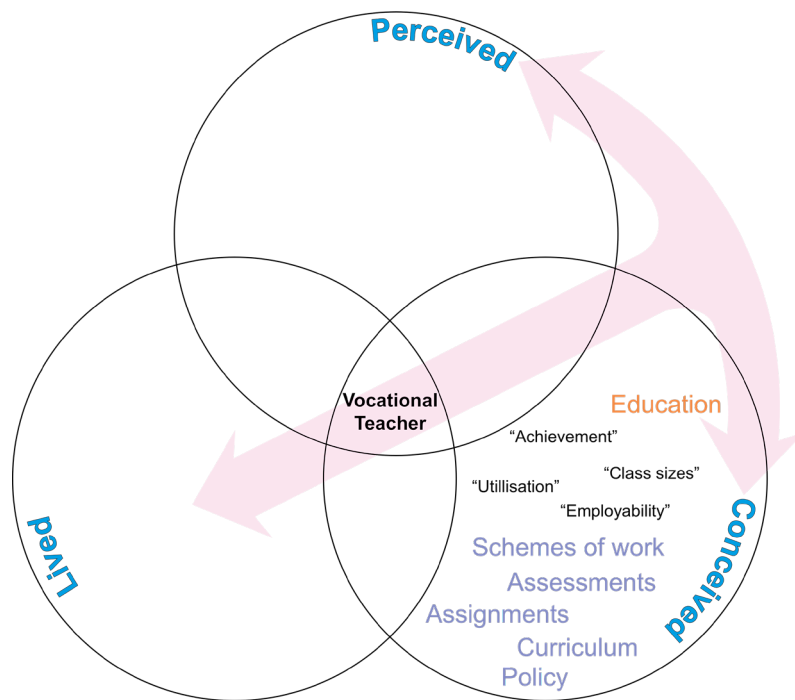


Figure 5 – The Conceived Element of the Vocational Teacher

#### 6.2.4 Identity - The Lived

Lefebvre considered lived space as the space that is 'directly lived through associated images and symbols' (1991: 39). This element of space overlays place, passively experienced, where the 'imagination seeks to change and appropriate'. Lived space dialectically interacts with conceived and perceived space, offering opportunities for the ethnologist and anthropologist to study the flow of rhythm through this space.

The literature broadly suggests that vocational teacher identity is rooted within their trade or expertise (Kirk, 2019; Esmond and Wood, 2018; Fejes and Köpsén, 2012; Lucas and Nasta, 2010; Le Gallais, 2006a). Le Gallais' particular study focused on construction teachers in the West Midlands at a similar institution with a similar vocational intent and almost universally found that participants identified with class and their trade over being teachers (2006a: 161). My findings however contradict Le Gallais', with more than two-thirds considering themselves teachers, either exclusively or as a significant part of their identity, unaffected by length of teaching service.

Gaudi, a bricklayer by trade, considered their time in industry finished, clearly stating that they 'couldn't go back to laying bricks', moving now toward the more conceived space of teacher expectations rather than the more altruistic, perceived space. This was similarly reflected by Leonardo, Dudley, Ringgold, and Vidal.

There were some who still considered themselves firmly in the 'trade' camp. These directly referred to their previous occupation, for example, Lovelace considered themselves an 'engineer first', Corbusier a joiner, and Walsh a carpenter. Ramsey considered himself a chef, but reflected more deeply than most:

*I think if you stuck me with a bunch of chefs now, I'd probably feel like I'm more of a teacher...but if you stick me in a group of teachers, I feel more like a chef. (Ramsey)*

This was echoed by others who occupied a liminal space between teaching and trade. Benz occupied this liminal trans-space between the conceived and perceived, considering themselves a 'professional teacher now...and a professional automotive technician', representing a clear example the ETF's binary 'dual-professional' concept (2018). Edison was similar, still firmly rooted in industry alongside their teaching role. Ringgold approached the concept more deeply, considering how they moved back and forth through this liminal space:

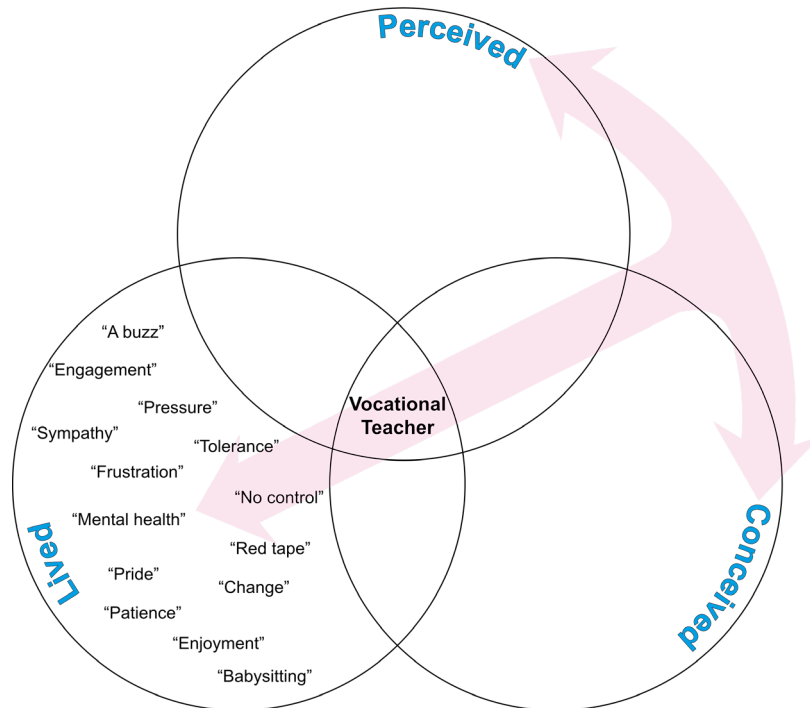
*When I talk to the students, I often use the analogy of having two hats. I have my college hat on, so certain things I say to them with the college hat on, such as science and the more political stuff. But very often, I've also got my decorator hat on and talk to them about what they could do in terms of getting into work and trade and stuff.*

Despite this, Ringgold still firmly identified as a teacher over their trade, 'stating I'm a lecturer at the college in construction'.

The move to a more fluid identity appears to be a more recent phenomenon, with policy and organisational expectations blurring the space between the perceived and conceived, creating a liminal space in between. As Frieda noted, '10 years ago I wouldn't have considered myself a teacher, but now I would', reinforced by Leonardo's comment that they are 'edging towards a teacher now'.



The result of this clash between the perceived and conceived plays out in the lived space (figure 6), as teachers struggle with the dialectical draw between the two. The result of recent reform has disrupted rhythms of teaching and industrial expectations, questioning where the teacher sits within the dialectic. As Brunel stated, '[I'm] a teacher...sometimes a babysitter!'.



*Figure 6 – The Lived Space of the Vocational Teacher*

### 6.2.5 Dialectical Transitions – Change through the Dialectic

Disruption to rhythm is primarily felt in the lived space and through the body. Arrhythmia occurs when rhythms clash. Cyclical rhythm, the academic year for example, is often disrupted by political changes, imposition of policy, and substantial moments, such as the raising of the participation age to 18 (Dobraszczyk, 2022) and the impact of COVID. Change in FE is frequent, for example there were ten Secretaries of State for Education between 2010 and 2023, including a period of five Education Secretaries in the space of a single year (FE News, 2022). With much disruption in the sector, many of the participants reflected on how they too had changed.

Lovelace explored some personal detail when framing change in their approach to teaching. They occupied a liminal state between a being a teacher and expectations to also be a social worker. Highlighting the impact of poor mental health on students because of the pandemic, they reflected:

*It did change me. I couldn't, I just couldn't find a way to deal with the different changes which then affected me. But now, I have to find ways to deal with certain situations, certain changes.*

Lovelace's manner is typical of their representative industry. During the interview, there were multiple occurrences of self-deprecation through 'banter' and consideration of their previous industrial behaviours as a means to aid this understanding of change:

*Yeah, yeah. I mean I'm still trying...try and make people laugh and you know, just to give them the best day they can...*

Their experience in teaching had forced a newly reflexive stance:

*there's got to be a reason as to why [students are] acting like this instead of just before, just brushing off [that] that's them....but maybe, sometimes, I've been trying to be strict when I don't need to be, and I need to know the personality first...so I always try and look for why they behave in the way they do...but there's a fine line between getting them on board and letting them get away with things*

Lovelace's reflection was shared by many other participants. Dudley reflected heavily on the lived experience of the students, stating that they, '[D]idn't realise how unfortunate...backgrounds some of the kids came from'. Leonardo and Ringgold, both experienced teachers with lengthy time in industry alongside multiple years teaching, spoke about how changes in student behaviours had impacted their practice and approach, forcing a traversal of the dialectic:

*More patience, that's for sure. Definitely more understanding of the type of students that you're teaching. So just trying to be more sympathetic...don't judge everyone, all students the same. [s]ome of them come from tough backgrounds, tough families...who have not got much interest in them, and it's easy to judge the young people until you know a little bit more about them. (Leonardo)*

*I've become a lot more, definitely more patient. Yeah, I'm definitely a bit more understanding, accepting, tolerant, than I probably would have been five years ago. (Ringgold)*

Although Benz referenced tolerance rather than patience, they reflected on how they had changed and learned how to better 'approach issues to get the best out of them'. Mansell, who shares the same industrial background with Benz, reflected on their own experience as not only being an automotive technician, but someone who had owned and operated an automotive business for

several years. They commented on their patience and how teaching had changed their perspective on dealing with others within their lived space:

*It absolutely changed my personality, for the better though. I'm gonna say, I used to be...very short tempered when I was at work. You didn't do the job that you were doing? "Get out", you know, "get yourself another job. You're sacked. You're fired". [I]t's been a journey for me...it's helped me to be patient...20 years ago that man would not have been as understanding...and I think I'm a better person for it.*

Vidal spoke about their journey into teaching, which began with school link students. They reflected on the maturity of their current students being much lower than they had previously experienced. This resulted in classroom pressures beyond simply teaching:

*[b]ecause some of them are not bad kids, no, you know. I mean they just need guidance...I've become their role model. That's what I feel like I am at Level 1, their role model...I don't really teach the skill, I get them ready [for life].*

This experience had inured Vidal who, along with Frieda from the same professional background, noted that it had made them stronger as individuals. Frieda also considered that it had made them a 'firmer teacher'.

Tesla, with nearly three decades of teaching, spoke at length of some of the student experiences and how they have seen a seismic change over the last decade. They spoke about students they had worked with before, considering themselves an 'old hand', but recognising that they had very much changed the way they worked. Mansell referred to this change and how they had become 'more streamlined' as a result.

## **6.2.6 Concluding Remarks**

The literature suggests that vocational specialists enter teaching through the perceived space, often for altruistic or even accidental reasons, and participant responses reinforced this. The dissemination of skills and experiences are primary motivations, however the conceived space dialectically interacts and disrupt, creating and recreating the teacher beyond dualistic labels, such as 'teacher-educators' or 'dual-professionals'.

This chapter has explored how teachers perceive their role within vocational education, grapple with both identifying and becoming professionals, and identify with often multiple expectations placed on them, through both industrial expectations and teaching. Lefebvre's lived space, the space of

representation, was where he theorised the dialectical convergence with perceived space and conceived space. This space of contestation reciprocally influences perceived space as teachers adopt and adapt to a multitude of expectations.

Rhythms of change flow through each dialectical element, exposing reciprocal conflicts. In the next section I explore and expose some of the rhythms that the vocational teachers' experiences.

## **6.3 Rhythms through the Vocational Space**

Lefebvre considered differences within repetition to constitute the 'thread of time' (2019: 17). His methodology suggests the analysis of rhythms to connect events through time, exposing conflict between cyclical and linear time in the light of rapid technological progression and the influence of capitalism. The rhythms of vocational education, historical moments of repetition, are experienced by the vocational teachers every day within their lived spaces.

The rhythm of reform compels teachers to reflect and adapt to remain effective in their roles. The perceived space of altruistic intention dialectically entwines with the conceived spaces of educational reform, managerialism, and increased bureaucracy, resulting in the hybridisation of roles and expectations beyond that of teaching. The cycles of reform impact teachers through either a series of smaller changes, where differences are more subtle and nuanced and result in lower levels of arrhythmia, through to major policy shift, where we see Lefebvrian moments, such as the introduction of the study programme in 2015 (Wolf, 2011).

In an attempt to capture the spirit of Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, I completed an observation in a vocational training environment to grasp and record some of these rhythms through lived experiences of the teacher and the students. I visited an automotive workshop on two occasions, the same day but a week apart, to observe a full day with the same group of students. I placed myself into the stores, a central location giving a view of the entire workshop without interference or influence (see appendix 8). From there, I documented a brief day in a vocational teacher's life.

### **6.3.1 'Seen from the Stores' - Observing Rhythms in Vocational Space**

As I arrive at the workshop, a gathering of students waits patiently outside, anticipating the teacher. There are small interactions, idle in nature, yet the conversation is low, muted. As the day breaks, young adults struggle within a circadian cycle. Despite the opportunity of personal interaction, many

are engrossed on their mobile device, browsing an abstract digital world. A teacher approaches the door and lets the students in. Dutifully, many immediately move to lockers to complete their uniform - a black polo shirt with black work trousers and protective steel toe-capped boots. Murmurs occur as boots are pulled on, still quiet, stunted, as many continue to stir from late nights. The physical area is vast, high ceilinged, steel framed, and would be spacious but for ten different vehicles dispersed across the area. Industrial machinery fringes the margins, with tool chests punctuating space between vehicles.

Teachers shout over the background hiss of an airline, firm yet not aggressive. Different teacher voices from different zones differentiate the students' place of work, merging and overlapping, but never unheard. Students engage, surrounding each teacher who in turn control their individual environments. They set the expectations of the session, recalling learned skills from earlier lessons, incrementally building on learning. There is a eurythmia present, an unintended yet harmonious occurrence where voices are raised over the hiss of machinery and students act in a behavioural unison.

Ten cars line up sideways, some on ramps, some on the floor. Each group of students peels off and take up their station from the previous lesson under the harsh artificial light. Alone or in small groups of two or three, students filter through the stores, booking equipment relative to their given task, before returning to their work area. Areas have identities of their own. Depending on the discipline and the complexity of the task, the workshop is designed to traverse students through academic years. Level one in area one, level two in area two and level three in area three. As each academic year passes, students themselves pass through, as the technicality of the task increases, incrementally developing learning.

Some students require very little attention, working as a team to dismantle a whole wheel hub, using their disciplined skills to determine the correct method, their body recalling previous skills, the use of tools an extension of the mind acted on by the body through repetition (Lefebvre, 2019). Others are less confident. For some, confusion halts the task, as they search for the teacher to reassure and support them - confidence as important as ability. Having to manage a group larger than would be usual, the teacher's experience proves invaluable in ensuring that each student receives just enough instruction to enable them to carry on without others becoming too distracted. Using learning within their perceived space as the leading experience, they weave in and out of groups, spending neither too little, nor too much time with each.

Elsewhere in the workshop others complete their tasks. The rhythmic 'buzz-buzz-buzz' of battery powered impact wrenches permeate the air as some change tyres, working in teams of threes or

fours, changing responsibilities as they move around the cars, carefully or sometimes carelessly, removing trims and hubs as their as yet untrained and inexperienced practices adjust to the application of physical pressure from the hand tools.

Teachers continue to walk round each group, ensuring those on task are on track, supporting the hesitant and reinforcing the confident - coaxing, nudging, and challenging as they go. Occasionally they stop the group, bring them together and delve into detail, explaining theory and drawing on previously learned information from the students before returning them back to their own group to progress each task.

A few students here and there disengage from their work. Unseen by the preoccupied teacher, they stealthily pass amongst other groups, hidden by vehicles, disrupting flows of work. Some welcome the distraction, others less so, continuing to complete their work in the hope they move on. Students continue to visit the stores, each task demanding a different set of tools. The flow is continuous, although frequency slows as each task becomes larger and more time consuming as the day progresses. The technician engages with each as they visit, often challenging the choice depending on the student's experience and level of learning. Each bring and take a different level of interaction, of confidence, as individual personalities play out in the work environment.

Large groups see more students disengage, the teacher struggling to keep up with the demand as the task grows more complex, taxing both experience and patience. The behaviour is less disruptive as students find more willing accomplices to share escapades with. Murmurs increase as voices get louder, more boisterous, more confident as time progresses. Noise increases as metallic tools impact the hard concrete floor disharmoniously, wheel hubs spin, and wrenches continue to attack stubborn nuts. The hiss of an airline continues throughout, at no time allowing silence, even when the teacher engages the group. The noise is almost percussive, yet lacking any measure, the beats random and unpredictable, but always continuous. Occasionally the pressure breaks on the tyre machine, creating a loud 'pop', at first startling the observer and many students, who start to predict and adapt to the noise.

Students begin to break out into smaller groups and occupy tables strategically placed outside of the demarcated floor to complete written work, complementing the practical. They peel away one at a time, slowly joined by others as the physical work progresses. For many, this is a chance to break away from the practical, physically demanding pressure on the body, and draw breath with their peers, this time without technological distraction. The difference from the session start is tangible, no longer occupying an abstract electronic space but that of people and personalities, as interaction returns to the physical presence of surrounding peers.

Throughout the session the teacher circulates, stops, prompts, and moves on. The cry of 'sir' increases as work starts drawing to a close in the final part of the session, students keen for recognition of their progress. Demand on the teacher grows, along with frustration, as challenges increase in complexity. The tempo of the session increases, and the teacher is drawn into more and more situations, students sensing the looming of the session end, eager to gain formal recognition of work completed. The early morning reticence has long passed, murmurs have now become voices amongst the machinery and confidence has peaked. More join those already at tables, engaging with their peers both for learning and opportunities of distraction. The eurhythmic start is now fully disrupted. Confidence, ability, and desire disrupt flows, as some technically pull away from their peers, creating an arrhythmic instance for the teacher, who adapts accordingly, drawing on skill and experience to manage the cyclical disruption of the linear session.

Cars so rhythmically disassembled now start the process of restoration, the deconstruction reversed to enable students the next day to themselves carry out the same work. Wrenches hammer against rims, tyre irons and torque wrenches complete the job. Tyres are replaced and handed back to peers who return them to the correct cars to restore. Different groups work at different paces, cars descend ramps one by one as each is complete, the teacher checking each in turn for completeness.

Some students avoid the task completely, gleefully letting others complete the reversal while they disrupt those who have finished or have yet to start. The distraction disrupts some as they find it difficult to ignore, forming a flow of disconnect interrupted by the teacher. Pressure in the stores increases, a queue forms, managed by the technician as they return each item of equipment back to its predetermined home. The queue eventually clears giving respite to the technician only to return as another group finishes their task, repeating every few minutes as students finish. Some grab brooms and start cleaning up, others watch, eagerly anticipating the teacher's call to end the session.

The teacher calls out. As the students entered the workshop, so they leave. The notable difference in exuberance is obvious; they have enjoyed the session and the company of each other. In one corner singing erupts, in another, students playfully scuffle. The teacher is noticeably fatigued yet still commanding. What started as a well-planned and controlled session had lost some discipline as the day progressed, yet the teacher never lost sight of the purpose or of the individual, having moved calculatedly through the polyrhythmic vocational space, using skills developed through industry, teaching, and life, to ensure that the session flowed and the students learned from the interactions.

The workshop goes almost immediately quiet, the absence of sound almost as deafening as the crescendo at the lesson's peak. As the students have gone, the smell of oil and grease remain, as do the tool chests, cars, and machinery, indelibly linked to perceived and the lived space that underpin

the trade, all contributing their part to the rhythm of the everyday in a typical vocational workshop in further education.

### **6.3.2 Rhythms of Student Engagement**

Whilst vocational teachers bring skills and experiences into education outside of the traditional academic route into teaching, there are challenges of the transition into education that feature in Lefebvre's spatial dialectic, including empathy and bureaucracy (Page, 2013). Vocational teachers seek an empathetic engagement with students, based on respect often experienced personally during their own training, 'yet their aspirations were often thwarted by their experience of students' (Avis and Bathmaker, 2004: 14). Students themselves experience rhythm, cyclical routines that are embedded through repetition. The disruption to rhythms through austerity, reform, and policy fluctuation, combined with the COVID outbreak, have created substantial arrhythmia in vocational education.

Every participant raised the increasing challenge of engaging students, parents, and carers, reflecting on how difficult relationships had become. Still fresh in teachers' minds, COVID featured in most participants' conversations, however few considered this the reason for change, more an accelerant. Attendance became an issue during COVID and has continued post-lockdowns, with absence rates almost doubling (Education Policy Institute, 2023; Thandi, 2023), but classroom behaviour, an increase in mental health disorders by 22% since 2019 (BMA, 2023) and a change in attitude to learning formed part of a wider theme around engaging students.

#### **6.3.2.1 Changing Behaviours**

There was almost unanimous consensus that student behaviour had changed, with most teachers citing notable changes between 2015 and 2018. Leonardo spoke about the students' attitude toward work, reflecting on the last seven years and a decline in engagement. Some suggested a link to socio-economic factors, with the region being amongst the highest in England for deprivation (ONS, 2023). Leonardo reflected on the location of the college and a conversation with a friend teaching in a rural college:

*Yeah, because that location, where it is, quite nice round there. It's quite rural, so they get bussed in. The kids...generally overall, they're great. Does that make a difference?*



Leonardo's inference was linked to some of their own experiences with the change in students' lived experiences outside of the college. Brunel noted that post-COVID, more students had become inclined to disruptive behaviour:

*[pre-COVID] you will always get your low-level disruption and disciplinary issues, but it just seems sort of, just got a lot worse from the normal students, the ones who aren't traditionally naughty misbehaving, they get involved more with low level disruption.*

During the field observation, student disruption, albeit low-level, was immediately apparent. Whilst behaviour had no malicious intent, it disrupted the rhythms of others. Dudley was more relaxed about the situation. Primarily responsible for apprentices and adults, they had not seen the extent of changes in behaviour that others had, however with some experience of full-time students, they were able to differentiate changes in behaviour across demographic types:

*We also have some students that exhibit quite immature behaviour. The opportunities that they've got sort of make you a little bit frustrated because, you know, they're not using it so well...since I [first] came into it...you've always had behaviour problems, but the percentage seems to have gone up.*

This behaviour was observed directly. The practical workshop environment used for the observation was demarcated into zones. The temptation for some students to pass into other areas was clearly overwhelming and occasionally occurred during the observation. Mansell explained that with as many as 80 students able to access the facilities at any given time, working across various levels, challenges were inevitable:

*I had students going across while they were doing their test. Somebody pulled out the plug on the emissions tester while I was in the middle of doing a demonstration. Lots of things like that. The kids swearing you know...they really don't want to be here and they're just messing around or causing lots of other issues around college.*

Smaller, less disruptive examples were directly observed in the environment, mainly due to large class sizes and scarcity of teacher attention. With the teacher spending so much time giving individual attention to small groups, student concentration waned at times.

Participants all referenced this increased disruption, with many lamenting the impact on other students in their tutor groups. Pinkham was unrelenting and had high expectations of their students. They explained that their skillset suited lower-achieving students and often led on that type of programme. Despite their experience, they had experienced a challenging year post COVID:

*Yeah, I think that the last year was my worst behaviour...students' mental health issues...but anger issues on top of that as well... that was the first time I've ever thought somebody was going to punch my face in.*

They spoke about dealing with parents, which had become a daily issue, concerned that accusations would be made should they not keep them informed:

*I am constantly on the phone to parents. That's just what I do, just to make sure that they're aware of it, and because at the end of the year, I don't want any backlash to say, "Well, you never told me. I didn't know of any of these problems!"*

There was a defensive nature about this approach that was not uncommon amongst participants. Ringgold, an experienced teacher, also raised issues with students:

*Probably the biggest challenges are with some of our students, noticeably over the last few years. We've had more than behavioural issues with our students...*

Frieda was concerned with the drop in standards of student behaviour, stating it had: '...changed massively'. Introducing a personal perspective, they spoke about their children that schooled in the local area and their own worries:

*Yeah, it's just, I think it's just crept up on us really, and then we went into isolation for two years and then, bam, it was around this when we came back...like, you know, knife crime and drugs and things like that. Unfortunately, because of where we live, it has a massive impact on us because it's rife in surrounding areas.*

Concerns about the area are not new. College links with the local police suggested there were issues across the borough. Frieda was concerned that this behaviour, formally the preserve of younger students, was edging into more mature students:

*[Y]ou can't believe that's how they are, they're behaving even at 19, 20, 21. It's really difficult to, like, you can't believe that they're behaving at their age, you would think that they would have more manners and respect.*

These challenges caused Frieda to question themselves as a teacher: 'you think it's something that I'm doing wrong? Is there something else I could do to manage the behaviour in the class?'. Other participants had explained how they had changed personally to adapt to behavioural challenges yet although all participants spoke about behaviour, many more continued to claim how worsening mental health and anxiety amongst students had become increasingly prominent.

### 6.3.2.2 Increasing Difficulties with Mental Health

There are documented increases in mental health illness following the global financial crash in 2008 and the subsequent political decision to enter a period of austerity in 2010 (BMA, 2016; Viner et al, 2022), with the coalition government asserting that the public deficit was the result of irresponsible spending decisions made by the previous government rather than as the result of failed neoliberal policy (Arrieta, 2022). The disruption of rhythm created by COVID was seen as an accelerant rather than a cause of increased mental health and anxiety. More than half of the participants talked through various issues with student mental health and how it had impacted their practice. Whilst many spoke about the college closures and the climate of uncertainty due to the COVID pandemic, many attributed the beginning of these behaviours prior to the first COVID lockdown. Edison talked about a recent rise in mental health conditions amongst students:

*[T]here seems to be more prevalence these days on mental health, anxiety, stress of students and that transfers into, you know, attendance and possibly how you do interact with some students.*

Of all participants, Benz was the most direct. They singled out one individual clearly struggling in their opinion with an undiagnosed condition, but from the perspective of affecting other classmates. They spoke about the difficulty of keeping the class flowing with constant disruption, highlighting an example of how just one student can affect a group: 'Take him out of the equation, when he's not here, and the flipping room is totally different'.

Benz was though an outlier. Participants often made links back to mental health when discussing student engagement, even if their experiences were negative. Lovelace, following recent personal experiences, considered themselves a convert:

*I'm more alert to that kind of stuff. I'll try and, you know, try and look out for it...I'm really passionate about [mental health]. To be honest, trying to get people, out of, the lows at the rear, and trying to keep them, you know, keep their head above water instead of keep sinking down, because it's not a nice place to be. I've been there myself.*

This brings more challenges into the classroom and vocational areas. With an increase in bureaucracy and managerial expectations, teachers are struggling to develop strategies to cope with the rhythmic change in the conceived space. Corbusier echoed many participants' thoughts, '...we seem to be having a lot of it pushed on to us'. They furthered:

*I personally think it needs a separate body, and that we're not social workers. But we are becoming more and more like social workers and, and a lot of our training reflects that.*

Pinkham was more circumspect, recognising that while there has always been a pastoral element to teaching, this was becoming an increasing element of the role:

*[J]ust the way things are now, you didn't have to use to deal with that, because they're not, not that they didn't have it, but there wasn't as much need for it for the students themselves - mental health issues and everything...*

They reflected on the previous 12 months in education and the return to physical teaching following the pandemic:

*Yeah, I think that the last, last year, was my worst behaviour and other students' mental health issues, but anger issues on top of that as well.*

Ringgold reflected further back, acknowledging that COVID has had an impact, but not necessarily linking it to changes in behaviours. A large increase in students with Educational Health Care (EHC) Plans, legal documents that identify additional educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support to meet those needs, have contributed, in their opinion, to the current situation (GOV.UK, 2012):

*Don't know why there seems to be all these days people with ADHD. A whole raft of emotional issues just seems to me now the last few years has been, it's just noticeably increasing students with EHC [Plans]. Probably the biggest challenges are with some of our students...we've had more than behavioural issues with our students, in particular, our first-year students. Discipline seems to be very dominant at the moment, certainly this year, and mental health issues.*

There were some links made to the impact of COVID on education. Brunel talked about the increase in low level arrhythmic disruption and how more students were being drawn in: 'It's almost as if they've mentally they've missed two years of that, students have missed this year eight and year nine in those years'. Other participants acknowledged the part that COVID had played in these changes but were less keen to attribute it to the change itself, changes acknowledged in literature produced prior to the pandemic (see BMA, 2016 for example). Many thought it exaggerated previous change, Ramsey highlighted that 'the pandemic just threw a whole new curveball into that'. Others made similar observations:

*I think COVID just sort of accelerated the process a little bit more. (Benz)*

*I think it's just crept up on us really, and then we went into isolation for two years and then, bam! It was around this when we came back. (Frieda)*

*I think people are blaming COVID. I think it was before then. (Walsh)*

Tesla was certain in their response. They reflected on what they perceived as ten years of change within education, highlighting that it was not unusual to have had difficult groups in the past, but had become an accelerating rhythm:

*I think it's been happening certainly longer than COVID. I think it's dumbing down; everyone puts it down to COVID or a lot of it down to COVID. But I think the change has been before then. (Tesla)*

Whilst it is clear that COVID has had an impact on student engagement, mental health and anxiety, participants attributed change starting before the pandemic. The combination of increased social isolation, local socio-political issues and having to stay in education until the age of 18, has resulted in some students taking courses that they potentially have no interest in studying. As a result, participants noted more disengagement from students and a change in attitude from previous years.

### **6.3.2.3 Attitudes to Learning**

Almost every participant spoke about how students' attitude to learning and personal expectations had changed. Every participant quoted periods between the last five and ten years as the foundation of change, dismissing COVID as a primary cause:

*It's in the attitude towards being here towards the work, just the general attitude towards work. (Leonardo)*

*Attitude, mainly. The students' attitude. For the last three or four years now, every single year, I could easily leave. (Pinkham)*

*We want to try and improve things, and it's very frustrating when you get one or two students not turned up, and then that stuff's been defrosted. Can't be used again. (Ramsey)*

*So, like, I've got a few students there that, like, will go to go to the toilet and they'll come back in 20 minutes, and it's like, I've got a class. I know they've disappeared, can't go and find them themselves. (Frieda)*

*I mean, behaviour and sort of, but they're not as much behaviour, it's more they don't care. It's more they're not bothered whether they get through [the qualification]. (Tesla)*

*It's a rarity now to get one that just comes in, cracks on with their work, and leaves and gets a job. (Walsh)*

*[after COVIDI] I just think motivation, work ethic, all went out the window, and the students were all, you know...everything was an effort. (Ramsey)*

Benz talked about changes in attitude, anecdotally discussing placing students with employers as part of their course. The study programme introduced in 2015, the result of the Wolf Report (2011), introduced an element of work experience in every vocational programme. They lamented the challenge of getting placements for students but also the response to the expectations they faced in industry:

*I think this is where there's a big culture shock when they go on placements. What they're doing at the [placement] at the moment is not like the garage at college. They have the doors off all the time, it's quite cold, and there are people saying, "I need 20 more minutes on that," and "I need you to drop this one." It's all hustle, hustle, hustle, so I'm asking it from both standpoints, because I used to be just a normal technician, and I was a service manager as well, so I was sitting behind the desk telling other people what to do, you know?*

Links to industry were common. Frustration amongst participants was high, as were their expectations. The vocational experience teachers brought into the classroom often felt wasted, as students frequently displayed apathy, noticed during the observation, with small groups of disengagement never far away. Benz, again, was most animated when linking their students to their own personal experience as an apprentice. They recounted a recent situation with a student that had been given a rare opportunity for an industry placement, despite it being an unusual offer at that point of their studies. Benz explained that he had negotiated this 'one-off opportunity to do some proper work experience in a proper garage', yet the student, for what Benz considered poor reasons, was now turning it down:

*[T]o me, that was so flipping demoralising. The fact that we've done that...above and beyond, and that, unfortunately, it ain't an unusual case...I'm telling you now, if somebody offered me a position at a lower age, I'd have snapped it up. If I wanted to be on the mechanics course, getting automotive studies because I want to work in the industry, and somebody offered me a placement, I'd be there with my flippin' shoes shined and ready to do it.*

They spoke about the change in student attitude toward qualifications, and the expectation that they would get a qualification merely for going to college. Some students had low aspirations, as Benz described, they would return from exams having failed with disregard, simply brushing the failure off. This incensed Benz:

*I think that's the thing that really knocks your neck in, the fact that you've got all this flipping paperwork to tick boxes and boxes and boxes and then you've got the attitude from the kids like, "I'm doing all this for you to try and get you a qualification, make yourself something in your life", and all you're doing is like it's like, "well come on, just give us the certificates".*

Benz was able to cross-reference attitudes more effectively than their colleagues due to teaching evening programmes to mature learners, stating that 'their attitude is different. They're respectful, they do the work'.

Teachers in engineering were some of the more recently qualified, and still held a strong industrial identity. Almost as scathing as Benz, Lovelace drew on personal experience, reflecting on the expectations they had placed on them by their own parents:

*You know why have parents gotta be involved? [W]hen I left school, I got a job a week after doing my GCSEs, and my mom says, "welcome to the real world, son".*

It was clear that Lovelace considered them adults at the age of 16, in line with their own personal experience. Gaudi also had a similar experience:

*When I was sixteen, I was everywhere...you know, doing miles and...they would change my job from one day to the next, and I had to get the bus on the way home. They can't do that now. These students have just not got that in them.*

The suggestion here from both participants was that students were now not ready at the age of 16 to be working and relied very much on parental involvement. A longitudinal international study by Icenogle et al (2016) showed that psychosocial maturation, the process of the development of attributes that optimise personal growth and socialisation, did not develop in young people until their 20s. They referenced that self-restraint appeared lacking in late adolescence, observed by many participants including Brunel, who noted a marked difference when students turned 18:

*...the maturity difference you see, it's like somebody switching a light on...I'm hoping that that's going to be the same for the students who've gone out on [T Level industrial] placement[s]. I'm hoping...they see the value of what they're doing here and how it relates to where they're going to go.*

Sutin et al.'s (2022) early post-pandemic study of adults found significant declines in openness and agreeableness, while Gotlib et al (2022) identified that post-pandemic, adolescent mental health and neurodevelopment appeared to have altered, at least in the short term. Dudley lamented the situation: 'We have some students that exhibit quite immature behaviour. The opportunities that

they've got sort of make you a little bit frustrated'. Lovelace spoke about working with students in a dangerous vocational environment and the challenge that immature behaviour brought with it. A student was reaching into dangerous engineering machinery without following the safe procedure:

*I've saved him from losing his hand. I see it that way, but he's just seeing me as shouting at him. The guard was down, and he put his hand underneath the guard, and I was just like, "wow, what are you doing?" You know, because if you're the person turned that on, his hand's going to be mangled...and he says, "there's no need to shout." But at that time, I wouldn't have had a chance to run over to him and press the emergency stop...within a split second, his hand would have been gone. Shouting at him was the only option for him to move his hand, yeah. So, he doesn't talk to me anymore!*

Work ethic was also referenced by participants. Many, when referring to their own industrial experiences, commented on the students' ability to be work-ready, or have the necessary enthusiasm to be successful in their studies. Ramsey spoke about the likelihood of students lasting in industry, stating that from a group of 15 students, 'I can identify four or maybe five of you who would make it'. Frieda also linked work ethic to phone use, stating: 'like, just generally in the world, it's getting worse, isn't it? And I think it's like technology, mobile phone, and social media'. When questioned on this, Ramsey stated that:

*I think it's got a bit of a dip, I think. Motivation, work ethic, and just even responsibility, not just for their workbook, but for their personal lives...They're on the phone still until 3 o'clock in the morning. They're coming in tired. Everything [is] an effort. Well, you're going into a job where it requires a lot of it and a lot of hard work.*

Tesla had much of their timetable dedicated to delivering electrical installation to adult and higher-level full-time students. They were disappointed at how things had changed during their considerable tenure in education:

*[T]here's a lack of attention to detail. The kids don't care whether their jobs look good or not, as long as they finish it and get paid. And it's not just the younger ones, it's the older ones too. It's money-driven, and they don't care how the job looks as long as they...get the money...they just want to 'bash it in'.*

Gaudi considered the change in students over their 15 years in education. They stated, 'I do think, at the beginning, I had students who, the majority were, "I'm going to be a bricklayer"'. This he reflected had changed for the worse, and student expectations have differed:



*[students are] told to come here because "[they're] good with [their] hands". So not that they've done anything with their hands [before], It's just, "I don't want to be in a classroom". Students aren't...they're further away from being ready for work.*

The notion that students who were less academically capable were pushed into a practical programme was noted by more than one participant. Mansell experienced the same phenomenon, stating that '[They] don't really want to be here...[they think] It's the easiest course they can do'.

Attitudes to learning extended beyond the student. Almost universally, participants expressed frustration at increased dealings with parents, particularly the time-consuming nature of frequent contact but also how interactions had become more complex. Corbusier opined having to call parents as an unnecessary layer of expectation on a teacher, considering it a chore to do 'things like ...chase up where [the students] are'. Many participants reflected negative experiences with parents and carers. Vidal stated that they, 'get very frustrated now because I spend so much time on the phone to parents because I have to'. Some parents had seemingly given up on order or discipline. Ramsey noted that:

*[E]ven when we had the [parents of students who were] at-risk [of failing in college]...discussing it with the parents, they mirror the same comments that we make [about their children] - the lack of motivation to want to try to do more.*

Vidal noted a similar experience, 'I had one say to me last week...can you talk to him? When he comes in? He listens to you'. These interactions have made some participants anxious about parental contact, Lovelace in particular stated that they started to 'dread making the phone call'. Some participants linked the students' attitude to experiences at home. Frieda stated that, 'I do think it probably comes from home, doesn't it?'. Leonardo broadly agreed:

*From my experience, kids with a poor attitude towards working and getting qualifications and being a good member of society, you know, if you've got parents who follow that same ethos, generally the kids do. You've got parents who don't, it's very difficult. A cultural thing.*

The organisational pressure to call and interact with parents regarding student behaviour was bemoaned by all. Gaudi questioned the impact of precious time spent interacting with disengaged parents:

*Biggest problem is that, until I know the parents are engaged, yeah, it's a waste of time. You know, some of these parents don't want to hear from us. And, and when they do, they're angry with us for disturbing them.*

There were some extremes where parents openly stated that the reason their child was in college was purely to access state benefits. Leonardo recalled a recent conversation:

*Yeah, mom and dad are saying to you, 'He's going to college to go just to get me, to get me extra social benefit money.' I've spoken to [some] parents and you know their first words, 'well, you know, does he get his benefit? Do I still get my benefits if you like, just signing up for this course?'*

Although not common, other teachers referred to a reliance on benefit payments, forcing the students to attend, regardless of their intent or aspiration:

*Students to parents who can't be bothered they, they'll phone up and like, what happens to the benefits then? (Pinkham)*

*So then it started to change because they weren't getting the benefits. Parents wouldn't get the benefits if the children weren't in. (Vidal)*

Pinkham had course leadership responsibilities for groups of lower-level students. Years of negative experiences had created a defence mechanism that pre-empted parental responses:

*So just making sure we're on top of the phone calls...makes your job easier, especially at the end of the year when you know they're, they're not gonna be progressing. I am constantly on the phone to parents. That's just what I do, just to make sure that they're aware of it, and because at the end of the year I don't want any backlash to say, well, you never told me. I didn't know of any of these problems.*

This tactic was not unique. Vidal reflected a similar approach:

*So, it is a massive job now to have that communication with mum and dad or guardians. You know, it really is important because if you can get a relationship with them, they also help you to guide them basically, and every single one of my group, I know all the parents by phone.*

Vidal reflected on years of experience as both a teacher and tradesperson. Originally teaching the 14-16 age group, they found themselves acting in many instances as almost surrogate parents, however now considered themselves, 'parenting at 16 plus'. Walsh detailed some of the extent of parental contact:

*Every day is...dealing with non-attenders. Constantly phoning parents up at break times, trying to do your plans. But then, if you've gotta go up and phone three or four parents because the student's not coming or, you know, they've turned up half an hour late, or they turn up without the right kit so they can't come in the workshop. It just, it just brings*

*challenges all the time. I would say at least an hour and a half a day spent on challenges chasing students, recording stuff on the [system]. Processing disciplinaries. Liaising with safeguarding, liaising with pastoral officers...*

While there were multiple participants lamenting student behaviour, levels of maturity, and parental input, there were a select few that reflected more deeply on individual cases. Despite often displaying a hard front, they acknowledged how challenging life had become for some students. Dudley was perhaps the most reflective:

*You don't realise with some of these kids that they have to take the younger siblings to school, they have to go out and they have to look after a, you know, basically, look after a parent because they're not well enough to look after themselves...some ain't got a room to [do the] work that they've got to do because they've got three younger kids in there screaming their heads off, and they ain't even got a computer.*

Vidal also referred to a current situation they faced, highlighting how challenging some students' lives had become:

*Like, one of the girls cried to me and she said she wasn't very well the one day, and I said to her, "You're 16, you need to go home if you're not very well." And she said, "I don't want to go home." And I said, "What do you mean you don't want to go?" She said, "If you had no life, you wouldn't want to go home neither". I just know that as a child, she's not a child. She's like, looking after Nan and Granddad, looking after nieces and nephews, so she hasn't got a life, basically.*

Vidal's experience shone amongst all the participants. They were most frustrated when they poured time, effort, and empathy into a student to get them engaged and on target, only for it to be undone:

*And then mum and Dad split up. Yeah. So, he wasn't coming in, so I phoned Mom and...she said I'm a single parent to go to work. I don't know what they're doing...*

Whilst these situations were rarely discussed by participants, they highlight how challenging social circumstances can force a maturity onto students they are unlikely to be prepared for.

The data clearly suggests a change in student engagement. From an increase in disruptive behaviour and mental health concerns through to an apathy that runs not only through the student, but too often through parents and carers too. The changes have resulted in teachers having more added to their already overburdened workload, from attendance calls to dealing with challenging parents and external agencies, through to the development of strategies to deal with constant low-level

disruption. The development of teaching appears to be the casualty of this increase in workload, with participants sacrificing the improvement of their pedagogical practice to meet organisational compliance.

### **6.3.3 Rhythms of Politics and Policy**

Policy determines how educational space is conceived, and reform is frequent. Coffield et al (2008: 70) for example take a small snapshot between 2005 and 2007, determining the publication of no fewer than 13 different policy texts impacting FE, while Norris and Adam (2017) cite 48 secretaries of state with relevant responsibilities since the 1980s. Lefebvre (1991: 39) considered this the conceived space, the 'dominant space in any society (or mode of production)'. In chapter two I visited recent reforms, the most substantial being the Wolf Report (2011) introducing the 'study programme' after a pilot in 2014 (Ofsted, 2014), coinciding with the raising of participation to 18 in 2015. The study programme put more expectation into teaching vocational full-time students than any previous reform. The programme introduced mandatory elements alongside a substantial qualification, including maths and English, work experience and tutorial elements, designed to develop character, skills, attitudes, and confidence, as well as embed political agendas, such as Prevent and Fundamental British Values (DfE, 2022).

Many participants discussed when change happened to both the curriculum, student engagement, student type and teaching expectations. Some, like Brunel and Pinkham, pinpointed exactly when they thought this initially occurred, citing the study programme as the beginning, as did Walsh who cited an almost doubling of workload and expectation since 2015. Leonardo, Gaudi, Benz and Mansell all alluded to change from around 2017 whereas others cited a 10-year gradual detrimental change, with Benz, Lovelace, Ringgold and Tesla all reflecting on acceleration of change that COVID has had on an already declining situation.

#### **6.3.3.1 Changes to Courses and Programmes**

The study programme fundamentally changed full-time vocational education. Whilst the qualifications did not immediately change, the structure did, increasing expectations on vocational teachers. Although not a lone reflection, the most succinct came from Mansell, who referenced that students prior to the study programme had 'wanted to be here'. Ringgold noted how the programme has differed from a qualification perspective:

*When I first started, it was all, 'we didn't do maths, we didn't do English,' it was stand-alone. And it [was] all about coming in and learning the trade, all the way from Level 1 to Level 3.*

Benz echoed Ringgold's comments, considering the changes over the last five to six years while also comparing the differences before and after the study programme and the current expectations:

*The agenda now is not so much the vocational qualification, it's more of how much of a package are you building the student up to when they go out into, into the big wide world? Do they know the maths? Do they know their English? Have they got social skills? Can they talk to people? Have they got customer facing skills and stuff, like?*

These skills are designed to better prepare students for employment, an apparent response to global changes from single technical skills to a wider set of competencies (Pilz and Zenner- Höffkes, 2023). Benz lamented the change of focus toward these wider skills:

*You know, they [were] learning the skill they get in the trade and they're going to be working on **your** car. [Y]ears and years ago, it was...you were doing a motor vehicle course - can you fix a car?*

This has compromised the development of practical skills for many participants. Gaudi, agreeing with Benz, spoke about the diminishment of vocational expectation:

*[it] seems to be a lot more on, maybe, the pastoral side of things, and make sure this, that, the other is done, and less on, can this student now build a more technical wall?*

The regret for Gaudi was the pull away from the perceived space, the reason for entering teaching, by the lure of the conceived. Corbusier in turn recognised that some elements of the conceived space had some validity, but had very much pulled too far within the dialectic:

*[T]he stuff with terrorism, the Prevent and all of that, having to be able to identify neglect and all of that sort of thing. I get it. We, we do need to identify that, but it shouldn't be a primary focus.*

Brunel and Ringgold referred to these changes as, 'fluffy stuff', implemented in response to Ofsted's 2019 Education Inspection Framework (EIF), which focused on a more holistic approach to inspections, contrasting the previous framework that focussed more on quantitative elements. Others referenced these changes. Edison for example stated:

*Ofsted's changed, and we've had to change and twist with it...certain elements have become more important, like maths and English and personal development. You can still get [the core] done, just you have possibly a little bit less time on it now.*

Although Ofsted has an influence, it is policy that has created the situation. The perceived element of the role, for many, had fundamentally changed, resulting in a lower status for the vocational element. Lovelace lamented the ‘importance...taken off the core element’. Gaudi agreed:

*You know, they used to come [to college] and the qualification was a bricklayer qualification, and that's what they're going to do. And now it is very much, well, actually, we work on your maths and your English and your personal development and, and we'll tag on a bit of trade. It's how it feels.*

The addition of the maths and English expectation on every student to reach a high-grade GCSE was brought into question by many participants. Corbusier decried the relevance of the GCSE in the vocational world, questioning the validity of a conceived academic qualification that has little benefit to vocational learners. Instead, Corbusier recalled the introduction of Key Skills, maths and English qualifications designed to improve young peoples’ numeracy, literacy, and digital skills (Kelly, 2001), as, ‘on target and absolutely aimed at the individuals that we were teaching’.

This method of embedding numeracy and literacy into vocational training was highlighted by many. For example, Benz noted skills behind measuring, filing and cutting, while Leonardo spoke about calculating surface areas, stating ‘You can't be a painter without working out how much paint it needs’. Dudley calmly considered students' reactions from a Plumbing perspective. Dudley was not sold on the concept, despite originally training as an engineer that had a greater emphasis on maths:

*The jury's out on that one to whether they should be made to do more maths and English...I think from a 16 or 17-year-old's point of view that doesn't particularly enjoy doing vectors and moving things around and matrices and stuff like that, and probably won't use it, I think the attendance might be better and the classroom environments might be better if they're doing something that's a little bit more for their way of learning.*

Dudley’s experience was reflected by others. Many students did not want to do the additional elements, instead wanting to focus on the trade of choice. As Pinkham notes, ‘you know, even some of the nicer students that do say, “Do we really have to do this?”’.

Changes brought about by the introduction of the study programme have directly impacted the vocational teacher. The perceived element of the role, where the tradesperson translates and imparts vocational spatial practices, and is often the driver for someone to leave industry and enter teaching, rarely matches expectations. Policy and political cycles disrupt education for students and teachers with seemingly little benefit, creating an arrhythmia that forces changes onto teachers within the lived space.

### 6.3.3.2 Changes in Vocational Teacher Expectations

The change in the study programme and the introduction of the new Ofsted framework, that we can see as conceived elements in Lefebvre's spatial theory, have impacted on the perceived spaces of vocational teachers.

What was previously perceived and communicated by vocational teachers to, 'Help young people learn the trade and become accomplished tradespeople' and 'passing on knowledge and skills', has become quite different to what is currently experienced in perceived and lived space. For many participants, the role has morphed, as conceived space oscillates in response to political priorities.

Work experience is a mandatory expectation introduced into the study programme. The Government considers this to include work tasters, student enterprises, participation in social projects, volunteering, or a placement with an external employer (DfE, 2023). The concept is to bring students closer to employers and the world of work. This is changing mindsets. Gaudi referenced adapting and recontextualising teaching so that students could apply it outside of construction:

*[I] feel like I'm now training you to be ready for work. So yeah, whatever I might often say to them, you know, when we're doing health and safety, this is important whether you become a bricklayer, whether you're a painter, whether you're working in McDonalds, whether you're working in Next, it's health and safety... they're less...focused on working in the trade...we're just trying to get them ready for work.*

Gaudi was not alone in citing personal change to deal with new expectations. The addition of personal development introduced expectations to deliver confidence, character, resilience, and more sensitive, socially relevant topics. Edison spoke about inexperienced teachers having to adapt their teaching to cope:

*[you need to] learn how to teach some of the tutorial stuff, which could be quite difficult to teach as an individual because, you know, it might be something that is embarrassing for the tutor to talk about, like sexual health or something like that.*

Benz spoke directly about how this change had impacted them, stating that their 'original mandate was to deliver a motor vehicle qualification...it's tending to take a bit of a backseat now'.

Although these have been substantial changes, many teachers spoke about how they had adapted. Edison, a practising electrician and a teacher, reflected on how they had changed:

*...you've had to learn more. You know, as a teacher, instead of just teaching electrics, you've had to learn how to teach, say, maths and English... You feel sometimes you are an expert in electrics, but you're not an expert at teaching maths and English. And it depends on what your levels are as a person as well, as to whether you can actually give the students the best experience. But you have to, as a teacher.*

Edison's comments were echoed by others. Walsh, a less experienced teacher, noted this change in expectations. Although not as explicit as others, they perceived a different role to the one they originally took:

*I think our role is completely shifting, and you just, you know, just want to teach somebody a trade, you're trying to give them the skills to be able to, to live, not even get a job. Just, you know, get a bank account and go to the shop and make a phone call.*

Walsh continued to speak about the increase in pastoral care and the multiple agencies that can now be involved when dealing with students:

*[w]e've got one pastoral officer to deal with 1500 students at this campus. Give or take a few, yeah, and that's just...not sufficient. The people that have to pick that up are the teachers and we're just not, we're not equipped to be able to pick that up...It doesn't, doesn't seem to be anybody taking anything away from us, [it's like the] analogy of we're carrying a stack of books and every month or so there's another book we need to put on top, but nobody takes one from the bottom.*

The pastoral element was reflected by other participants. Lovelace perhaps best concluded, stating that 'I feel I've become more of a parent to students and social worker'.

Despite often successfully adapting to new practices, many of the participants did not welcome the impact on their workload. Corbusier considered the changes:

*As in terms of changing, as a job role? I suppose I, kind of, it's made me enjoy it a little less. Because again, I feel like it's taking the fun out of learning new skills rather than, you know so... I'm not saying I hate the job. I don't hate the job. I do enjoy it a little less at times...*

Amongst the negativity was resilience and genuine reflection. Teachers often spoke about how they were changing to adapt, even though it impacted on their everyday experiences. Edison was circumspect, reflecting on both the role and societal changes:



*You know, so I think the role has adapted, and I think society has changed over the nine years I've been here, so therefore, you've had to run with that...You've got to, you know, times change, not just now, but the subject matter, and how you teach, you know...we used to be called lecturers or then tutors and things, so it's a different role. Yeah, we don't just lecture because we're not lecturers. We are tutors or facilitators, so you've got to change the way that you look at things.*

Edison was not alone. Many participants were vocalising how they viewed their role and how they had adjusted their practice accordingly as the pull of the conceived took them further away from their industry practices and more toward that of a teacher, mentioning increasingly additional expectations, such as social work and administration (figure 7).

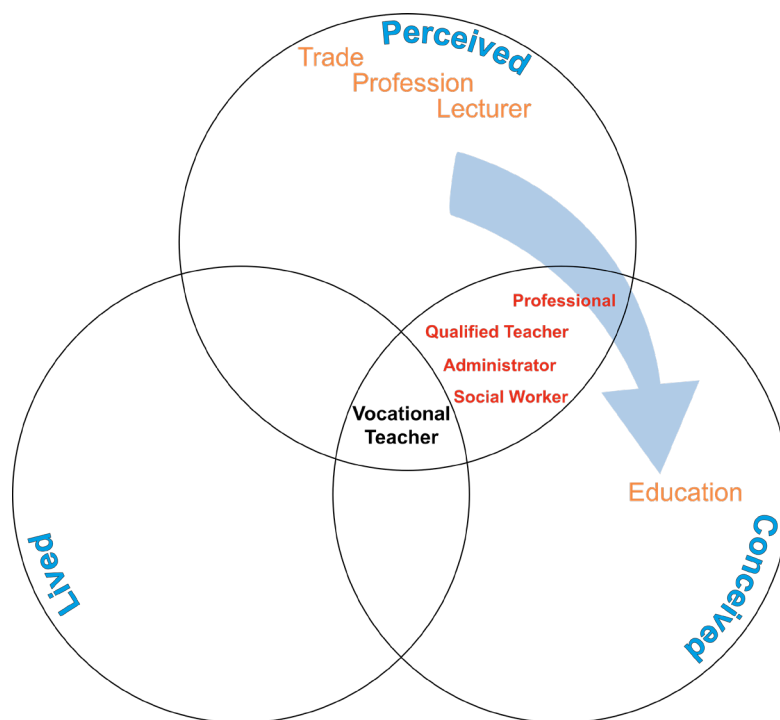


Figure 7 – Teachers drawn into Lefebvre's conceived space.

The final impact of these macro level decisions of politics and policy is felt through bureaucracy and managerialism. These reforms cascade through educational organisations, ultimately enacted through the teacher and their interactions with the students, often increasing workload and teacher expectations.

### 6.3.3.3 Bureaucracy and Managerialism

Despite the change in the Ofsted framework to a more holistic focus this has not translated into a reduction in workload. Many participants spoke about the additional bureaucratic expectations since the introduction of the EIF. During the observation, students completed multiple assessment papers and reflective sheets within the practical session, abstracting knowledge from practice, all with the expectation that the teacher would assess each one in context. Tesla stated directly, 'I think the bureaucracy's got a lot worse'. Edison came into education two years prior to the introduction of the study programme and noticed a difference following its implementation:

*I think workload has changed...it's definitely got harder. I think there's more pressure now to do certain things. Everything seems to be more metricized, so there's a table produced or some sort of data produced on pretty much everything that you do, whether it's attendance, parent chasing, or something else.*

Tesla's observation was echoed by multiple participants. Benz was completing paperwork for each student, pulling together information for a central report:

*I mean, we've got a good example now with the reviews and all that kind of stuff. We're flipping bombarded by, you know, we've all got to put an individual review for every student.*

Benz was referring to student learning records. Bureaucracy remained an issue for many. As well as normal expectations of teachers, Edison lamented considerations that were often taken for granted:

*I suppose the pressures of getting through the paperwork, getting through the qualifications, you know, the pressures of the number of students that you've got, so therefore the, the environment, busier, noisier.*

Bureaucracy was not limited to educational paperwork. Lovelace, a former welder, spoke at length about how industry compared to education. Although quite conscious of health and safety concerns, they spoke about how it could be frustrating to get work done in industry and stay compliant. In comparison to FE though, it now felt to them like a formality. Since coming into education, they struggled with the, '...red tape...a lot of red tape'.

Some participants felt many of the additional expectations were unnecessary and did not contribute to developing the students. Corbusier flippantly stated that, 'The tail's wagging the dog'. Vidal

reduced this further: 'sometimes it comes down to numbers, doesn't it?' and Tesla, one of the most senior participants in terms of educational experience, posited a similar perspective:

*I think there's a lot of, in terms of tutors, we are having to do a lot more than probably we would have done sort of 10 years ago. You know, everyone looking at data, and data this, and data that, is that really improving the students' journey? I would argue...probably not.*

Gaudi and Benz reductively referred to this collection of data as 'box ticking'.

Many spoke about the burden of student contact. The expectation beyond teaching extends to calling parents, carers, and in some instances, managing social workers, local authorities, and child protection agencies to comply with legislation. This created further administrative burdens for teachers. Pinkham spoke about how the role had gradually, but surely, grown:

*[P]honing the parents, doing this and then the disciplinaries and then everything else, and I think it just adds on to everything, little bit, by little bit, adds on.*

Many shared Pinkham's frustration. For complex reasons, including post-COVID trauma and the socio-political situation in a highly deprived Midlands town, attendance was below national averages that were already unusually high (Thandi, 2023). Gaudi considered this a real detriment to their teaching, comparing the scenario either side of the study programme:

*Chasing attendance, chasing disciplinaries, chasing parents...I think there's a lot more expectation to be chasing these things. Again, I'll get back [to] my first teaching [experience], I don't remember ever picking up the phone and chasing parents.*

Constantly dealing with parents in this way took its toll on many participants, even when the relationship was positive. Brunel spoke not only about the parental contact, but the expectation to '...document it the other side', that added to the workload. Vidal explained how they used their experience to forge relationships with parents and carers, but at the detriment to their other responsibilities:

*So, it is a massive job now to have that communication with mum and dad...or guardians. You know, it really is important because if you can get a relationship with them, they also help you to guide them...and every single one of my group, I know all the parents. They're like, 'you can try', or 'I'll try something, OK?'...but that takes up a lot of time and energy, you know?*

This was not untypical, Vidal's comments were repeated by many, particularly impacting the teaching element of their role. Vidal had moved to part time teaching in a bid to carve a better work-life balance but still felt the burden nonetheless:

*...the bits and pieces that go with it, your lesson prep, you know, your handouts, trying to update everything. It's a phenomenal job now and I do that on 18.5 hours a week.*

These additional burdens have forced multiple ways of working. As Mansell stated: 'inevitably, you...have to take some work home'. Dealing with student issues had implications for many participants in terms of satisfying the perceived element of their role. Frieda spoke more widely about dealing with wider behavioural issues: 'The problem is...the time that you've been teaching is limited because you spend so much time managing behaviour'. For some this was a big impact. Although all participants commented upon workload being an issue, some linked it directly to impacting teaching in the classroom. Tesla linked the financial imperative with the teaching specifically, 'I know we've gotta stick to budgets. There's all, there's all that, but I think it does block innovative teaching'. Gaudi explained that they had not developed their teaching for several years due to the administrative expectations, instead using resources that were adequate, yet often out of date.

Walsh, one of the more recently qualified teachers, prided themselves on their classroom techniques, yet conceded that, 'Things have to give'. What Walsh was not expecting to 'give', was the part they perceived as the primary intent of the role:

*The only thing that can give is the quality of the teaching. Yeah, it is literally what's gonna, what's going to cause damage. You know, what's the damage limitation? And the last thing that you're going to get hammered for is the planning of your teaching.*

Walsh continued, echoing many points raised by other participants, but with increased passion:

*Funny, because you know, the days where you could spend your, your prep time sitting there, adjusting...PowerPoints, changing your resources, have gone. That is literally something you're having to do in your break times and your lunch times. And the effort you put into the planning of sessions, and I think that the fact most of us rely on the fact that we've been doing it so long, we can kind of ride it out, but in terms of progression and developing stuff, it's limited.*

Tesla was perhaps the most cynical, reducing the lack of time to a fiscal comparison:

*It's basically the accountants looking at it and thinking, well, we've got a bit of space there. We'll fill it with something and we do something else with it and there's nothing you can do about it. You just gotta work with that system that you've got.*

Bureaucracy and managerialism are not new factors to FE. Stephen Ball has written much on the impact of neoliberal practices on education, but perhaps clearly sums up how they affect teachers in the following sentence: '[G]rids and checklists and reviews also compare us, classify us and divide us; they value and reward and discipline and sanction' (2016: 1050).

A contributing factor of increased bureaucracy placed on teachers is the disruptive rhythm of reform in vocational education, where even small changes can result in increased and often unnecessary workload. The final theme explores how this rhythmic disruption cuts through Lefebvre's space of representation at an increasingly accelerating velocity.

### 6.3.4 Rhythms of Reform

Reform in both qualifications and educational frameworks have become an increasingly accelerating rhythm. Teachers were frustrated at the frequency, the quality, and how reforms have devalued what they considered professionally relevant qualifications. Previous iterations, while not considered perfect, had a relevance and a link to occupations that structural changes have subsequently diluted. Current qualifications were perceived by many as having a lesser value, with changes contributing to an increase in workload for no perceived educational gain.

Tesla spoke in depth about the changes, particularly frustrated that paperwork changed every time the qualification did, noting, 'What you teach hasn't changed too much, just little bits'. Certainly, during the observation, there were no practices evident to counter this suggestion, with students completing tasks that would have been completed for many decades within a similar environment (see appendix 9 for an example of reform in electrical installation).

Ringgold spoke about the expectation to remain current in industrial practices. They remained unconvinced, recognising a rhythm:

*So, you know, when we have all these new theories to learn, it's stuff for you that's been around forever, just regurgitated...it all keeps coming back around...Nothing really changes...painting and decorating is painting and decorating, however you badge it.*

The vocational content may not have changed, but other elements of the role have. Ramsey was one of the least experienced participants, having qualified just prior to the COVID lockdown. They discussed how they felt they had crossed the threshold between industry and education but had concerns about how the qualification had changed and the plans for further reform due from 2024.

*I definitely felt that, within the first few years, just as you learned something and got comfortable with it, the goalposts move again.*

Although Edison's tenure in education is relatively short in comparison to their peers, they discussed dealing with multiple reforms in such a short period of time, culminating in the introduction of the T Level at time of interview, again highlighting another rhythm of vocational education:

*I think [it's] cyclic, and I think that we...go back again and try and do things that we've done before, but we know...the old hands probably know [better], doesn't work very well...we know that that sort of system is not going to work very well because it didn't...work the first time or, or even the second time they've tried it.*

Of all the participants, Tesla was the most experienced, recalling changes in qualifications over their 29-year tenure. Their industry is one of the most frequently reformed (see appendix 9), with seven main qualification changes since 1995 alongside big changes in apprentice structures. The challenge for Tesla was that, despite changes in qualification structure and expectations, little else had changed:

*I see a major problem with what we, the [City and] Guilds are doing, because there's so much out of date stuff...there's a lot of out of date stuff. I mean, we're still doing...sodium lamps for Christ's sake, we've still got BS3036<sup>2</sup> fuses...What? Why are we doing that? Why is the industry doing that? Because you're just never going to fit them...I think the qualification, and...certainly the City and Guilds needs to catch up.*

For Tesla reform had failed to remain current and added little value to learning. Walsh, one of the most active participants in industry alongside teaching, spoke in depth about skills developed over their career. Having to adapt and expand their skills through recessions, they explained how they had experienced broader industry as a result. As a practising expert, they considered what they had been teaching and how qualifications were being devalued because of reform:

*[T]he qualifications are quite dated to be honest, you know, stuff like, running cornice in situ? Never going to do that on site.*

Others reinforced this devaluation of qualifications. Gaudi went further still, insinuating that changes to policies and reform had shifted teaching expectations and changed student demographics, resulting in a lesser-valued qualification:

*I think there's a devaluing of the trade qualifications...when I first came in, I think they held their value, and now, I think it's seen very much as almost a byproduct of having these*

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<sup>2</sup> Rewirable fuses. Not in production for some time and generally considered unsafe.

*students in college. I mean, when I became a bricklayer, it was a five-year apprenticeship. You know...there was a lot of education and training to go into that before you could go. 'Yeah, yeah, I'm a bricklayer', so yeah, I would say it has been devalued.*

Dudley echoed similar, considering that changes had produced a 'meaningless' qualification in some instances. With institutional pressure on them to get students through qualifications and the opportunity to retake failed exams, the qualification had become much easier to pass. Dudley also spoke about the five-year apprenticeship they undertook on leaving school:

*With all the best will in the world, you're not going to become a tradesman of any description on even a two-year course because you're not going to have enough time to gain experience or mature...*

Dudley's comment is a call-back to the early apprenticeship expectations discussed in chapter two, where apprenticeships were designed to not only qualify an individual, but develop experience and a maturity. Dudley and Tesla both shared this perspective, able to draw on the experience of having delivered five-year apprenticeships during their careers. They explained how, while little had changed in delivery expectations and content, it had become easier to pass because of reforms:

*I still think the final exams are a lot easier than they were...if you go back to the old [City and Guilds], A/B/C Series, I would say that there would be hardly anybody that could pass the 'Part B' in this college if you actually put that in front of them. They couldn't do it. And as for the C cert<sup>3</sup>, forget it, you wouldn't have a hope.*

The focus of the current reform in the shape of the T Level is the intent to make qualifications more technical in nature, as opposed to vocational. Tesla's comment suggests an inability to reach the intention due to the nature of the student. This also suggest that the T Level may well be linked to an element of performativity that is ultimately doomed to failure, with parallels to the GNVQ and Diploma explored in Chapter two.

In perhaps the only positive comment, Tesla had some hope for qualifications moving forward. The current qualification is part of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) introduced in 2015, meaning that, in line with GCSE and A Levels, it had a single, externally assessed, fixed date exam:

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<sup>3</sup> The 'C Cert' is a reference to a City and Guilds technician level qualification in electrical installation that was closed to registration around 2005. It was a legacy qualification from the introduction of the ITBs (see chapter 2) that survived due to industry demand, however never fit into modern qualification levels, becoming less recognised and eventually becoming redundant. It would have been approximately HNC level in 2023.

*[T]his current qualification we're working [is] in a lot of ways the best qualification that we've had for a while. And the only reason I say that, is the students are being forced to actually do some work themselves, 'cos basically we're there, we can only facilitate the syllabus, we can't pass an exam for them!*

Unfortunately, as Tesla opined, this new qualification is due to be replaced by the T Level in September 2024 as more reform is enacted. Thousands of qualifications at level three are being removed and qualifications at level two and below are being rewritten (Department for Education, 2022).

The rhythms of reform repeat and renew. As Bewick and Gosling (2023: 18) state, 'Reforms have kept coming at a barrelling pace, yet the medicine being prescribed does not always have the desired effect'. Qualifications change in structure and frameworks, yet despite multiple reforms, teachers consider them a further burden on their already stretched workload, adding little to no value to students or the industry it is designed to benefit.

## **6.4 Concluding Remarks**

Disruption through the perceived and conceived elements of Lefebvre's dialectic manifest and are reproduced through the lived spaces of the vocational teacher, resulting in an increase in individual accountability that was voiced by many participants (figure 8). Additional expectations alongside teaching were also heavily vocalised, particularly the increase in bureaucracy and a deepening and distrustful managerialist approach, where conceived expectations directly impacted the teachers' everyday experiences with the students.

Natural rhythms through these spaces are frequently disrupted before a stable cycle of reform is given the opportunity to develop and stabilise, resulting in frequent arrhythmia experienced within the lived spaces of vocational education.



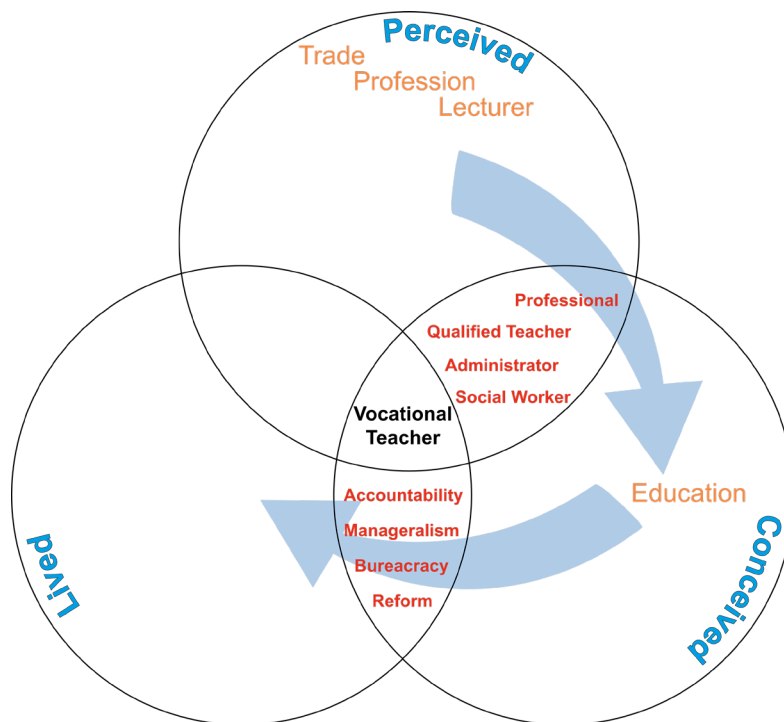


Figure 8 - Moving through the dialectic.

Some of these arrhythmic occurrences are influenced by wider societal issues, where increased deprivation and challenges to government services following a period of austerity are being felt by some of the more vulnerable in society, impacting directly on vocational teachers in FE. Most arrhythmia though comes from a cycle of reform, through political intervention and ideological educational stances. Regardless of the challenges, teachers demonstrated how they had changed in response to these demands, how they evaded the frustrations in the lived space by returning to the perceived space, grounding themselves in their vocational specialisms and using the practices developed there as an anchor to believe in their identity and give the student the best possible experience. There are questions as to how far and for how long vocational teachers can continue to adapt and perhaps an even bigger question in should they have to adapt, or should something else change?

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications**

### **7.1 Introduction**

My intention through this thesis was to explore the origins of vocational education and how they have combined with a series of reforms to produce the vocational teacher of today. I also intended to highlight the arrhythmicity and the repercussions that these reforms have on the everyday experiences of the vocational teacher.

In concluding my research, I first summarise the findings through Lefebvrian theories, before reflecting on contributions made to vocational education in FE. I finish with some recommendations for the sector and identify limitations of the research and suggestions for further research in this area.

### **7.2 Lefebvrian Perspectives of Vocational Education**

#### **7.2.1 Polyrythmia in Vocational Education**

Simons (2019: 73) considered polyrhythms as the ‘natural outcome of several voices or instruments singing or playing together in non-unison’. The ‘everyday then reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia’ (Lefebvre, 2019: 25). The college is an amalgam of multiple actors, a polyrhythmic entity with, for my purposes, the vocational teacher sitting at its heart, the bodily transactor translating political and organisational conceived space through their more familiar perceived spaces to the students. Despite the daily challenges, students learn, achieve, and often end up in positive destinations. Teachers are determined, although often frustrated, to help them achieve. Vocational facilities in the college are excellent and students are often exposed to environments that reflect their industrial equivalent. Most teachers remain at least industrially relevant, with many still practising in industry.

Interference through policy, funding, and reform create an environment that permeates from macro to micro levels of FE, yet the organisation endures regardless. This is perhaps best summed up by Orr (2020):

[d]espite all these headwinds of policy churn and precarious funding, and despite their very broad mission, FE colleges in England continue to serve their students and their communities, successfully for the most part, as they have done for over a century.

As a polyrhythmic entity, the college performs that which is asked of it by government and society as Orr suggests. Rhythmic disruption though is too frequent, and the cycles of reform have ever-contracting wavelengths. The result is a great deal more arrhythmia than eurhythmia within the organisation.

### **7.2.2 Eurhythmia in Vocational Education**

Post 2011 reforms have created a challenging educational space. Despite this, there is a uniformity and a shared experience between vocational teachers and their passion for their vocations and professions. The feeling of belonging to their subject specialism was strong, as was their belief in passing on their skills to a new generation of young people and adults. Some continued to practise their vocation outside of education, spanning educational and professional spaces, with each reciprocally influencing the other.

There is a skill in manipulating large groups of students through practical vocational environments. The field observation revealed vocational rhythms and how the teacher enabled this natural flow, almost unconsciously maintaining student rhythms in a 'metastable equilibrium' (Lefebvre, 2019: 30). Despite multiple challenges to student engagement following years of political interference and instability, curriculum reform and COVID, teachers continue to expertly navigate their environment and strive to give students the best possible experience, often akin to their own personal experiences and the desire to improve young peoples' opportunities or to 'give something back', as the literature strongly suggested.

Individual change was evident from the data. While it was rarely welcomed, teachers explained how they had adapted to the challenges, both personally and professionally, maintaining in some instances a eurhythmic state. In some respects, those with more experience were able to better absorb these changes. Teachers recognised the changing socio-political landscape, alongside localised decisions and policies and procedures. They also had a deep understanding of an intrinsic link between financial security and continued employment.

### 7.2.3 Arrhythmia in Vocational Education

Lefebvre (2019: 17) posited the question, '[do] Differences induced or produced by repetitions constitute the thread of time'? The literature suggests, from a vocational perspective, that repetition plays a substantial part in how vocational education has been formed. From the early formal conceptions, where difference was often subtle and occurred over longer periods of time, to the present day, where political interference results in reform occurring within very short periods of time, with often small but frequent changes pressuring the teacher to adapt. As Lefebvre states (2019: 17), 'The antagonistic unity of relations between the cyclical and the linear sometimes gives rise to compromises, sometimes to disturbances'. The disturbance, the arrhythmic, forces adaptation, conflict, and concern, all experienced in the everyday by vocational teachers. Whilst these changes can be substantial, the data suggests that vocational teachers are often aware, adaptable, and willing to change their own perceived space to meet the linear change demanded by post-16 education. Experience mattered little, with some of the longest-serving teachers demonstrating an unconscious reflexive perspective. Teachers traverse Lefebvre's dialectic, passing through and occasionally pausing within the liminal trans-space between each (Wade, 2018), and while the conceived spaces are dominant, rarely do teachers lose sight of the space of representation, the lived, where it is evident that despite multiple arrhythmic instances, there is genuine motivation for the best possible experience for the students. The lived space is where teachers change lives.

Teachers expressed changes in student personas, challenges in engagement, behaviour, a decline in mental health and an increasingly more difficult socio-economic environment. They spoke about uncomfortable changes in teaching expectations, from teaching maths and English to the delivery of challenging topics, including sexual health, drug abuse, extremism, and female genital mutilation. Characteristics of students have also changed in the intervening years following the raise in participation age, with the data suggesting a decline in engagement and occupational interest, alongside increasingly higher levels of disruptive behaviour. Whilst no teachers attributed COVID as the catalyst for changes, almost all considered it an accelerant.

The rhythm of reform, particularly amongst experienced teachers, resulted in less arrhythmia than literature perhaps suggests. The impact amongst those with less experience appeared greater, with the frequency of change presenting difficulties in adaptation, specifically following the changes experienced in the introduction of the study programme. In some instances, the more experienced dismissed the changes as purely bureaucratic, others criticised reform for failing in industrial relevancy or reductive content.

The increase in managerialist approaches and state-driven bureaucracy however was a concern for all participants. Austerity resulted in a 14 per cent funding cut in real terms between 2010 and 2019 (Camden, 2021), exacerbated by a change in the inspection regime by Ofsted and a reduction in wider support, particularly for mental health issues. Teachers were acutely aware of the need to recruit students for job stability, however lamented the additional duties that had been placed on them from the mid to late 2010s. Financial constraints at the very least resulted in increased class sizes, diminishing student experience and learning opportunities, creating a natural arrhythmia by itself.

#### **7.2.4 The Production of the Vocational Teacher**

There are multiple influences involved in the production of the vocational teacher. Rhythmic reform has resulted in the creation of a system that challenges industrial identity and preconceived notions of the role of the vocational teacher. The participants more readily identify as being teachers, as opposed to maintaining their industrial identities, as the expectation to deliver their occupation has been replaced by a conceived curriculum that demands ‘a structured and challenging learning programme that supports their development and progression in line with their career plans’ (DfE, 2022).

Vocational teachers are often labelled dual-professionals, occasionally triple-professionals, and more rarely, multi-professionals. The challenge for today’s teacher is to be professionally and pedagogically current, competent to respond to government policy, able to respond to political initiatives and qualification reform, understand and adapt to increasing social, emotional and mental health and SEN needs, be financially aware, and understand and teach complex social issues. Much of this is often without support or enough time to prepare.

Teachers enter education in the perceived space, often with the intention to return positive experiences of their vocational journey. Pressures from the conceived space disrupt this intention, as abstract policy and bureaucracy draw the vocational expert toward the conceived teacher identity, dialectically combining to absorb new identities, such as social workers and administrators. This dialectical interaction moves the teacher through the lived space, where the rhythm of daily social interaction flows. It is here where teachers oscillate between pride and frustration, tolerance and pressure, engagement, and dealing with red tape, as perceived space dialectically interact with educational lived spaces. Individual perceived spaces though adapt. Some have developed a patience and understanding often not found in industry. Some have lost faith. Where once passionate,

multiple reforms and managerialist cultures have jaded some, who struggle with the demands placed on the vocational teacher in 2024.

Teachers are produced by a combination of many factors, including historical development, industrial exposure, societal influence, governmental policy and even changes in student demographics. They are influenced by institutional culture and imperfect translation of policy, coupled with reconciling their own cultural and professional values and individual priorities (Edward et al, 2007). The lack of a single determinant or fixed identity makes it difficult to reduce the vocational teacher to a duality. It is almost impossible to state that they are simply a teacher and a tradesperson. The dual professional label I therefore suggest is reductive, given the demands placed upon individuals who have retrained as teachers as a second occupation, since the introduction of the study programme and raising participation age.

The completion of Lefebvre's dialectic in Figure 9 highlights, through the participants' voice, where teachers pass through each phase, adapting and shifting identity in the process. For example, a teacher is required to be occupationally and pedagogically competent yet understand vagaries of social care while completing multiple administrative tasks required by internal and external agencies. This might happen multiple times a day, as the teacher is required to teach both their respective trade and extra-curricular topics, offer counselling to students struggling with anxiety, comply with managerial expectations and plan for the next series of curriculum reform.

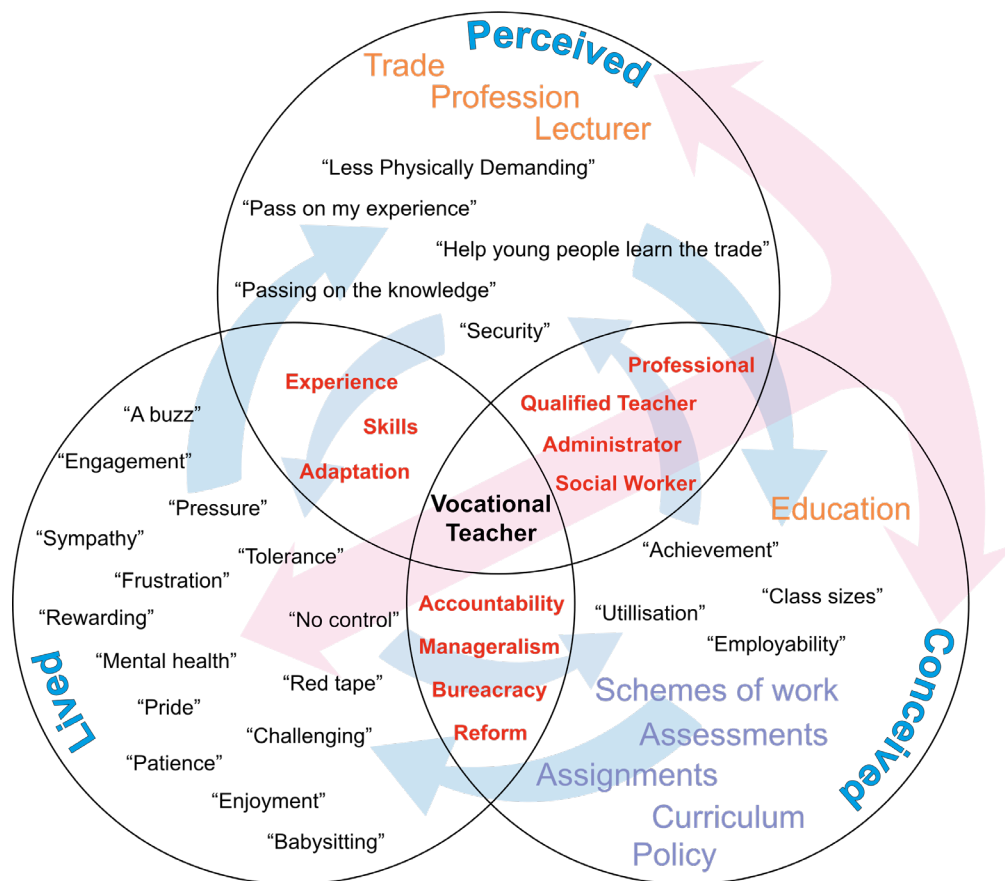


Figure 9 – Lefebvre's Dialectic Producing the Vocational Teacher

### 7.3 Contributions to Knowledge

This research aimed to visit the history of vocational education, document how history and policy combine to produce the vocational teacher, and the impact these have had on everyday experiences of vocational teachers in one college in the West Midlands in 2024.

Through the analysis of vocational rhythms, I have looked at how history has shaped vocational education and how everyday rhythms flow through teachers' vocational spaces. Through an adaptation of his tri-dimensional dialectic that focuses on the self, as opposed to space, I have sought to give a voice to a subsection of FE that is often ignored or conflated with technical education, despite some clear differences I explored in chapter two.

Through the authentic voices of vocational teachers, an observation within a vocational workspace, and a review of literature, an analysis of the data answered the following research questions.

### **7.3.1 How have the rhythms of history shaped vocational education?**

Vocational education has struggled to establish a clear identity for more than 150 years. In almost every instance, attempts to improve or even successfully introduce vocational education have failed. These reforms exhibit a cyclical nature, a recurring pattern frequently invoking parity of esteem with academic equivalents and international competitiveness as reasons for justification. These often well-meaning interventions have led to increasingly frequent reforms of both qualifications and frameworks, with few discernible educational benefits. While the structure of qualifications changes in every instance, participants noted that content often remained static and, in some cases, reductive. Participants questioned the industrial relevance of these reforms and their direct impact on learners, lamenting the changes and the associated bureaucratic expectations that came with them. This research, along with broader literature, suggests an increase in administration and bureaucracy almost in tune with the cyclical increase in educational reforms.

### **7.3.2 How does policy contribute to the production of the vocational teacher?**

Vocational teachers in further education are often referred to in literature as dual professionals, suggesting a combination of prior industrial experience and qualifications and a second career as a teacher or lecturer. They frequently enter education for altruistic reasons, bringing skills and experience gained in Lefebvre's perceived space into the tri-dimensional dialectic, where the clash with the conceived space creates expectations and challenges that often surprise the new teacher as they enter an industry awash with bureaucracy and increasingly more challenging circumstances. Multiple authors, including Le Gallais (2006a), Orr and Simmons (2010), Lucas and Nasta (2010), Fejes and Köpsén (2012), Esmond and Wood (2018), Smith (2018) and Kirk (2019) document an allegiance by vocational teachers to identify with their prior occupations above that of a teacher, regardless of number of years of educational service. This research though contradicts the literature, and the primary industrial identity was less dominant, with many participants actively and in some instances proudly referring to themselves as teachers.



### **7.3.3 What are the repercussions of post-2011 reforms on vocational teachers?**

All participants referenced a change in student type and engagement, resulting in behavioural challenges and an attitudinal shift in learning. While few provided a specific timeframe, responses suggested that this shift began between 2012 and 2017, coinciding with reforms including the introduction of the study programme and the rise in the mandatory participation age in education to 18. The pandemic predictably featured throughout the participants' responses, however all considered changes to have occurred prior to the pandemic, with many considering it an accelerant that exacerbated change rather than the catalyst itself.

Despite the challenges, vocational teachers adapt their practices accordingly to cope with these rhythmic reforms, demonstrating a reflexive versatility that belies literary dualisms, such as the often used 'dual professional' descriptor. Earlier literature suggests an inflexibility and stoic adherence to industrial identities that was not evident through this research. Teachers spoke about individual personal changes that had altered how they perceived and interacted with others, fundamentally changing their personalities within the lived space.

### **7.3.4 Adapting Lefebvre's theories beyond his original intention**

While Lefebvre's intention was for his tri-dimensional dialectic to assist in the decoding of space in a post-modern world, it is possible to adapt and repurpose it outside of this intention. In this thesis, I use it to determine how the vocational teacher, or the 'self', is produced. I explored how the combination of an established identity through the perceived space combines with the conceived elements of educational space and how these then play out through the lived spaces within vocational education. These lived experiences re-enter Lefebvre's dialectic, influencing and changing both the perceived space and at times the conceived, as teachers reflexively adapt and change in response. The non-conclusive nature of the dialectic allows for interpretation and reinterpretation, as each element amorphously interacts with the other, yet acting at once a singular instance within Lefebvre's construct.

I believe that this use of the tri-dimensional dialectic demonstrates its versatility, and I see potential as a methodological tool for other arenas of research around the production of the self, particularly in

areas that might complement this research, such as academic teachers or tradespeople and professionals.

## 7.4 Recommendations

From the findings in this research, I believe that educational and political organisations, politicians, and colleges themselves would benefit from considerations that would not only improve the experience of vocational teachers, but also directly benefit the students studying vocational or technical qualifications. I also believe that industry itself, that so desperately looks to FE as a solution to the skills shortages, would benefit from a better planned and measured approach to qualification design and delivery. I therefore recommend the following:

1. Reform should be planned, measured and relevant. Consultation should not just be with predictable stakeholders, who are often large employers, researchers from outside of FE, and civil servants, but should also involve experienced practitioners and experts. Policy created in the conceived space should be at least equally influenced by those closest to practice and assess and consider how they affect the everyday lived experiences of thousands of vocational teachers already overburdened with bureaucracy and dealing with the socio-economic impact of wider political decisions, such as austerity, while striving to remain industrially current and relevant to their profession.
2. Post-COVID support to young people needs to increase. The impact of austerity since 2010 and the acceleration caused by COVID has resulted in teachers too often dealing with the pastoral elements of vocational education rather than the focus on developing their vocational skills. Pressure on mental health support for students has been moved in many instances to the classroom as the burden is felt in education who often feel that they are covering shortfalls in wider public services.
3. Organisations need to support and develop vocational teachers. Changes in expectations are taken as given and, too often, vocational teachers are teaching outside of their skillset, including inheriting associated bureaucratic and administrative tasks that could be done more effectively by others. Freeing specialist teacher time to focus on industrial practices would improve the situation for students and teachers. Multiple and diverse expectations of the teacher result in frustrations and sub-optimal experiences for all parties.
4. Organisations and external bodies need to consider how they can reduce the workload on teachers. The pressures of reform, changes to external frameworks, and internal expectations in response, all burden the teacher, increasing workload within an already time-poor

environment. Vocational teachers express a clear will to develop the next generation into a skilled workforce, but these pressures stymie their best efforts.

5. Government needs to increase funding, and organisations need to better understand, plan, and effectively resource the increase in students needing additional support. Teachers feel unable to cope with the increasing challenges of mental health difficulties and social and emotional health considerations, particularly when faced with increasingly larger student numbers for reasons of fiscal security.
6. Research within VET should consider how it delineates vocational and technical qualifications. From both a practitioner standpoint and the student perspective, there is a difference, and characterising both under one heading risks marginalising one at the expense of the other. The victim of this conflation is often vocational qualifications, and the cultural desire for more academic pathways does little to promote vocational pathways as an acceptable career choice for young people.

## 7.5 Limitations of Study

The study was performed at a single organisation located in the West Midlands and as such, should be considered in context. Expanding the study across multiple institutions would have given a greater reassurance of data but may not have provided some of the richness that the study demanded. The sample size was broadly representative of the vocational workforce, however focusing on single occupational areas with higher sample rates may have produced different responses, as would potential comparisons with other colleges.

There were many smaller sub-themes that were less developed but would present opportunities for further investigation. I initially wanted to investigate how vocational spaces were manifested physically and how teachers influenced the conceived elements of their vocational environments. Participants however had little to no influence on this element of space, not necessarily suggesting that things were 'done to them', more that there were wider factors that determined conceived space, from qualification expectations to estates management to budgets. Few of these were influenced by the teachers, who often stated that others had planned and developed their vocational environment, limiting the collection of meaningful data. Some teachers spoke about class sizes and how smaller groups delivered during COVID were more 'switched on', with much less in the way of disruptive behaviour and a stronger focus on learning. I believe that this warrants further investigation. Although there were discussions around the impact of Ofsted, they did not feature as

prominently as might be predicted, however again I believe that there was enough relevant data to warrant further and more focused research.

Rhythmanalysis remains under-developed compared to other established qualitative methodologies. Whilst I have attempted to invoke the spirit of Lefebvre's methodology, there are few benchmarks for comparison, and interpretation of his work in this thesis is very much my own. The flexibility and multi-disciplinary approach suggested by Lefebvre allows for an open interpretation of the methodology, posing opportunities both for methodologically strong interpretations and potentially weaker ones in research design. I suspect that the flexibility offered will encourage growth as a methodology.

## **7.6 Concluding Thoughts**

The data suggests that vocational education is vulnerable to multiple and frequent instances of reform and the pressures of wider societal influence. Historical baggage suffocates the sector, and the lack of understanding has condemned it to a relentlessly accelerating programme of change. Adaptation is critical for the survival of the vocational teacher. In 2024, bureaucracy continues to plague education, as teachers battle not only reform and managerialist organisational structures, but changes to student cohorts, as behaviour, mental health, apathy, and disengagement add to an already substantial workload. There are questions as to how long this can continue without wider political recognition, investment, and support, and not only in education, but in the wider support services that contribute to a healthy, fair, and equitable society that inevitably feed and underpin core values within educational organisations.

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# Appendices

1. Interview questions
2. Field observation notes/areas of focus
3. Participation information sheet
4. Participation consent form
5. Sample interview transcription
6. Ethics approval
7. Sample Nvivo coding
8. Vocational spaces
9. Curriculum reform example: Electrical Installation
10. Navigating the dialectic
11. Theories on the production of space

## Appendix 1 - Interview Question Prompts

This was my 'carry along' list of questions to ask the participants. As the interview was semi-structured, I returned to this list of questions if the participant needed prompting to continue. Much of the questioning revolved around identity and change, most participants though were more than eager to discuss their everyday challenges, and the conversations often moved to their experiences in the classroom today.

### Prompts

Determine: Curriculum area – Years in education/industry – Ethnicity – Gender

1. Can you tell me what your industry is and how long you have spent in education and industry beforehand?
2. Do you consider yourself a tradesperson/professional or a teacher?
3. Have you heard the phrase, dual-professional?
4. Do you think teaching is a profession? Do you think your trade/skill is a profession?
5. Do you still consider yourself a [specific trade] person?
6. What have been the key changes in your job during your time in education?
7. How has this affected you as a teacher?
8. What are the daily challenges you face today as a teacher?
9. Can you tell me a little about the environment that we are currently in?
10. Have any of the changes affected how you design curriculum or workshop/salon facilities?
11. How has this environment changed in the time you have been here? Why do you think that is? Have you had any influence? Who does have the influence?
12. What does this environment mean to you personally? Is it realistic; does it compare to industry? Does it evoke any emotion or reaction?

### Final question

Influenced by personal experience, I was curious as to how participants answered the hypothetical question. It is a question that I have never personally been able to resolve, particularly as I have moved through multiple positions within colleges and now occupy a senior leadership position. I was surprised that every participant answered with confidence.

Can you give me your response to this hypothetical scenario-based question: 'you meet someone new whilst away, perhaps on holiday, they ask you the question [in relation to your work], "What do you do?". What is your response?'

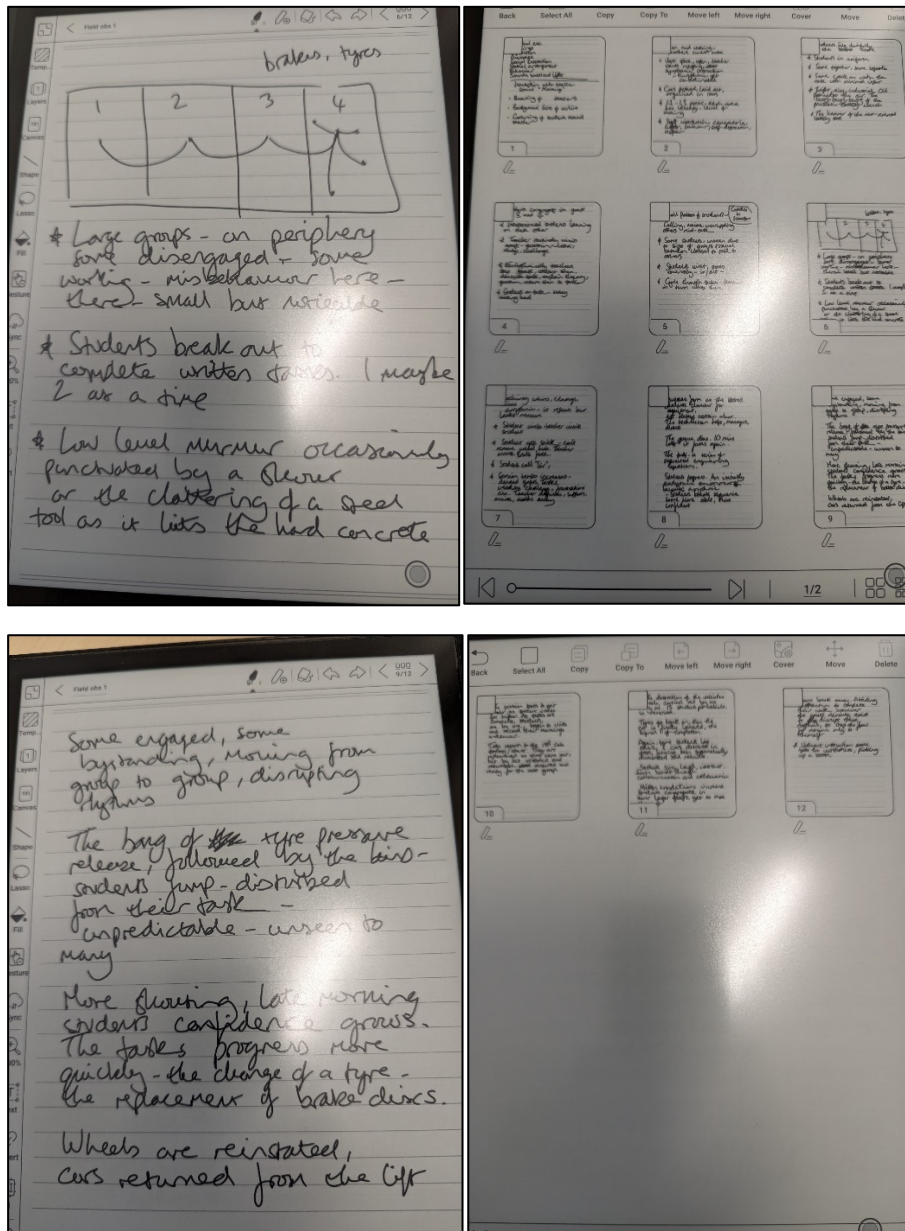
## Appendix 2 - Field observation areas of focus

The following are suggestions of focus for observation within the vocational teaching environment:

1. Physical environment
2. Timings of sessions
3. Noting examples of repetition
4. Examples of dressage (Lefebvre, 2004)
5. Social interactions, coordinations
6. Spatial arrangements
7. Behaviours
8. Sounds, smells, and light

### Sample notes from the observation

The following notes were taken within the field using an electronic device:



## Appendix 3 - Participant Information Sheet



### Participation Information Sheet

#### **Vocational teachers, dual professionalism, and the rhythm of reform: a study of space and identity in further education**

##### **Aims of the study**

While there have been many studies focusing on teachers, vocational areas are often overlooked, with focus more commonly placed on skills, employers, and employment, rather than the individuals involved in delivering training. This research project aims to explore vocational education through the following questions:

- What do we know of vocational education, and how does this historicity influence the vocational landscape today?
- How does educational reform affect the everyday experiences of vocational teachers, with a focus on the introduction of the Study Programme in 2014?
- Commonly referred to as dual professionals, what are the identities and cultures associated with teachers and teaching as a second career?

##### **Invitation to take part**

This research project aims to explore experiences of vocational teachers and discuss professionalism, identity, the distinction between vocational and academic qualifications and issues that affect everyday activities and choices and decisions made by the teacher. You have been selected to participate due to your experience in both teaching and the occupational area that you teach in.

##### **How will this take place and what will be my involvement?**

The project will involve a walking interview; exploring workshop or salon spaces while discussing questions related to the project aims with participants. Subject to negotiation, there will be some observations of day-to-day activities that occur within these environments that will form a separate part of this enquiry. Interviews are expected to take approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length and will be completed at a mutually negotiated time. Interviews will be recorded on audio devices and transcribed. These will be used as part of data analysis related to the aims of the study and will be shared with you prior to analysis to ensure accuracy.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There is no financial reimbursement for taking part. You will be asked to sign a 'consent form' prior to engaging. If you decide to take part, you are free to stop at any time without any reason and without prejudice. A request to stop during the data gathering process will be honoured in full, with no further questions asked, and all data gathered at that point in line with the confidentiality agreement will be deleted or destroyed. If data at the time

NSVOC 21/09/22 V2



## Appendix 4 - Participant Consent Form



### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** Vocational teachers, dual professionalism, and the rhythm of reform: a study of space and identity in further education

**Name of Researcher:** Neil Sambrook

**Project Code:**

**Participant identification number:**

10956

Initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 21 <sup>st</sup> September 2022, version 2 for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected and without prejudice. I understand that if I withdraw my participation, any gathered data will be deleted, unless at the time of request, the data has been anonymised and analysed (estimated to be January 2024).	
3. I understand that relevant sections of my data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from Birmingham City University and from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
4. I understand that personal data about me will be collected for the purposes of the research study including age, ethnicity, occupational specialism and length of service within education, and that these will be processed in accordance with the information sheet dated 21 <sup>st</sup> September 2022, version 2.	
5. I agree to audio recording and the use of anonymised quotes in research reports and publications.	
6. I agree to take part in this study.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name of Person taking consent**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**



## Appendix 5 – Sample Interview Transcription

Interview with Benz - 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022 19:00-20:10 pm

### Context

I meet Benz at their staffroom. I checked that they are still comfortable and have the available time to commit. They explained that they had students in, but they were in an exam so there would be no formal teaching happening this evening. They were keen to do the interview. We walked from the staffroom into the workshop, which is mere steps away. The workshop is large, at its peak accommodating over 80 students in a simulated vehicle mechanics space. We walk between various elements of the workshop, between cars, ramps, and small breakout areas. As we start the interview, I use a Dictaphone device I have recently acquired, however as can be seen, I have a small element of doubt that it is working and use a device I am familiar with as a backup.

The following interview was carried out on the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> of November in 2022.

### Researcher

*OK. And I've never used this device before, so let's see how it goes...be honest and open when there's nothing there's, you know there's no prejudice or anything here. Yeah. It's just me, just having a bit of conversation with, with you, really. The research is around whether we consider ourselves, and I include myself, as a teacher or still a tradesperson, and what sort of challenges, we might, we might face everyday in our roles.*

*I will start with, tradespeople? Or teachers? Because we've got this dichotomy, kind of, you know, so. What do you what do you think? What do you consider yourself?*

### Benz

I think over the last few years there's more emphasis now on the teaching side of it. As in teaching the, the wraparound stuff. The, the pastoral support, the English and maths, the, the, the social side of it, social skills and that kind of thing, then the actual technical qualifications.

### Researcher

*So how long have you been in education, Benz?*

### Benz

It's gonna be probably 10 years now.

### Researcher

*And when you did, when did that kick in that [the changes]? That side of it.*

### Benz

Probably in the last five or six years, I think. It was pre COVID, it was before COVID. Yeah, I think COVID just sort of accelerated the process a little bit more.

### Researcher

*I'll come back to [that] in a minute. So you kind of think you're edging towards teacher rather than trade?*

**Benz**

Yeah, yeah. I mean, when we get the, you know, when we get the mandate of when the students are coming in, the first thing we've gotta check is obviously the maths and English grades. We know that even though they've been graded by the schools and the schools are saying how they predicted this, that, and near that, and they've achieved these grades... I think since COVID, none of us are really secure in the fact that the grades that we're seeing on a piece of paper are the actual representation of what the students actually know in maths and English. When we are doing math and English tasks with them related to their vocational course, it doesn't even match the sort of grades they get on a piece of paper.

**Researcher**

*And that. That's becoming more common?*

**Benz**

Yeah, yeah, definitely, you know.

**Researcher**

*I'm just double backing this up, just in case...[started second recorder]*

**Benz**

Yeah. Yeah, it's definitely there's more emphasis now. Like you, you've mentioned when we did the, the, the meeting in the venue, that City and Guilds, the, the, the, the agenda now is not so much the vocational qualification, it's more of how much of a package are you building the student up to when they go out into, into the big wide world do they, do they know the maths? Do they know their English? Have they got social skills? Can they talk to people? Have they got customer facing skills and stuff like?

**Benz**

That, well, at the end of the day, years and years ago, it was you who was doing the motor vehicle course. Can you fix the car? Yeah, you know, and there's the thing I think we're a bit frightened about now because we're moving into the era of electric vehicles and high voltage cars and stuff like that. Are these kids potentially heading towards a dangerous situation where they're not really listening to what we're telling them and not taking in the information to keep themselves safe? Are they just ticking off boxes to get through a qualification, and then we're giving them a piece of paper saying they've passed Level 3 or their level 1-2 in electric vehicle hybrid technology? They're going into an employer and putting their lives on the line, yeah, because they haven't remembered or retained the knowledge they need to cope in the modern environment.

**Benz**

...A very good initiative, and obviously, people like IMI are very proactive. We have things like Tech Safe, which is their new initiative to get all technicians fully safety conscious when dealing with electric and high voltage systems. Even then, it's a bit sketchy because these students won't have a second chance with these cars. It's similar to someone working on the 18th edition or whatever for

their mains electric. If you poke your screwdriver into the wrong terminal, it could be game over, you know.

**Researcher**

*Simple point, I wonder, wonder how much further that's been thought outside the shop.*

**Benz**

Yeah, you know, I mean, we've sort of cringed a little bit when we've had the conversations with, like yourselves or awarding bodies or people who have come into the college, you know, visitors, and said that the outlook for the education system is that all students are going to be leaving schools. We predict that they're going to try and get their national grade for English and maths, but they'll be coming straight onto a Level 2 program because if they've got that achievement in their English and maths, then they're definitely going to be suitable to do a Level 2 program. No, they're not. Where's the health and safety side of it? We've already covered that in Level 1 if they're going to jump a stage and come straight into a workshop where they don't know whether you can put a collar on a ramp safely or jack a car up without it falling on your head. We're going to have all sorts of issues, and the wider part of it is the health and safety. So it's going to be a big issue.

**Researcher**

*There's, if there is, there's reform going to come down the line. I think we're a few years away from it. Yeah, but it is, who knows what? So it's interesting then that you, you know, you're still thinking about industry? Have you ever heard the phrase dual professional? Have you come across that?*

**Benz**

That I've heard being used. Obviously I'm assuming that's a reflection of what you used to do and what you're now doing. Yeah, you know, I'm a, I'm a professional teacher now, a lecturer, and I'm also a professional automotive technician.

**Researcher**

*That's OK. That was really great. So do you think there...but I thought what you just said it's exactly spot on the line. So do you think teaching is a profession?*

**Benz**

It is a profession. But I think what they're tending to do is steer away from a lot of the what?

*<interrupted by a student coming into the workshop>*

Sorry, mate, did you how? Did you get on <muffle> brilliant?

**Student 1**

Is anything you can check so the answers and stuff?

**Benz <talking to student>**

Answer is no, no, no, that look. It shows you on there, is the areas that you were strong on and the areas that you weren't so strong on. So you were strong on these two areas, 2 and 3. Number one, you were almost as good. You are 90%. So the area that you've lost your is area 4 with removing and replacing the chassis systems, so you know. But I can't really see the question you got right or wrong. So thank you. OK, well done. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you gonna just go? You're practical.

<muffled>

Oh, you're doing practical, yeah.

**Benz**

Yeah. So you so you won't, you won't be in Tuesday and you won't need to come in Thursday, obviously. So all I've got to do now is mop. OK. The exams and. Then Joe and Phil have just got to mop up the other guys who. Need to the practical.

**Student 1**

And the week off and following.

**Benz**

Yes, well done. Yes, yeah. So, you know, we've got to that stage now where I think we're going to a point where we feel that even though we've got all these skills that we've brought into the teaching side of it, which is what our original mandate was—to deliver a motor vehicle qual—it's tended to take a bit of a backseat. There, we've got to do all this stuff. I mean, we've got a good example there with the reviews and all that kind of stuff. We're flipping bombarded, point. You know, we've all got to put an individual review for every student. I've had 51 reviews I've done this week, and everybody else has got to put the same sort of effort in for this, you know. Now, let me just do...

*<Student 2 interrupts, sharing exam results>*

**Benz**

Five distinctions so far. Must be doing something right?

**Researcher**

*Yeah, absolutely. That's correct. Still on the same sort of lines you've answered some of the questions though this, is great. Do you still consider yourself an automotive technician? Do you still? In yourself as you, I guess?*

**Benz**

I'm getting further and further away from that life now, okay? I've still got the talent, obviously, yeah. I'm not keeping up to speed as much as I'd like to with all the new technology, and I'm not getting the opportunity to deliver some of the new stuff even though we're getting new equipment and things like that. And we are moving forward with the electric and hybrid stuff, but I'm starting to get a little bit more remote from the skills, the knowledge side of it is a little bit getting a little bit fading. Now the practical side is not too bad, but the knowledge side is.

*<student interrupts>*

Well done mate.

<muffled>

**Benz**

I do get to see all your results, all in, well in the 90s, which is fantastic, well done well.

<muffled>

**Benz**

And, and nobody and nobody can ever come down and go, that they're cheated now. Christine was up there doing the exam I've sat there. There I've got no input in it so...

**Researcher**

*So you mentioned the, the changes, you mentioned a lot about changes. We live through the changes though. We...how has it affected you as a teacher?*

**Benz**

I just think there's more, there's more pressure as a teacher. I mean, all the expectations of what I've got to deliver are a lot higher. Yeah, before it was just, well, these need to know about the exhaust, these need to know about the engine systems, and you know, obviously, we get pulled up or we always get the question asked when we've had lesson observations. When I was here, when I was at Sandwell, and whatever, do you embed any math or English? Well, I've just been on about steering geometry. How much math do you want? Yeah, you know, they will be writing down stuff and then checking the spellings and all that kind of stuff. So the English is in there, and that's all I've been told when I did my Cert Ed. You know, the girl who used to do the training at Sandwell, she said to me, she says, "I've got to ask you the question, do you embed any math in there?" And so now, and she said, "I don't really need to answer that question though because we did an engineering observation where I was doing some fabrication. So we were measuring, we were cutting, we were filing, we were checking." She just said, "You smashed it out at the park. You know, everything that we need to know, you're doing."

*<student interrupts>*

And James, no, it's it the...

**Benz**

Same the other day. Yeah. You bought a couple of guys around for. The DfE. Ohh.

**Researcher**

*Yeah, the actual guy, the main guy.*

**Benz**

Yeah, and I... I stopped, and he said, "If you don't mind," he said, "if you got a five-minute chat." And I said, "Yeah, I'll just make sure these guys are doing what we're supposed to be doing and they're safe." And we were doing wheels and tires, so we were always checking the tire sizes and looking at the aspect ratios and all that kind of stuff. And the first thing he said to me is, "What level is the group? Are they Level 1?" James, he said, "Oh," he said. "And what are they doing? It's wheels and tires this week, okay."

Do you do any? Are they? Are they going to the maths and English classes? Are they doing the GCSE?" And I shocked him a little bit. "No," I said. "They're all exam exempt. I said they go to maths and English to complement the course because it's part of the study program, as you know." But, I said, "They've all got their GCSEs. They've all got grade fives and above." I said, "So these are the high-flying group, if you want." And he asked, "What sort of maths and English are they doing?" And I said, "Well, they've just been doing tire sizes, aspect ratios." And the guy from the DfE, he said, "That's fantastic." But he wasn't interested in the motor vehicle side of it.

**Researcher**

*And like I said that, the guy, is the director. He's the top bloke in the DfE.*

**Benz**

Yeah, and... And he came, and he says, "Well, look, they seem to be engaging and doing what they're supposed to," he says. "But you know, it's really good that you're engaging with the maths and English. I thought the motor vehicle side of it, you know, they're learning the skill to get in the trade. And they're gonna be working on your car, mate."

*<student 3 enters the room>*

**Benz**

Yeah, yeah. Well done guys. All good, all good.

This is my big boss so you're making me look really good. You know. These, these two lads work in JLR, yeah.

*<muffled conversation about working for an international company>*

**Benz**

It just comes up straight up with your results, yeah. Yeah. Well, so you've done, you've done, your you do, your your practical Tuesday. That's it. Yeah, yeah. Fantastic guys, well done

*<multiple student conversations outside of microphone range as they return from exams>*

8 distinctions and one merit Umm.

*<multiple student conversations outside of microphone range as they return from exams>*

**Benz**

I like the assessments. I love it when they come down [from exams], especially as it is the first exam, it's just the apprehension they've got, the assessments, assessments. And then they come down...

**Benz**

And flipping smashed the got distinctions, you know, so.

That's really so that's. That makes the job. Really. You know what I mean? It's worth, it's worth all the hard, hard work, yeah.

**Benz**

But again, I love working with the adults. So because you've got a good rapport with them. You get no flippin hassle from them. They just come in, and it's hard, after work, I mean we've all been there. You've done your day of work. You're coming in. You're looking tired, and you've got another three hours sitting there for, you know, me battling on on about flipping car parts and stuff. Yeah.

**Researcher**

*Yeah, it's good, mate. I love seeing this sort of thing. Yeah, I missed this. Yeah. So I'll be back in teaching soon, that's my plan. Just a few questions a bit about the workshop really, as much as anything, yeah. Totally, you do spend time in this classroom.*

**Benz**

No, no, I'll spend probably more time doing the workshop this year than I have done for a few years. So, I've only got one one theory session. This year on the timetable this year, on Wednesday afternoons with one of the level one groups, the rest of the time is all workshop based so...

**Researcher**

*Just wondering how to phrase this now. Compare the workshop fully. I guess to the, the world real world, industry.*

**Benz**

I guess, from a technical point of view, there's no difference. You're still doing the same types of tasks. It's just that you haven't quite got the environment that you've got in a workplace, and that's the big gap between education and the real world. We're simulating things, so they haven't got the aggro from the customers. They haven't got the service manager breathing down their necks, asking, "When's the job going to be ready? This, that, and the other." And I think this is where there's a big culture shock when they go on placements. They're doing some stuff with the trade center, and at the moment, it's nothing like we'll do something like the garage at college. The doors are all the time, it's quite polling, and there's people saying and doing that, you know, "Got 20 more minutes on that." It's all "bustle, bustle, bustle. You've got to drop on this one now." You know, it's all...

I'm not asking it from just one standpoint. I used to be just a normal technician, and I was a service manager as well. So I was sitting behind the desk telling other people what to do. Yeah, I think that's the big difference. When we're trying to get them ready for the workplace, from the technical point of view, that's where we can do our bit. But from a "I need to speak to a customer," "I need to write a report out," that's supposed where the more social side of it, and the English and math side of it that we're delivering as well, that's where that's really more important. You know, the social skills and dealing with a customer. Because some of them, you put them in front of a customer, and the flipping customer would punch them on the nose. You know, "This is crappy. Look at my car. This is leaking out of it." And they go, "Oh, you take it or leave it." You know, that kind of thing would happen, but they're not seeing that side of it. I mean, like a good example, one of my level one students, a female student, came to me and said, "I'll be looking around trying to find a placement." I said...

**Researcher**

OK.

**Benz**

I said, "Are you having any luck?" She said, "I've been to a couple of garages, and they said, 'Well, we need this, we need that. We don't have public liability insurance. You need to speak to the college and get them to contact us.'" So she came to me and said, "Look, I'm getting a lot of negative vibes about this. What can you do?" So I took her up to see Debbie Boyd, our IPO in placements, and I said, "Look, Kate is looking for some work experience. Is there anything you can do?" So obviously, we have good links with the Trade Centre, and she said, "Well, I'll speak to Lee and see what he says." And Lee was a bit reluctant to start with, but then he said, "Okay, yeah, go on then. We'll give her a go. We'll give it a week. Just let me know a week that suits you and suits us, and we'll get together and we'll arrange it." So we arranged it for the week commencing the 5th. So next week, she would have been doing it. Within 24 hours of us arranging it and contacting them and telling them these were the arrangements, she phoned me up. She said, "Well, I just spoke to my mom on the phone,

and my mom said we have too much stuff to do next week, so can you just tell them to rearrange it?" I said, "No, I can't. We've arranged this. We've arranged for you to get a placement. It's one of the big companies, and you've now decided you have some other stuff to do? Well, we have to go to the cadets, and I have to do this, and I have to do that."

### ***Benz***

And we've arranged this, and now you're telling us, "Well, I've got the cadets. I've gotta go to cadets, and we've got a camp out, and all this stuff." And I said, "Look, this is a one-off opportunity to do some proper work experience in a proper garage, and you're turning it down." "Well, I can't do it. You'll just have to tell them to rearrange it for another time." I said, "No, I'm not doing that," I said. "I'm not letting down one of our really good partner companies who's working with the college because you can't be bothered to go to this one." So I spoke to Debbie and said, "Debbie, say thank you to Lee for doing what he can, but unfortunately, take her off the list and we'll see if we can find another candidate." But two days later, I got a message from her mom. "Why are you being so negative about getting her in this workplace?" And I went, "I'm not being negative," I said. "We've gone above and beyond. No other Level 1 student has been offered a place at the Trade Centre to do work experience, but we did it for Katie, and she couldn't be bothered to do it," I said. So unfortunately, they've said, "Well, can you find us another candidate? We'll do some work experience with somebody else." So she's now going to the bottom of the list. "Oh, well, I think it's disgusting," I said, "Well, you can think what you want. If somebody offered me a position at her age, I'd have snapped it up. If I wanted to be on the mechanics course, getting automotive studies because I want to work in the industry, and somebody offered me a placement, I'd be there with my flipping shoes shined and ready to do it." I said, to turn around and go, "I can't be bothered. Can you rearrange it?" We're not doing... You know, I haven't heard anything more about it, but to me, that was so flipping demoralizing. The fact that we've done that, we've gone above and beyond, and unfortunately, it ain't an unusual case. It's quite common, you know? We've had a couple of bits of feedback from some of the guys on the Level 3s who have been doing it, and a lot of these become...

### ***Benz***

I mean, I... We had Lee when Lee first came here, and we were talking to the students. I was listening in, and one of the students turned, I can't remember who it was, and he said to him, "What hours do you work?" And he said, "Well, the guys are normally in around 9 o'clock in the morning till 5," he said. "And then there's like a rota for, like, weekend work and stuff like that." "No, I don't really like them," you know, it... What do you mean? He says, "Well, don't you do like 10 till 3 or something?" He says, "No, mate, we don't do flexi hours. We're supplying... We are customer service, yeah. And the customer wants service done at 9 o'clock, and they want somebody there probably at 5 o'clock, and they want somebody there at the weekend if they need work doing. We can't be... 'Oh, sorry, we're out of hours. All our guys are on flexi time. They're not working.'" And that's... And then when you say to them, "That's a stupid question, you don't know they might do flexi time," they don't. It's a fucking garage.

### ***Researcher***

*That makes you, wonder...*

### ***Benz***



I don't know what the answer is, and you know, it's like for me, it's... We, I was speaking to Martin from City and Guild a few weeks ago, about a few months ago, and we were on about... We did the training, we did our apprenticeships and all this kind of stuff, and I said the big difference was, I had to answer to my service manager and the managing director of the company. And if I hadn't attended college for whatever reason or I'd skipped an exam, or I'd flunked an exam, I'd be straight up that office and it would be, "What's going on?"

**Researcher**

*I remember being pulled in. I'd got about 38% on this exam, and I was second top in the class. Hmm. And it was... It's obviously clearly a hard exam, so I was... I was thought, "Okay, if I was sitting there, quite smug." Next thing, I got a phone call. "You're wanted in the office." I'm like, "What's this?" So I'm sitting in front of the director, he's going, "38%." I'm going, "So what?" So it's like, they said no, you've got 38%. Explain yourself." So what's going on when you don't actually... That's pretty good. The next lad was... 39/40%, they said they are not interested in the next lad.*

**Benz**

Yeah. I mean, they... They, you know, and that was the attitude. And I said, you know, we used to enjoy working with one of the guys and say, "Tell you what, jump in the van, we're going to go out to this job. You can come and give me a hand." And you don't know what the weather was like. You'd be there, flipping passing spanners and you'd be helping out and all that stuff. And it could be in the middle of the motorway or a bloody quarry or something. Like, what? You'd be doing it because that's what you wanted to do, you know? And it gave you a big buzz when you came out and said, "Oh, we're doing this today. I've been working on this truck or whatever." You know. But you tell them now and...

**Researcher**

*So it's a different mindset than it is.*

**Benz**

I've had a student come back this afternoon, late from break, and I said, "Where have you been?" They said, "McDonald's." Walking to McDonald's, I said, "Yeah, but we've always said there's no way you're gonna get over there in 15 minutes, get your order, and then get back here. So what are you late for?" "I was hungry, I told ya". I'm thinking, and I said, "You're on a Level 2 now. You're pushing it for a Level 3." And you went, "I thought, well, you signed up for this course, you wanted to do it, and then you're giving us all this grief about..." And that's the... I think that's the thing that really knocks your neck in, the fact that you've got all these flipping paperwork to tick boxes and boxes and boxes, and then you've got the attitude from the kids, like, "I'm doing all this for you to try and get you a qualification to make something of yourself in your life, and all you're doing is like, it's like, well, come on, just give us the certificates." Yeah, it is a... It is a strange culture that we've got. It's like a work ethic has completely faded away.

**Researcher**

*Yeah, COVID doesn't help either.*

**Benz**

Yeah, and the... The... And the... The first thing I've said is, the first time I had a student say, "Well, they pass the exam or not because we were watching football on the screen or something." You know, we've done that. That's because you're working in the workshop, but we're expecting you to carry on with the tasks. But you know, we do it as a bit of a favour. You wouldn't get that in a proper garage. They wouldn't have the big television on while you're working on customers' cars and stuff. But you just... It's like the anticipation is, or the expectation is, "Well, it doesn't matter whether we do pass the exam or we pass the assessment, we're going to get through the course anyway." You know, "Look, we've got to tick a box. We've gotta make sure that you get there." And that, to me, is... is wrong. You know.

**Researcher**

*How do you think? So given, going back, but not going back. How does that affect how you work in the workshop? How has that affected the space around? Do we talk about these kids not engaging and not switched on? Does that mean you would change everything that's in?*

**Benz**

We wouldn't change the dynamics of the way the place is set up. It's just the fact that your teaching style changes. You tend to focus more on the people who want to learn, and we've all... I've said for the last couple of years, now, where we had lockdown and we had small groups, where we split the group, and since half the group was coming in one day after, the flipping difference was amazing. And everybody said the same. You got a group of eight or nine students, they're all just getting on, working away. No problems at all. You had no flipping hassle with them coming back late from breaks. And then you add the other half in the following day, exactly the same, but you get one person in there with sixteen others, and it flipping changes completely. It's like a change, and that impacts on your teaching on that.

Because I've... We, I've got one example here. I've got one student. I teach him, Rav teaches him, Ryan teaches him, and he supposedly has ADHD. He hasn't got ADHD. He hasn't been documented as being ADHD. He never completed any of the assessments for it because he never turned up. But everybody you speak to says, "Oh, he's a flipping live wire." He's not got ADHD. He's not verbally abusive or anything like that. He's literally just hyperactive. He's like a bottle of pop, and he just sets everybody off, and not... And you've got students in this room here. I've got a student that sits there, Alexander, and the non-students sitting there, and they're going, they're trying to do the theory work they can, because you won't shut up, and I'm going to come up, "Shut up, Callum. Will you shut up so we can just... get this?". "Callum, shut up!", just yeah. And then he's in the workshop and he's the same. You can hear him from this end of the workshop to another, he's just a livewire. Take him out of the equation when he's not here, and the flipping room is totally different. And we've said, "Look, if you get a learning walk or something like that, if I had him in the learning walk, I'd just say to the person, 'Look, you're just gonna have to mark me down as a flipping disaster area,' because that's gonna be the case with this guy. He's a nuthouse."

**Researcher**

*You know, yeah.*

**Benz**

I know, we're going to get them, and we tried to screen them, but at the end of the day, you've... they've all got an equal opportunity to have a go. But you'd think some of them, it's like... like I haven't gone back to school. I've got the GCSE, which might be right or might be predicted. Er, but I've

got all the things I need, so I don't have to go back to school, so I'm really going to college, I can mess around. I can shout with me old mates from school 'cause area as well, and that's what it is. It's like it's an extension there of school, you know?

**Researcher**

*And I think that's where it's gonna go in the future to be honest.*

**Benz**

And they... and they... And when you say to him, just a reminder, when you sign the respect agreement and you did your enrollment form and you did your interview and you're telling us how good you are and how what you're gonna do and aspire to being a mechanic for McLaren and all that, where did all that go wrong? "Oh yeah, but yeah, I'm in college now. What's going on?" Yeah. So what do you wanna do with your life? "I don't know". I don't think it's that. I think it's the fact that we're... it's all you, you're pulling something up the top of the hill and then somebody comes along and cuts the rope, and it rolls back down, and then and you think, "What the hell have you done that for?" It's just... demoralizing that you're doing all this work.

**Researcher**

*And you think? Do you think it's changed, you think?*

**Benz**

Definitely

**Researcher**

*Shifted about 5-6 years ago you said?*

**Benz**

Years ago. Yeah. Yeah, definitely, yeah.

**Researcher**

*Certainly agree.*

**Benz**

I mean, the thing is, I suppose I see the difference more than the rest of the staff because I'm teaching adults. There's a classic example. I've got people who are more mature that have gone through the education system, they are working, they've got jobs, and some of them are between jobs or they're trying to find a job. But their attitude is different. They're respectful, they do the work. I don't get no issues with them. Alright, the timekeeping and the attendance could be a little bit of an issue because of commitments to family and businesses and stuff like that, which is, you know, something we have to put up with. But the fact that they can go in and come in and do this, get this exam results like that, and it's like, "Well done!" and you know, fantastic. I'm not and you soak it up, you thought, "This is what a flipping morale boost this is, you know, that I've done something brilliant." You don't get that from the younger students. You pass your exam, well done guys, and they're like, "It's flipping easy, was it?" or "You pass your... You only just pass by one mark. You do realise that, then?" "Yeah, you know?" "Yeah, it's easy, okay." And that's the difference. It's yeah. You do the handout, right, I've done a handout today. You know, this is all about steering. So what do we

gotta do? Get all the vehicle details, give them a walk back out of the workshop at the end of the session, and paper airplane in the bin. You think, "What have I been wasting my time for?"

**Researcher**

Yeah.

**Benz**

You've got to use that to revise for the exam. I've said to him today, "All this is going to be in your exam in a couple of months' time." The next thing? "Next goal, yeah, that we've got ages to do that, man." So when we say to get your notes from when you were in the workshop and whatnot, "Yeah, the ones you made into a paper airplane and flung it in the bin."

**Researcher**

*I'm just going to ask one last question. There's a hypothetical question. The reason for this question is because I struggle with the answer to this question, so it's purely hypothetical, so...when you go on holiday, nice holiday abroad say, and you get talking to somebody on the sunbed, or you're in the bar or whatever and they ask you what do you do? What do you say? What's your first answer?*

**Benz**

I'll tell them I'm a college lecturer. And they say, well, you know, what do you teach you or whatever? I mean, you we usually get around to talking about automotive.

**Researcher**

*That's your first, a college lecturer. Just was really interested...*

**Benz**

Well, those days of the technician have gone. Yeah, I've moved on from that. Now this, I would never have come into this. And yeah, Sharon's always said to me, "Oh, well, you know the old saying, you can talk a good job, but you can't do a good job." Yeah, you know, okay. I've got to the stage now where I wouldn't want to go back. She said to me many, many times, "All this job here, I've seen a job for a master technician. I want a service manager." So I can't be going back into the industry, be doing flipping 8 hours a day stripping gearboxes. There's no way I can't. I just physically couldn't do it anymore, you know. And you sometimes wonder whether you still got the physical power to do it in here when you've got 14 struts to put back on because the kids have disappeared and not put this stuff back on it, and you've got to get all the cars assembled ready for the next groups and stuff. You sometimes think, "Shit, what am I doing this for?" But you do it because that's the choice I made. You know, I've decided to get into the industry and move into this, and I do like the extra holidays. And I do like the flexible working, you know, it's a lot better than being in the trade. And I suppose Paul and Rav and all the other guys that say the same that have been in the trade, you know, once you've been there, it's very difficult to go back and make the return journey. I do miss the buzz because I get to talk to the guys from JLR. There's another guy, the guy came in and Simon as well. He works for Bosch. He knows a lot of the guys I used to work with, right? That are still around, and he said, "Oh, so now they're retired. They're hung up the spanners and, yeah, you know, living the high life." And that's what it is, you know. I mean, I don't intend to carry on forever doing this. I did have a plan. I said to Mark, probably another two years and I'll be looking at retiring, but obviously with the economic markets at the moment, I'm probably going to be pushing more 65 before thinking about it,

you know, mid-pension plans are going to be pushed back a little bit. Yeah, but I don't intend to sort of see past 65. Yeah, to just carry on, keep me hand in.

Yeah, just to do some reduced hours and even even potentially, you know, if I do decide to knock it on the head, maybe do a little bit of IV and get my IV qual and do some IV and and do a little bit of invigilation and that kind of stuff you know, so you, you, you're staying in the environment and you're not stagnant. You're not doing nothing. Yeah, cause Sharon always said to me you'll never retire because you've always got something to do once you've run out of things to do, you'll be back to work. Again, you know and it's not, like you just want to keep buzzing.

**Researcher**

*You think that's cultural? Maybe it is just curiosity. Yeah, I mean I'm an electrician. Yeah, so construction really you can't sit still.*

**Benz**

Yeah. No, you can't. You know, she'll say. To me, we'll go to so and so for holiday and I've gone really. What's there? What was a big beach? I've been flipping walking that beach backwards and forwards every day. I can't go on the sunbed. Does my head in. I've got to go exploring somewhere and have a look around, doing stuff and she said to me, yeah, you'll never retire. You'll you'll always be doing the only thing that they'll go back to is. There's a lot of guys who don't work in the industry. But every weekend, they're still underneath somebody's car. They're still doing this? Nah, forget it. I'll still take money to the dealers and say there's OK, get that sorted. Yeah. You know, I've got to that stage there. You know I can't be...

**Researcher**

*Yeah, that's fair enough. Fair enough. I get it, I get it. I get it, you know, especially at the moment. I've done many requests to work during the holidays. Maybe I wouldn't do it now, I don't even know. I did it when I first came in because I came in quite young. I was about 28 when I started teaching, yeah, evenings. And then I moved full time when I was 29. But every holiday that I was working, yeah, I've still got all the contacts. I know what you're doing and, you know, in a couple of weeks, and I did it for a few years, but then it got a bit too much. Work gets more stressful, yeah. I need to think, you know what I need? Some downtime, that's all. Yeah.*

**Benz**

I think I did a little bit when I first got into teaching. When I worked at Sandwell for the first couple of years, I kept my hand in. I literally got my overalls in the car, I put my overalls on and I drove over to Tamworth or something and I helped a mate out or whatever, sorting a car or vehicle that had problems, and I just took a bit of cash in hand and stuff. I just kept my hand in, and it was alright. But then I got to the stage where I was doing my Cert Ed and then doing my TAQA and everything else. And I said, "Oh, guys, I just can't come over this weekend and help you out because I've got flipping shed loads of paperwork to do and marking." And then eventually that void starts to open up and the phone stopped ringing. And you very rarely hear from them anymore. You might bump into them in the pub from time to time. "Now, what are you doing these days?" "I'm still a lecturer." "Ohh, you're still doing any work on cars?" "Not really now. Still got your garage?" "I'm retired now. I'm just over here for a holiday. I've just got back from Marbella." Thanks a lot. It's that sort of thing. It's one of the things I've got to keep doing something. I said to Mark the other day, when I don't get a buzz out of doing this, that's when I'm going to call it a day. You know, but I'll still get the hook. I've said to him this year, I don't know whether I'm going to do the evenings again because I've done it for like seven

years now. Seventh year on the evenings, and I said, I think I'm going to call it a day next September. I'm not, you know, they'll have to put me on something on full-time, let some of the others go. But when I'm home tonight, I just get a kick out of it. It's just so rewarding to see the people come in.

**Researcher**

*Even when I started here as CM at about 10 years ago, I still carried on the night for two years. Yeah, I just enjoyed teaching.*

**Benz**

That I do. I've got the same thing. You know, I just... it's just something about it. And Mark said to me, "I'm glad you're doing the evenings again because I can just leave it to you and you just get on and get it done." It was a bit of a curveball and a change for the 7290. Originally, we didn't want to do the diploma as we've always done, but there's just so much content. It's just not possible to do it on a three-hour theory session and a three-hour practical. There are just too many assessments. I think this year's diploma, we've got four because we're doing the Cert, and that's because I've added two mandatory units, an optional unit, and the supplementary unit which is the 601, which is the new hybrid. It's a safety awareness course. There's no practical involved. It's effectively a level one, but it's just about the safety aspect. So it's a knowledge course. It's only a short course, only like two weeks of the curriculum, and then they'll do the GOLAs at the end of it. So we've got four GOLAs to do, but the diploma's got nine GOLAs. And the issue, like the likes of Rob are having, means that if they fail it, they're having to retake it. And then the fact that, again, they've got to rebook it, and if they fail again, they've got to rebook it, and then it's snowballing into the next goal. You know what I mean?

<more students walk in with exam results wanting to talk to the teacher>

**Researcher**

*Thanks Benz, I'll leave you to it.*

## Appendix 6 – Ethics Approval



Faculty of Health, Education & Life Sciences Research Office  
Seacole Building, 8 Westbourne Road  
Birmingham  
B15 3TN  
HELS\_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk

11/Oct/2022

Mr. Neil Sambrook  
Neil.Sambrook@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Dear Neil,

**Re: Sambrook /#10956 /sub2 /R(A) /2022 /Oct /HELS FAEC - Vocational teachers, dual professionalism, and the rhythm of reform: a study of space and identity in further education**

Thank you for your application and documentation regarding the above activity. I am pleased to take Chair's Action and approve this activity.

Provided that you are granted Permission of Access by relevant parties (meeting requirements as laid out by them), you may begin your activity.

I can also confirm that any person participating in the project is covered under the University's insurance arrangements.

Please note that ethics approval only covers your activity as it has been detailed in your ethics application. If you wish to make any changes to the activity, then you must submit an Amendment application for approval of the proposed changes.

Examples of changes include (but are not limited to) adding a new study site, a new method of participant recruitment, adding a new method of data collection and/or change of Project Lead.

Please also note that the Health, Education and Life Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee should be notified of any serious adverse effects arising as a result of this activity.

If for any reason the Committee feels that the activity is no longer ethically sound, it reserves the right to withdraw its approval. In the unlikely event of issues arising which would lead to this, you will be consulted.

**Keep a copy of this letter along with the corresponding application for your records as evidence of approval.**

If you have any queries, please contact HELS\_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk

If you would like to provide feedback on the ethics process, please complete the feedback form using [this link](#).

I wish you every success with your activity.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Abdulla Sadiq

On behalf of the Health, Education and Life Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

## Appendix 7 – Sample Nvivo Coding

- Figure 1 – Initial Coding
- Figure 2 – Early Topic/Thematic Development
- Figure 3 – Developing Themes
- Figure 4 – Final Thematic Framework

The screenshot shows the Nvivo software interface during initial coding. The 'Nodes' list on the left contains various codes. The 'References' column shows counts for each node. The right pane displays an audio file and its transcript.

Name	Files	References
Academic comparison	12	31
Academic disinterest	1	1
Bureacracy and managerialism	13	69
Can teach or you can't	3	3
Change as a person	14	43
Change happened	13	36
Change in teaching expectations	15	81
Changes to courses and programmes	14	48
Changes to teaching practice	12	39
Class sizes	6	14
Compared to previous experience	3	4
COVID	7	10
Devaluing	6	12
Dual Professional	14	51
Employer expectation	3	5
Entry requirements	3	3
External policy expectations	3	6
Hypothetical scenario answer	14	15
Identity affiliation	16	104
Imposter syndrome	0	0

Figure 1 - During Initial Coding

The screenshot shows the Nvivo software interface during early thematic development. The 'Thematic Framework V1' list on the left shows a hierarchy of nodes. The right pane displays a transcript with highlighted segments and coverage percentages.

Name	Files	References
Vocational Teacher Identity - POS	0	0
Changes in Student Behaviours - RHYTHM	0	0
Student expectations	15	71
Student attitude to learning	14	92
Student behaviour	14	74
Parental engagement	12	31
Mental health	8	16
COVID	7	10
Student poverty and issues	2	2
Political Influence on Vocational Education - RHYTHM	0	0
Production of Vocational Space	0	0
Industrial Expectations within Academia - RHYTHM	0	0
_spare codes	0	0

Figure 2 - Early Thematic Development



**Thematic Framework V1**

Name	Files	References
Vocational Teacher Identity - POS	0	0
Changes in Student Behaviours - RHYTHM	0	0
Political Influence on Vocational Education - RHYTHM	0	0
Change in teaching expectations	15	81
Changes to courses and programmes	14	48
Bureacracy and managerialism	13	69
Teaching outside subject area	13	38
Change happened	13	36
Policy	10	26
Workload	10	35
Reform	9	21
Qualifications	8	17
Societal changes	8	12
Class sizes	6	14
Devaluing	6	12
Ofsted	4	4
Managers expectations	4	6
External policy expectations	3	6
Production of Vocational Space	0	0
Space	15	46
Industrial Expectations within Academia - RHYTHM	0	0
Trade	15	50
Industry comparisons	14	89
Change as a person	14	45
Student ability	13	29
Academic comparison	12	31
Work ethic	11	38
Work-ready students	9	30
Industry specific training	4	4
Employer expectation	3	5

**Thematic Framework V1**

Name	Files	References
Vocational Teacher Identity - POS	0	0
Identity affiliation	16	104
Dual Professional	14	51
Changes to teaching practice	12	39
Hypothetical scenario answer	15	16
Academic comparison	12	31
Profession or professional	10	23
Why entered education	10	20
Positive comment about teaching	9	15
Motivation to teach	4	10
Professional development and upskilling	9	20
Compared to previous experience	3	4
Pride	5	10
Skills development	7	15
Negative comment about teaching	6	15
Less teaching hours	2	6
Change as a person	14	43

Figure 3 - Theme Development Process

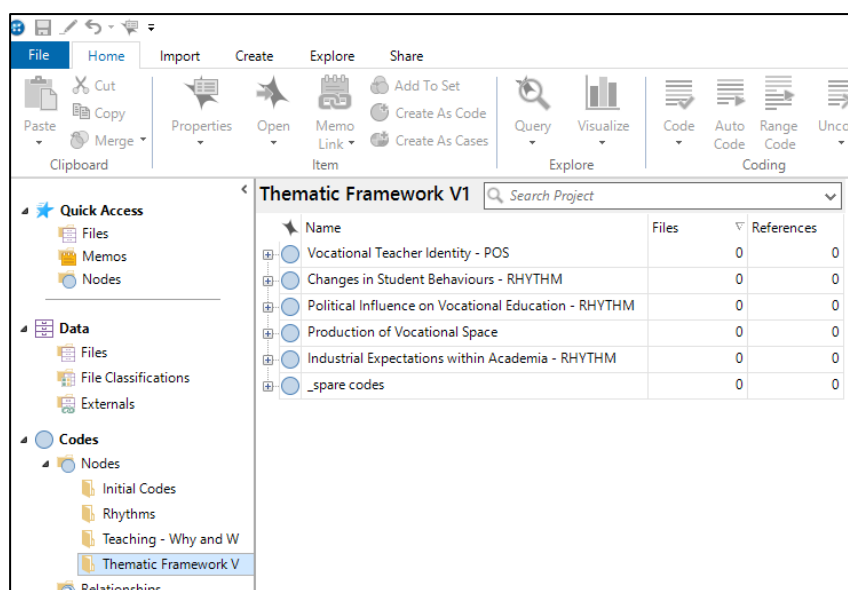
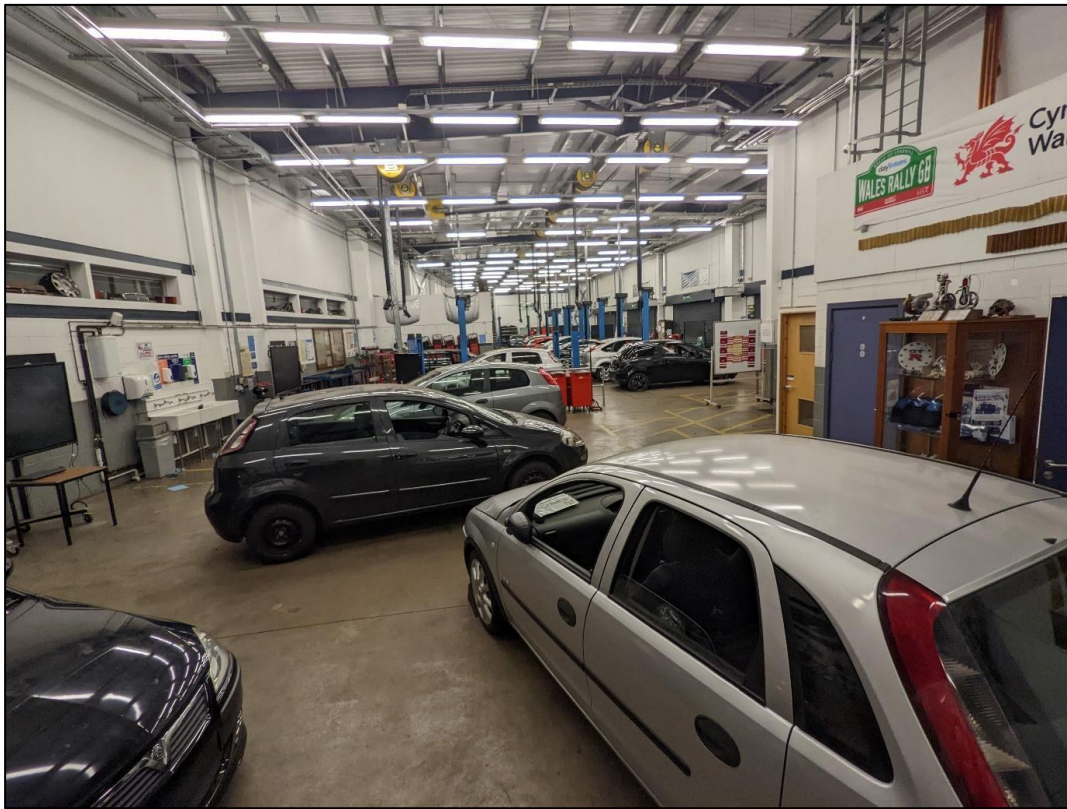


Figure 4 - Final Thematic Framework

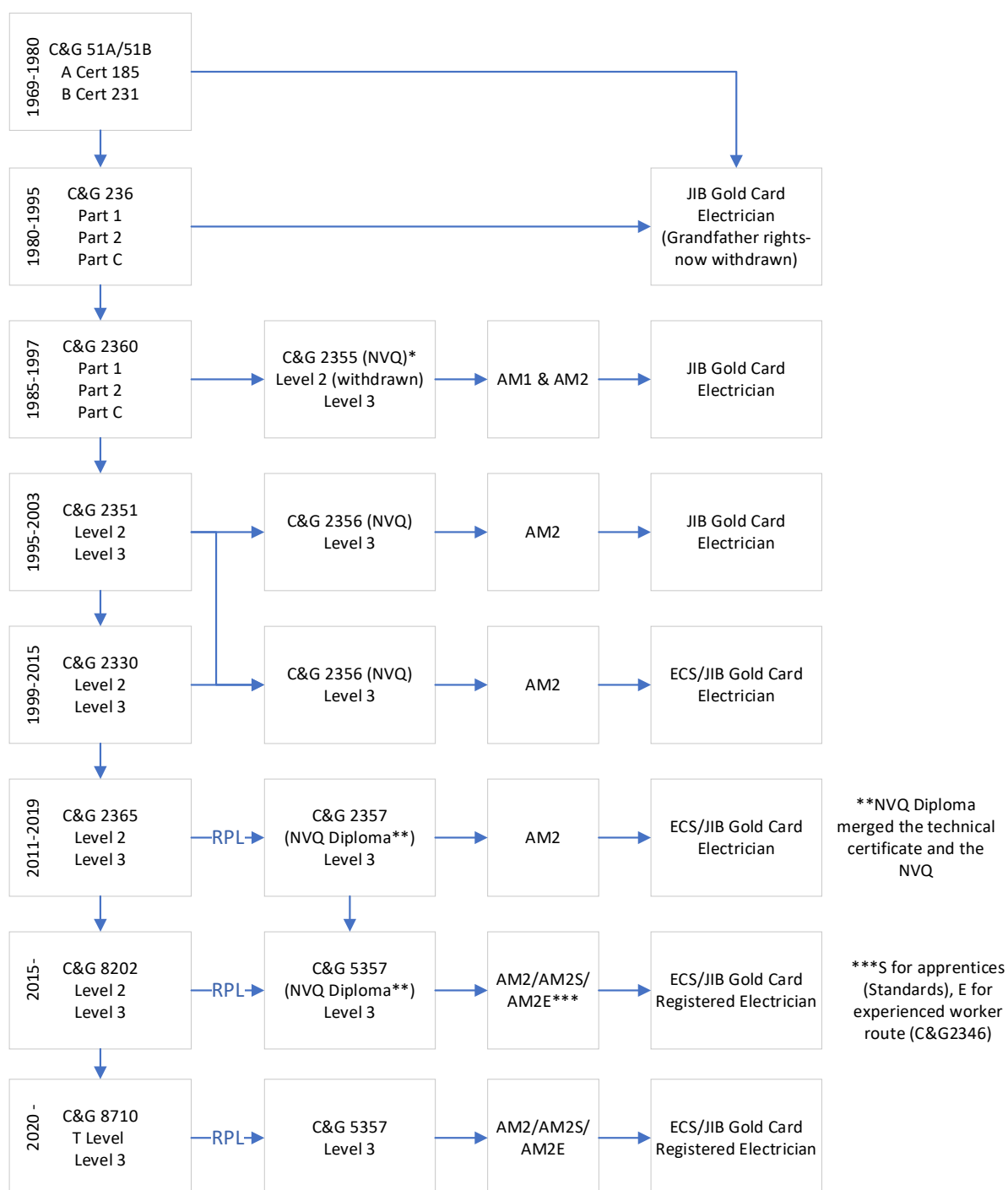
## Appendix 8 – Vocational Spaces

### *Motor Vehicle Workshop*



## Appendix 9 – Curriculum Reform Example: Electrical Installation

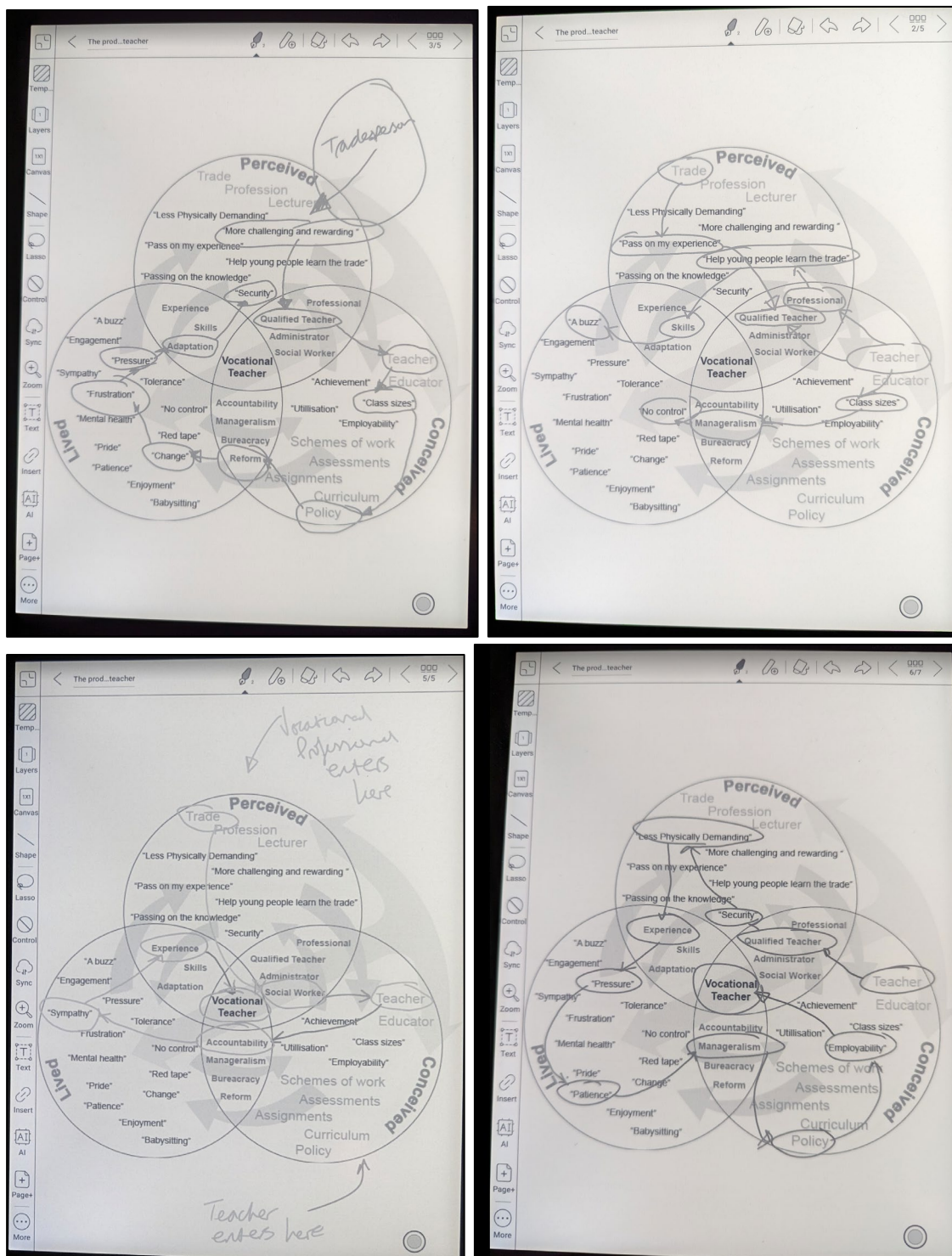
Over a period of approximately 40 years, the pathway to becoming a qualified and recognised electrician has undergone multiple reforms. During this period, there have been 12 different qualifications developed. These are undergoing further planned reforms for 2025, with plans to split qualifications according to the student's age.





## Appendix 10 – Navigating the Dialectic

To assist in decoding Lefebvre's spatial dialectic, I created a template file on a e-reading device, enabling me to run through participant responses. This allowed me to sketch freely and indefinitely play with the concept.



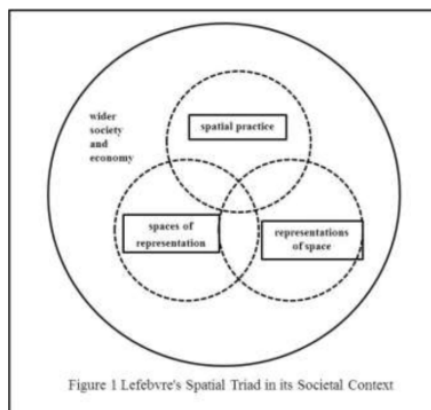
## Appendix 11 – Theories on the Production of Space

Throughout this thesis, I have grappled with the theory behind the production of space. To help, I used this section to record other authors interpretations of the dialectic.

Elden (2004)

<b>Spatial Practice</b>	<i>L'espace perçu</i>	Perceived	Physical	Materialism
<b>Representations of Space</b>	<i>L'espace conçu</i>	Conceived	Mental	Idealism
<b>Spaces of Representation</b>	<i>L'espace vécu</i>	Lived	Social	Materialism and idealism

Leary-Ohwin (2015)



Fuchs (2019)

	<b>Spatial Practice</b>	<b>Representations of Space</b>	<b>Representational Space</b>
Subjects	Members of society, family, working class	Experts, scientists, planners, architects, technocrats, social engineers	Inhabitants and users who passively experience space
Objects	Outside world, Locations, spatial sets, urban transport routes and networks, places that relate the local and the global, trivialised spaces of everyday life, desirable and undesirable spaces	Knowledge, signs, codes, images, theory, ideology, plans, power, maps, transportation and communications systems, abstract space (commodities, private property, commercial centers, money, banks, markets, spaces of labor),	Social life, art, culture, images, symbols, systems of non-verbal symbols and signs, images, memories
Activities	Perceiving, daily routines, reproduction of social relations, production	Conceiving, calculation, representation, construction	Living, everyday life and activities

**Table 1: Lefebvre's three levels of social space, based on information from: Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 32-33, 38-43, 362, 50, 116, 233, 288**

	<i>Accessibility &amp; distancing</i>	<i>Appropriation and use of space</i>	<i>Domination and control of space</i>	<i>Production of space</i>
Material spatial practices (experience)	Flows of goods, money, people, labor, power, information, etc.; transport and communications systems; market and urban hierarchies; agglomeration	Land uses and built environments; social spaces and other 'turf' designations; social networks of communication and mutual aid	Private property in land; state and administrative divisions of space; exclusive communities and neighborhoods; exclusionary zoning and other forms of social control (policing and surveillance)	Production of physical infrastructures (transport and communication; built environments; land clearance, etc.); territorial, organization of social infrastructures (formal and informal)
Representations of space (perception)	Social, psychological and physical measures of distance; map-making; theories of the 'friction of distance' (principle of least effort, social physics, range of a good, central place and other forms of location theory)	Personal space; mental maps of occupied space; spatial hierarchies; symbolic representation of spaces; spatial 'discourses'	Forbidden spaces; 'territorial imperatives'; community; regional culture; nationalism; geopolitics; hierarchies	New systems of mapping, visual representation, communication, etc.; new artistic and architectural 'discourses'; semiotics
Spaces of representation (imagination)	Attraction/repulsion; distance/desire; access/denial; transcendence 'medium is the message'	Familiarity; hearth and home; open places; places of popular spectacle (streets, squares, markets); iconography and graffiti; advertising	Unfamiliarity; spaces of fear; property and possession; monumentality and constructed spaces of ritual; symbolic barriers and symbolic capital; construction of 'tradition'; spaces of repression	Utopian plans; imaginary landscapes; science fiction ontologies and space; artists' sketches; mythologies of space and place; poetics of space; spaces of desire

Soja (1996)

