

# A Teacher's View

## OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING WITHIN A PENAL ESTABLISHMENT

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THE TITLE is misleading: the intention is to make some broad general comments about which aspects of vocational training seem (to teachers) to be satisfactory—and where not, the way(s) in which improvements could be made and if my categoric statements bring correspondence, I should feel justified in having taken up my pen.

From tutor organisers in general the initials V.T. bring varying reactions: some profess to have “nothing to do with it, it’s the Dep.’s job”; some rather condescend to provide a number of allied evening classes, but even to some of these (in my view) rather more enlightened gentlemen the feeling seems inbred that the “V.T. evening class” provides a perk for the C.I.O. rather than anything much of an educational nature: to others the C.I.O. has no standing as a teacher (this is frequently true as will be pointed out later, but the gap is often a narrow one) or he

would be employed as a teacher in a college of technology . . . with the resulting higher pay, better status, shorter hours, shorter working year (i.e. longer holidays), in short with superior conditions.

But it is necessary to face facts as one sees them: in Wellingborough Borstal where I am (truly) privileged to work the vocational training facts are seemingly as briefly outlined: and subsequent upon the bald statement of facts I suggest a possible solution in outline which is both relevant to training in penal establishments *and* in line with modern training procedures.

Some 200-plus receptions are dealt with yearly. They arrive after periods varying between six weeks and over four months at the allocation centre (this time in fact does include their generally brief sojourn in a local prison before being sent on to allocation at either Wormwood Scrubs or

Manchester). They then average between nine and 11 weeks in our induction wing—though some part of this time will generally be in the next step on their training ladder, as training grades. By April 1966, presumably because of the simple fact of pressure of numbers being sentenced to borstal training our overall training period was shortening and there became a tendency on the part of the rather better potential training material to visualise the simple mathematics of their own case and realise that vocational training, if not available quite early after their arrival at Wellingborough, would automatically preclude the possibility of an early discharge. Facts must be faced: DISCHARGE DAY is the major aim in a lad's mind. Thus the general standard of course material declined—

- (a) not because of lack of attainment or potential, although this has and probably always will be a factor;
  - (b) not simply because the lads were "anti" after their long and enervating stay at allocation centre;
  - (c) not because employment in the particular trade was a tremendous problem in the area to which they hoped to be discharged;
- simply because lads did not want to commit themselves after seven or eight months to the certainty

of a further six months "inside".

As an aside at this point one must make the assertion (amply proved by the figures produced by borstal after-care in whatever light they are read) that vocational training must not *in itself* either—

- (i) be offered seemingly on condition that the lad enters the type of employment to which the course is geared—although almost every selection board one attends seems biased in this way;
- (ii) or be offered specifically to those lads who, whatever their general post-sentence aims, seem to offer a good chance of examination success. It is at this stage one would make the point that the "mock examination" run by the Home Office V.T. Unit seems quite irrelevant to one of the problems offered. Of course it matters that the lads should, if possible, take an external examination of the City and Guilds or U.E.I. type; and equally, of course, it matters that public money should not be wasted. But it seems to most of those involved that it is patently impossible for six-month courses (and making allowance for instructors' leave and possible sickness) in any way to be

geared to a "mock-examination" *at the right time* in the course.

C.I.O.s, as teachers already are, should be trusted to recommend and their recommendation be then acted upon. This seems an admirable point to briefly continue the theme raised in paragraph 3. Most C.I.O.s nowadays have a full technological qualification: if not the full Technological City and Guilds (or possibly in some cases an Ordinary or even Higher National Certificate) then an ordinary City and Guilds certificate in their chosen field. Therefore, many of them could NOW move into junior craft teaching in colleges of technology, and many more are fitted to take the "Technical Teachers' Certificate Course" run by university departments of education part-time at local technical colleges or to attend the one-term in-service training courses or the full one-year technical teacher training courses provided (with full grants) by the four colleges set up by the Department of Education and Science (then the Ministry of Education) for this very purpose. Facts must be faced.

Yet another postulation: is the purpose of the V.T. course to—

(a) teach people to "think"?

Universities, no less, would like to learn the secret; or

(b) as work therapy—possibly

an excellent aim in itself?;  
or

(c) is it aimed simply at teaching a man to earn his living?

Some experimentation has been indulged in in penal establishments: some vague threats are implied—that if sufficient numbers do not appear for courses the C.I.O.s will duly disappear (at least to pastures new). Unfortunately the extent to which experiment has been allowed is unknown as either publicity is shunned or the White Paper on Communications has not yet been fully digested. Therefore I should like to make a number of general propositions which, to me at least, seem educationally sound as well as economically viable, and (dare I add) light be shed on reasons for administrative instructions which appear both unsound and largely unworkable.

1. The fight between V.T. and other departments at Head Office be ended by some form of armistice (doubtless it will be denied that a state of war existed, but the evidence is to the contrary).

2. Trade training courses of indeterminate length be allowed in industrial training shops where (as in, for instance, carpentry) there is an obvious possibility. The course need not be of any pre-ordained length or form, but suitable material could be retained for a

longer than usual period and allied evening classes provided for those with especial interest.

3. If a situation is arising that delay in allocation centres threaten some of the more successful existing-type courses, then there might be quicker allocation of those who opt for and are suitable for vocational training by the allocation centres—after all, it would be difficult to argue that those who WANT training ought not to have priority FOR training.

4. In the larger "world of work" it is becoming more and more common to have separate courses for "technicians" and for "craftsmen": the City and Guilds of London Institute courses by their "G-course" selection subscribe very firmly to this thesis.

5. In 1966, of 87 who completed V.T. courses, 18 failed the internal examinations—and of those entered after Head Office screening for external examinations, five of 10 passed City and Guilds inter, whilst nine of 14 passed U.E.I. stage 1.

6. Certification is at least a step on the road towards Union recognition: the present certificate awarded at the successful completion of the internal examination is not only not recognised: it is not even *held* by the person who has earned it!

7. What is patently needed is courses at two levels—at technician for the more able lad: the lad who wants to go into the trade

and is worth a chance; the lad who is educationally up to taking, with a reasonable chance of success, an external examination. Alongside should run, over a shorter period, a craft level course—similar in a practical sense but without the theory which so bedevils the less able and further, that entry should be staggered.

Difficult? At first, no doubt—but certainly possible, as I now try briefly to outline.

Apart from the possible courses running within industrial training workshops entry to vocational training courses to be staggered; not more than three lads to enter per month (and they together) and the course to have a ceiling number as at present of 12.

The course to be basically aimed at being a craft course, with the C.I.O. keeping his eye open for likely lads of technical standard. Dealing first with the craft lads: these would remain on the course for four months only; their work would be practical in nature (except in so far as theory came within the area of general discussion when setting up a job); their examination would be practical in that it would, over perhaps the last two or three weeks of the course, consist of a job which covered in its performance as many as possible of the facets of the trade. Advice would be forthcoming from both other lads and the instructor (as is the case with "improvers" within the factory-situation) and

the end-of-course certificate would be issued *to the lad* as a "craft certificate" based solely on the recommendation of the C.I.O.

Those lads who showed extra promise—perhaps 25 to 30 per cent of the intake—would remain on the course for a minimum of six months; longer if the instructor felt this was in the lad's interest and/or particularly necessary. These lads would have an allied evening class in theory, and also be placed by the tutor organiser, acting in consultation with the C.I.O., on extra maths. classes or perhaps on technical drawing. They would also be allowed, at the C.I.O.'s discretion and after consultation with the orderly officer, to use classrooms during the working day for study purposes. These would, in all probability, be the lads recommended for permission

to sit external examinations—one would also hope that for them also a method be found of giving *them* a successful course completion certificate.

In my view, an overall scheme somewhat on the lines herein propounded would have many advantages over the present rather archaic and over-formalised one—it would present a format more closely allied to training in normal society and thus would enable the released prisoner more easily to reorientate and come to terms—it would to an extent be self-selective of those who were likely to continue in the trade in which they had been trained.

Equally, the success/failure figures produced by after-care would be meaningful if they considered separately those lads who had done well as technicians *and* intended to follow the trade.

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