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College and Work- Based Learning in Hairdressing

How to Improve the
Perceived Skill Level

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Chapter 1 Introduction

How can I improve the perceived skill level of college based learning in hairdressing to be equivalent to work based learning.

I have decided to research the standard of skill coming into the hairdressing industry after studying full time at a FE college. The concept of lifelong learning came into its own in the 1970's. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has long placed a high priority on lifelong learning and yet there still seems to be a gap I feel between the standard of skill taught and learnt at a college and the industry expectations.

'In 1996 OECD Education Ministers concluded "lifelong learning will be essential for everyone as we move into the 21st century and has to be made accessible to all" (OECD, 1996). In 2001 the Secretary General stated that "As the world moves increasingly to knowledge-based economies and societies, the emphasis given to this goal [i.e. to lifelong learning] is not only right, but it must be reinforced ... it is not surprising that education emerges everywhere as the major preoccupation of citizens and of governments. It should be our priority of priorities" (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2001,p7).

It has frustrated me for a long time, how the perceptions are very different between college training, and work based learning, whilst both are striving to achieve the same end result. That end result being excellent professionals in the hair and beauty industry, that in turn give back to their community and the industry as a whole. After being on both sides of the fence, so to speak, salon lecturer and professional hairdresser. I feel it has been a constant problem/clash between what is expected from employees and the skills students actually possess.

I would like to explore and diagnose this hypothesis further and delve into what the issues/problems are, if any, why they exist, evaluate my findings and take appropriate action where possible, and as a trainer what I could do about closing the divide between these two areas. After seeing firsthand the attitude that my employers over the years have taken to freshly qualified students there seems to be a clear underlying theory that the level of skill and knowledge coming out of the FE colleges is not up to the standard they would like.

I believe this action research project will be invaluable to inform how I deliver my subject in the future. It will give me a better understanding of what employers want and how we can work together to create talented, confident, highly skilled, and knowledgeable trainee

hairdressers. Hopefully it will help me gain a better understanding of the balance between the training packages I deliver and the current industry needs.

I would like to improve the quality of my own teaching to increase the chances of students securing job placements, where they can flourish and input into the hairdressing industry as a career. To encourage a partnership between education, training systems and industry, to provide an environment of training, where skills have real labour market relevance and that young people gain an early appreciation and understanding of the world of work.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

There are currently estimated to be around 35,000 hairdressing and barbers' salons in the UK providing general hairdressing services (cutting, styling, permanent waving and colouring) according to HABIA, the standards setting body for the hair and beauty sector (2006), mostly. According to figures produced in 2006, the turnover of the hairdressing industry was £3 billion and £430 million for barbers. There were 187,500 employees and 35,400 businesses; between them they averaged 387 million client visits and employed 100,00 trainees.(White and Croucher). The latest figures from 2010 suggest an annual combined industry total turnover of £525 billion and employing 245,795 individuals. Unbelievably the industry has grown 10% year on year since 1995 confirming this is a growing and significant industry with skills that are transferable across the world.

The hair and beauty sector is vast, in that it covers six industries, hairdressing, beauty therapy, barbering, nail services, African type hairdressing/barbering and spa. All of these industries are represented by the Hair and Beauty Studies principal learning Qualification, together with science, marketing, management and business skills, thus providing a broad knowledge base qualification where you can carry out practical skills in each industry. The underlying principle of this being that the learner becomes a more rounded individual, with transferable skills, who has a clearer idea of the career options and pathways ahead of them. These qualifications, (NVQ's) are designed to certificate workplace competence and ensure the learner is 'job ready'. They rely heavily on 'evidence of competence', which can be in the form of past jobs and activities as well as current status.

'Train to Gain is an initiative by the former Department for Education and Skills (in England) to help employers to raise the skill levels of those of their workforce who do not currently have a level 2 qualification. It builds on the successful "Employer Training Pilots", which were introduced in September 2002. In both schemes, government funded training is delivered by an approved training provider (which may be an FE college or an independent provider) to meet the needs of the employer and the workforce, following a plan agreed jointly by the provider and employer. Initial assessment of the skills of the workforce is an important part of the scheme and the training is tailored to take account of existing skills, although the end point is intended to be the achievement of a recognised qualification, usually a National Vocational Qualification. An evaluation of the pilots by the Adult Learning Inspectorate⁴⁰ found that both learners and employers were enthusiastic, but that there was

sometimes too much emphasis on accrediting existing skills for an NVQ rather than developing new ones'(Leney, T and Ponton, A,2007).

'The creation of the Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) in 2004 was intended to increase the numbers of vocational learners progressing into higher education, by stimulating curriculum development, advice and guidance and progression agreements.'(Obrey, D and Wood, C). They also stated that the proportion of students following a vocational route has declined from 51.3% to 48.6% from 2005/06 to 2009/10.

Therefore it is imperative that the type of education we offer as lifelong learning tutors has a drive for excellence and an injection of fresh enthusiasm for new ideas and excellence of skills wherever learning takes place. We have a serious skills deficit at the moment in the UK, and the Government has set very ambitious targets, that by 2020 we will have achieved and embraced world class skills. Lord Leitch in his recent review states, 'The UK must become a world leader in skills. Skills are the most important lever within our control to create wealth and to reduce social deprivation.'

Lord Leitch also recommends radical change right across the skills spectrum and that there are defined clear ambitions at basic, intermediate and high skill levels. Even though his study focuses on adult skills he does express concern and suggest action also for 14-19s.

His actions include the following:

- 95 per cent of adults to achieve the basic skills of functional literacy and numeracy.
- 90 per cent of adults qualified to at least Level 2, with a commitment to go further and achieve 95 per cent as soon as possible.
- Shift the balance of intermediate skills from Level 2 to Level 3. Hence improving the esteem, quantity and quality of intermediate skills; meaning 1.9 million additional Level 3 attainments over the period and boosting the number of Apprentices to 500,000 a year.
- 40 per cent of adults to be qualified to Level 4 and above, up from 29 per cent in 2005, with a commitment to continue progression.

Lord Leitch believes that a shared responsibility is the way forward. 'Employers, individuals and the Government must increase their action and investment. Employers and individuals should contribute most where they derive the greatest private returns. Government investment must focus on market failures, ensuring a basic platform of skills for all, targeting help where it is needed most.

There should also be a focus on economically valuable skills - 'Skill developments must provide real returns for individuals, employers and society. Wherever possible, skills should be portable to deliver mobility in the labour market for individuals and employers'

The skills system must meet the needs of individuals and employers. Vocational skills must be demand-led rather than centrally planned. Although the future cannot be predicted for a particular skill type, the framework must adapt and respond to future market needs and build on existing structures. Lastly improve performance of current structures through simplification and rationalisation, stronger performance management and clearer remits. Continuity is important. (Leitch)

This will run alongside the framework of excellence that was set up in 2008 and the recognised accreditation of learner's qualifications.

High numbers of staff employed to deliver these vocational skills are now qualified or working towards accreditation at levels 2 to 5 (in accordance with the further education and teachers continuing professional development register (England) regulations 2007). This means opportunities are now given for 'skills for life' teachers to work alongside vocational specialists and agree materials and strategies that support embedded skill development.

This then in principle allows the tutor to:

- Make use of effective college support services
- Ensure learners are clear about those services
- Take into account the needs of literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners,
- They have clear referral and follow up services
- Liaise between course teams and provide ongoing support.
- Provide educational guidance
- Progress goals in ILP's
- Provide help to learners to understand and use the course material
- Provide assurance via lesson plans, observations, evaluations and agreed action plans
- Provide feedback time
- All clear about standards and strategies to meet diverse learner needs
- Engage in ongoing professional development

At present the level 1 NVQ delivered in hairdressing is based on competence that involves the application of knowledge in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which are routine and predictable.

The Level 2 NVQ delivered in hairdressing is based on competence that involves the application of knowledge in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts. Some of these activities are complex or non-routine and there is some individual responsibility or autonomy.

The Level 3 NVQ delivered in hairdressing is based on competence that involves application of knowledge in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide range of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources is often present. (QCA.org)

These levels are very learner focussed, and the idea is that they are accessible, flexible, have a clear role definition. In the chart below courtesy of QCA, you can see the principles of a possible route for learners, based upon the guidelines of the above levels.

Learner supported by learning provider in reflecting on experience; identifying learning; identifying and presenting evidence of learning. Individual/group support

'Levelling' of learning:
Learning is mapped onto SCQF
by learning provider, using
level descriptors, core skills or
NOS to identify a notional
level

Assessment of evidence of
learning for general SCQF credit
rating

Learner is supported in identifying individual
learning pathway/personal learning plan

Undertake
further learning,
if necessary

Plan to undertake further learning
through a formal programme

Plan to undertake further learning and
development in non-formal setting i.e. CLD;
workplace; voluntary sector; private training
provider or through professional body

Application to college, university or other
learning and training provider

Assessment of evidence of
learning for specific credit-
rating for entry to and/or
credit within a programme
of study at college,
university or other learning
and training provider

Progression

Lifelong Learning

By 2020 nearly 20 million additional people will need higher skill levels than at present, ranging from basic skills to degree level;

Young people alone will not solve skill deficit problems in the immediate future, as over 70 per cent of the 2020 workforce has already completed their compulsory education and in effect, the government reforms need to be focused on improving the skills of the existing workforce.

Wolf states that in England today there are around two and half million young people who are aged between 14 and 19. The vast majority of those are currently in full-time or part-time education. To this group of young people long periods of study and formal accreditations are the norm (Wolf,2011). Vocational education is a crucial part of that environment. The Department for Education and Skills, DFES aspires to raise the participation of 17 year olds in education to 90% by 2015. With most 13-14 year olds concentrating their focus on what subjects they are going to take, they are not likely to know what path they want to follow in terms of career goals.

At my college I currently deliver a level 2 qualification and when completed accounts for the equivalent of four GCSE's, add this to the funding arrangements at present, students are steered to gain a qualification which may not even help them into work or higher education. 'For many learners in vocational education and training (VET) and for many employers, the gulf between learning and work is large. Learning is often seen as abstract, classroom based and academic. The world of work is seen as concrete, with bosses and customers, profits and machinery' (Fild, Hoeckel, Kis and Kuczera, 2009).

During the time of this action research project a report was produced by Professor Alison Wolf in which she stated, 'the staple offer for between a quarter and a third of the post-16 cohort is a diet of low-level vocational qualifications, most of which have little to no labour market value. Among 16 to 19 year olds, the review estimates that at least 350,00 get little to no benefit from the post-16 education system.'

In 1851 Prince Albert established the royal commission and policy makers have struggled until the current day to provide young people with a proper technical and practical education that is of a level of skill which other nations boast of. Wolf also stated that, 'Vocational education has been micromanaged from the centre for decades. This is a bad idea, and not just because it is inherently ineffective. It also means that the government takes direct

responsibility for success and failure, and finds it correspondingly impossible to be honest.'(Wolf, 2011)

Quality assurance systems are in constant redesign, re-regulation and re-organisation. This then puts the tutors of vocational skills under huge strain to deliver and cope with an ever changing format and system. The skill level that students leave college with, especially those on the level 2, is very much below the expectation level of what industry requires, however, these qualifications are still part of the major offering to 14-18 year olds. This then can lead to incorrect decisions being made in the choices available to this age group.

With a significant proportion of young people being of moderate or low ability on vocational courses, the curriculum, qualifications system and associated teaching styles are then ill-suited to their ability, which can only lead to a gradual build up of disaffection, which in turn leads to them leaving education at 16. In addition to this family problems, an anti-learning culture and recession further contribute to problems of vocational training. What also adversely impacts is the fact that there is no statutory requirement for hairdressers to be qualified, few go on to complete all components of an advanced apprenticeship which then in turn fuels the perception to industry that the qualification the learner holds is not valued in the labour market.

At present employers have no formal mechanism or opportunity to engage with the teachers and trainers to provide feedback and are on the whole unaware of the up-to-date knowledge of national and regional developments and the new and emerging priorities that occur. Employers have a crucial role in the advancement of lifelong learning, which includes providing the relevant on-the-job training linked to the trainee's off-the-job education and training, but sadly in many cases this just isn't happening.

The assessment from awarding bodies is critical, but this again can be a headache, as there are 15 different bodies and agencies responsible for the funding and content of vocational education and training programs. Add to these issues that there are a shortage of teachers and trainers delivering vocational skills and the ones that do deliver these skills more often than not, do have industrial experience but are not always up to date with the industry they are sending their learners into.

Due to the ever increasing amount of paperwork associated with a learner's placement, employers are reluctant to accommodate learners under 16 on their premises. Other issues include, the length of time required to train a renowned low paying sector and the perception of limited career options mean the calibre of recruits available to the hairdressing industry is poor (Habia 2002).

I feel the gaps at the moment lie in these vocational qualifications being relevant to the world of work that the students will ultimately enter. While the VET institutions often want to improve their trainer's experience, there is a gap with the trainers and tutors being familiar with the fast-changing requirements of modern workplaces. 'While VET institutions often want to improve their trainers' familiarity with the workplace, the concern in industry is more often to equip the supervisors of apprentices with the necessary pedagogical skills. Supervisors play a key role, they pass on practical skills, but also transmit theoretical knowledge, help apprentices get used to the social codes of the workplace, and more broadly, are responsible for the management of apprentices (Gérard *et al.*, 1998).

Smith and Ferrier address some of the gaps in the lifelong learning sector in their report on proceedings of a symposium, they state there needs to be a better balance between the:

- individual learner and the industry needs
- Training package developers and delivers
- Workplace and simulated competence
- Private investment an public training
- Range of qualification outcome levels that now are produced from the system
- Teaching and assessment
- Specific task and broad based education

(Smith C and Ferrier F, 2002)

Therefore it makes sense for the primary relationship to be between employer and training organisation and not between employer and State training organisation, and how we can then further develop in an arena of mutual respect.

By considering the available literature and articles on the issues I feel the solutions could be as follows:

Employers should be directly involved in quality assurance and assessment activities at a local and national level. This could maybe through monthly meetings.

Students that are leaving school at 16 -19 who are entering vocational skills should be given the opportunity to spend a good percentage of their time in work placements, where they can experience and undertake genuine workplace activities

Employers should be given payments for taking on apprentices to entice them into given this age group opportunity of work based placements. With the tutors having a more active role in helping the students get these placements.

The assessment of vocational policies and provision devised by the awarding bodies should involve local employers regularly by regular performance reviews and target setting in standardisation meetings.

Employers should be re-educated in how they operate and should see themselves as educators as well. Therefore it would be a good idea to make it mandatory for every salon owner to have assessor qualifications

All tutors should be trained properly and keep up-to-date relevant industry experience. This could include 'swap days', where tutor and employees changed roles for a day and experience and learn from each other's environments.

A magazine could be created that could be used throughout industry by students, teachers, and owners alike, for sharing resources, interview tips, hot spot topics, problems and solutions shared. This could also give regular briefings about update teaching and curriculum developments.

A forum should be created that goes across all of the industry for sharing views, ideas, teaching techniques, problems and answer issues. The database would then be useful locally and nationally.

More use needs to be made of up and coming technology, mobile phones, TV, internet.

For example e-learning portfolios could be used between tutors and employers while a student is in college and work- based learning to keep track of both environments that the students is working in. The liaison between the tutor and employer could be a vital component of that student's success or failure, for example in the monitoring of practical assessments, that the correct amount are achieved in a given time scale. Assessments could be achieved quicker and problems identified early and resolved.

Allow the learners more control in their learning process, this could include top ten students from each college throughout the country regularly meeting with HABIA and the awarding bodies to discuss what is working for them and what isn't.

Lesser performing colleges would benefit from visiting more successful colleges in different areas; Regularly sharing ideas and systems.

More involvement from parents, get them into the colleges more, maybe through volunteering or parent/teacher forums.

Yearly meetings could be of benefit of vocational specialists, and tutors, to bash out any foreseeable problems and possible ways forward in industry.

Previous students to mentor new comers for the first year, enticing them back to college to achieve more learning.

Regular refocusing on the curriculum delivery and how that affects the needs of each individual could be helpful, in how to involve them more actively in the planning and delivery of learning.

Continued professional development made compulsory for students leaving level 2 for the next 5 years, in order to keep practising.

It would be helpful to Develop and maintain a national bank of learning resources that all can access.

Encouraging part-time workers to spend time in industry, would be beneficial

Create flexible pathways of recruitment to attract more industry specialists.

Make much more use of workplace training and ensure good quality in the delivery.

In conclusion, "Lifelong learning will be essential for everyone as we move into the 21st century and has to be made accessible to all" (OCED, 1996). In 2001 the secretary General stated that "As the world moves increasingly to knowledge based economies and societies, the emphasis given to this goal (i.e., to lifelong learning) is not only the right, but it must be reinforced.... it is not surprising that education emerges everywhere as the major preoccupation of citizens and of governments. It should be our priority of priorities" (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2001, p.7).(Smith and Ferrier, 2002).

At the same time Wolf states, "concentrating government intervention on qualification design leads repeatedly to officials and agencies concentrating on paperwork rather than on direct safeguards of quality and standards in assessment, which cannot be checked by sitting at a desk and reading submissions. This is always a major risk in bureaucracies, made even stronger by the current 'audit' culture which demands a paper trail, and is by no means confined to education. But it has been very strongly evident in the qualifications field, where hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of hours have been (and are) spent poring over the written specifications for qualifications, and scrutinising terminology, and even syntax. This

occurs even though the written specification for a qualification plays only a small part in the quality of the assessment, and in determining the standard of the award, let alone in the quality of teaching and training of candidates. There is a constant complaint that there are 'too many qualifications'; and every reform leads, in practice, to yet more. This is because, on the one hand, there are good reasons to have many vocational qualifications in a large complex labour market; and on the other, because qualifications in schools and colleges reflect, and do not drive, the organisation of provision. Get that right and the number of qualifications will take care of itself. All young people should receive a high quality core education which equips them to progress, whether immediately or later, to a very wide range of further study, training and employment. As a society, we are committed to equality of opportunity for all, and families, as we have seen, have very high aspirations for their children. The period from 14-19 should be one when those remain alive, and not, as is so often the case at present, a time when options close and aspirations shrink. *We have no business, as a society, placing 16 year olds, let alone 14 year olds, in tracks which they cannot leave.* It is also critical that institutions – whether highly specialised or general in their vocational orientation – maintain close links with local employers. Indeed our major objective should be to recreate and strengthen genuine links between vocational education and the labour market; and especially, in the case of young people, the local labour market. Employers are the only really reliable source of quality assurance in vocational areas, and, in spite of lip service, have been progressively frozen out of the way vocational education operates.” (Wolf. 2011).

In my view it is imperative that as a tutor I try and get this balance right, my hope through this action research project is to highlight where I can achieve this through:

- ensuring I put systems into place that help me to effectively liaise between employers and the FE environment.
- ensuring the experience the students encounter is not only balanced, fair and positive but enjoyable and actually equips them properly for the industry they are to enter.

Chapter 3 Methodology

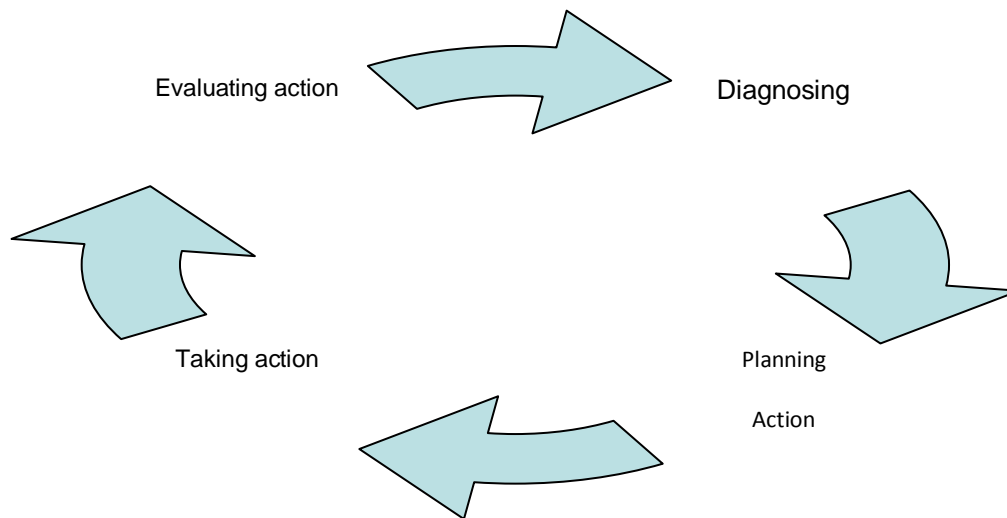
Research is a process for collecting, analyzing and interpreting information in order to answer proposed questions; Action research steers the focus on knowledge in action. But to qualify as research, the process must have certain characteristics: it must, as far as possible, be controlled, rigorous, systematic, valid and verifiable, empirical and critical.

Action research began in the 1940's. Kurt Lewin is commonly seen as the originator of this concept. Whilst working at the University of Iowa, Lewin set out to show there were alternatives to a publication written by Frederick Taylor, entitled *The Principles of Scientific Management*; In which Taylor's idea was of a scientific method to systematise and standardise industry. Taylor argued that a hard working employee should be better paid and that they would be happier to work under harsh conditions. Attempts were then made to take his idea of industrial efficiency into schools. The US Office of Education, under their guidance, allowed a variety of schools to be surveyed in their own work. Objective tests were developed and this was used to determine the quality of their teaching. On the other hand Lewin 'carried out tests in factories and neighbourhood settings in order to show that there were: "greater gains in productivity and in law and order through democratic participation rather than autocratic coercion." [Adelman, 1993] 'Lewin's notion was that by empowering ordinary people in local communities, it would help them to do what they wanted to; Rather than Taylors theory of systematise and standardise. Hence Lewin was accredited for creating the action research concept.

'These programmes were intended to raise the life chances, achievement and expectations of the poor, otherwise called the 'disadvantaged'." [Adelman,op.cit.] By the early 1970s, Action Research as an approach had been widely incorporated into managerial approaches in the US, thereby losing its character. At this time the Ford Teaching Project brought together John Elliott, Barry MacDonald, Clem Adelman and Rob Walker [1971]. Elliott maintained that while excellent teaching materials were being created there had been little corresponding change in teaching practice. In particular "There was an alarming gap between the aspirations of education policy makers, who decided on expenditure for curriculum development, and the implementation of programmes of change in classrooms." [Adelman op. cit.]. The intention was to show that teachers could change the curriculum by working together. The Ford T Project, as it became known, worked with forty teachers and demonstrated that teachers were able to research and improve their own practice. The idea has since spread to many parts of the world and the Classroom Action Research Network [CARN], based at UEA, is now an international organisation with members from a range of professions such as the health service and the police, in addition to teachers. There is now

too, the new periodical *The Educational Action Researcher* in which the above paper by Adelman appeared. The periodical has an internationally based editorial board and publishes refereed papers. There is also a magazine called *the Action Researcher* which was recently launched with Jean McNiff as editor. The magazine provides publication opportunities for anyone who carries out AR, not just academics (McBride, R and Schostak J,).

Lewin described action research as a cycle, which therefore repeats itself throughout the action research project. Below is a diagram to explain this in more detail:



According to Winter (1989) the following principles apply:

- Reflexive critique
- Dialectical critique
- Collaborative Resource
- Risk
- Plural Structure

Action research is different from other kinds of research in the following ways:

- It focuses on learning

- It embodies good professional practice, and goes beyond
- It can lead to personnel and social improvement
- It is responsive to social situations
- It demands high order questions
- It is intentionally political
- It focuses on change, and the self is the focus of change
- It steers the practitioner to accept responsibility for their own actions
- It emphasizes the values base of practice.

These principles will help me in my own action research and act as a reflective process of progressive problem solving in the question I pose and help me to improve the way I address issues and solve problems.

I have been using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. My data collection has developed in the following ways:

Qualitative research methods

- Interviews

I have undertaken interviews face to face with my candidates and the information gathered will be captured through note taking and audio recording. A copy of the questionnaire is seen in Appendix I.

The interview has been structured in order to gain an understanding of the variety of feelings and ideas salon managers have and the perceptions they hold of students coming out of the learning environment and going into work.

I have planned to try and interview at least 10 different salon owners for this data, who had initially been approached at random via email. The qualitative approach taken has its advantages in being able to provide depth and detail rather than just analysing ranks and counts. It also creates openness by encouraging people to expand on their responses, which could then open up further topic areas not initially considered. The use of qualitative responses means that no pre-judgement is being made and honest/real responses are captured.

If used alongside quantitative data collection, it can explain why a particular response was given. The disadvantages I perceived of conducting interviews is that essentially the small

number of respondee's, with only 10 being interviewed. The collection of qualitative data is generally more time consuming than quantitative data collection and therefore it is generally necessary to include a smaller sample size. Obviously with a smaller sample size drawing generalised trends/conclusions of the whole population based on them does not provide a truly representative view. It is also difficult to make systematic comparisons: for example, if people give me widely differing responses that are highly subjective. Lastly it is dependent on skills of me as the researcher particularly in this case of conducting interviews, focus groups and observation.

My quantitative research will mainly be from::

- Questionnaires

Again I have chosen a mix of open and closed questions, with some multiple choice answers. This type of research has its advantages as it allow for a broader study, involving a greater number of subjects, and enhancing the generalisation of my results. It can allow for greater objectivity and accuracy of results. Generally, quantitative methods are designed to provide summaries of data that support general procedures to ensure validity and reliability. By using certain standards means that the research I deliver can be replicated, and then analysed and compared with similar studies. This allows me to summarize vast sources of information and facilitate comparisons across categories and over a period of time.

I see the disadvantages of this being that I collect a much narrower and sometimes superficial dataset. The results could be limited as they provide numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative and generally provide less elaborate accounts of human perception. The research is often carried out in an unnatural, artificial environment meaning a level of control can be applied to the exercise. The development of my standard questions could lead to 'structural' bias and false representation, where the data actually reflects my views instead of the participating subject.

With my questionnaires, I am aiming for at least 30 replies. I have discussed and talked with the students beforehand and they are more than happy to complete this data, the questionnaire being used is shown in Appendix II.

I will also use

- Existing available information

I have researched and read a large amount of data that has already been collected by others, although it may not necessarily have been analysed or published.

- Observing

I have observed in open and concealed formats. In open observing I have shadowed colleagues in 3 different colleges. I have also achieved concealed observations in a salon environment, working as an employee.

These have both served different purposes and have given me additional information to the interviews and questionnaires

- Focus group discussions

I have facilitated group discussions with two groups of 8 and 12 informants

I have carefully planned my data collection process and have pre-tested my data collection tools to minimise the risk of bias.

My collective research has been forming over the last two years. In the first year I have observed and used discussions to form my action research and the second year has been the above plus interview, questionnaires and discussions groups.

Questionnaire for College Students

As part of an action research project, would you mind filling in the below:

How old are you?

How long have you been attending college?

What made you choose this course?

What do you enjoy about the course?

What don't you enjoy about the course?

How would you rate the teaching on this course?

(5 = Excellent, 4= Very Good, 3 = Good, 2 = Average 1 = Poor)

Why?

How well do you feel this course has helped prepare you for the following:

- a) **Getting a job in a salon?**
- b) **Working with others in a salon?**

5 = Exceeded all my expectations and feel very confident

4 = Very Well, pretty confident

3 = Well, slightly more confident than when I started

2 = OK, not much more confident than when I first started

1 = Not particularly well, do not feel confident

How difficult was the theory part of the course?

5 = Extremely Difficult, 4 = Difficult, 3 = Average, 2 = Straightforward, 1 = Very Easy

What improvements would you like to see on the theory side?

What other things would you have liked to do on this course?

What ways have you found most effective in learning, eg power point, handouts, hands on tasks?

Would you attend this college again next year?

Would you recommend this:

- a) Course to your friends?
- b) College to your friends

What are you going to do when you leave this college?

Questionnaire for Employers

I am currently conducting a piece of action research related to the training of hairdressing as a vocational skill and profitable career to pursue. Your views and opinions on this subject are valuable and I would be grateful if you could spend a few minutes completing the questionnaire below.

Many Thanks

Karen Hartless

Questionnaire

How long have you owned/managed the salon you are currently in?

How many staff do you currently employ in the salon?

How many of these are trainees with less than 12 months experience in hairdressing?

On average how many trainees do you tend to take on a year?

What age range are they generally?

Is there any particular reason for this?

When employing trainees do you look for the individual to hold a specific qualification in hairdressing and if so what?

How many new trainees/year would have: Level 1?

Level 2?

What are your reasons for choosing that particular level?

In your experience, how would you rate the trainee's skills in your salon immediately after completing full time hairdressing study?

5= Exceeded all my expectations and feel very confident with them on the shop floor

4= Very Good, Limited guidance required

3= Good, Guidance needed for the first few months

2= Satisfactory, needs lots of guidance and help in every area

1= Poor, Great deal of support and guidance required, I would not feel confident leaving them alone on shop floor for anytime

How would you rate the understanding and theoretical knowledge of hairdressing, gained during their time studying?

5= Exceeded my expectations, deep and thorough understanding of the theory behind hairdressing

4= Very Good, fairly comprehensive understanding of the theory behind hairdressing

3= Good, basic understanding

2= Acceptable, requires some support and guidance in understanding the theory behind hairdressing

1= Poor, very limited understanding of the theory and concepts behind hairdressing

In your experience, what do you look for when employing a trainee directly after completing a hairdressing qualification?

What of the above is often lacking in a trainee?

What frustrates you as an industry employee, when taking on college students?

Are you aware of the current structure of hairdressing qualifications according to government standards? (Explain, briefly)

Where do you feel there are gaps, if any, for a career in hairdressing based on the current learning system?

Do you feel there should be more of a relationship between salon owners and colleges?

Yes/No

If yes, how do you see this taking place?

If no, why not?

Chapter 4 Results

Student Questionnaires

Respondees	1	2	3	4	5	6	Summary of Results		
age (years)	46	20	25	23	33	35	Average = 30		
What qualification did you leave college with?	2+3	2	2	2+3	2	2	2 = 67%	3 = 33%	
Did you attend full time college or placement from a salon?	both	placement	college	full time	full time	placement	full time = 50%	placement = 33%	both = 17%
What made you consider a hairdressing course in the first instance?	interest	school	wanted a creative job	always wanted to do it	always wanted to do it	work experience			
In your view did your chosen hairdressing course equip you for salon life?	yes 3 no 2	no	yes	yes/no	yes	yes	yes = 60%	no = 30%	don't know = 10%
Why?	2 too basic	too basic		not enough cuts covered		salon owner was tutor as well			
Did the college you attended have sufficient equipment for your course? (please circle)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes = 100%		
Is there anything you would've have changed about your college course?	no	no	yes, more up to date techniques	no	more concentration from teachers	more theory. Extra tutor	yes = 50%	no = 50%	
Has your experience of college inspired you to continue in education studying further in hairdressing or otherwise?	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes = 50%	no = 50%	
Would you consider returning to a FE college for further courses, or would you rather do private training, and why?	college	college	private training	both	private	private	college = 33%	private = 67%	both = 17%
How would you rate your skill and knowledge when leaving college?	3	3	3	4	3	3	Average = 3.2		
How would you rate your skill and knowledge now?	3	3	5	5	5	4	Average = 4.2		no
Do you feel your college lecturers kept relevant to the industry?	yes	some	yes/no	no	no	yes	yes = 33%	no = 33%	some= 33%

Which aspects of your vocational learning do you now value in retrospect?	methodical approach	none	science	theory	theory	qualifications . Sound knowledge			
What do you think the barriers were if any in your vocational training?	not enough practical	none	teachers having favouritism	theory	none	not enough one to one			
Did you feel you were given enough information about future pathways and career decisions to make the appropriate choices?	yes	none	yes	yes	yes	no	yes = 67%	no = 33%	
If no, what information would you have liked to have been given?						what levels I could achieve			
What advice if any would you give to a fulltime student now attending college on a hairdressing course?	Get salon experience and learn as much as you can	get on a apprenticeship and leave college	work hard	throw yourself in completely	get salon experience	do work-based training			
Any general comments about your college experience:	very good			very good	enjoyed it	one to one more. Not enough competition or shows			
What do you feel the gaps are if any between college and your fist salon job	level 2 is a massive gap between college and what industry expect.	more practical experience in salon. Not enough hands on at college	you don't feel prepared. Overwhelmed	lack of experience	college over compensate and believe you know everything	not enough knowledge given			

Responsees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
How old are you?	19	14	15	14	14	15	17	16	16	16	15	15	14	
How long have you been attending college?	104	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	33	33	33	
What made you choose this course?	interested in hair and beauty	interested in styling hair	school	school	school	school	always wanted to do it	enjoy doing hair	like hair	like hair	like hair	school	wanted to do hairdressing	want to hairdres
What do you enjoy about the course?	teaching style	learning new stuff and practical	everything	practical tasks	practical	nothing	practical	practical	practical	learning to do different things	practical	everything	practical	practical
What don't you enjoy about the course?		theory	nothing	nothing	theory	nothing	theory	nothing	theory	theory	theory	not allowed to cut	pc work/writing	theory
How would you rate the teaching on this course?	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	3	4	4	4	3	
Why?		they help me allot and I learn new skills	good teachers	very good teachers	they help a lot	she gets to the point	get lot of help and learn a lot	learn a lot and get a lot out of it	they know what they are doing	they make it enjoyable	they make it fun	have learnt a lot	don't know	enjoy learning

How well do you feel this course has helped prepare you for the following:															
a) Getting a job in a salon?	5	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	4	4	1	4	4	2	
b) Working with others in a salon?	5	5	3	4	5	3	4	4	4	4	1	5	4	2	
How difficult was the theory part of the course?	1	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	
What improvements would you like to see on the theory side?	access to learndirect, log books and more resource books	more info	longer time for theory	longer time for theory	learn more info	don't know		nothing	more work	less writing	none	more time	nothing	none	
What other things would you have liked to do on this course?	beauty	plaiting		highlights	more styling	colouring	barbering			animals	colouring and cutting	cutting and colouring and makeup	cut men's hair	cutting and colouring	cutting

What ways have you found most effective in learning, eg power point, handouts, hands on tasks?	hands on	powerpoints	hands on	hands on tasks	powerpoint	powerpoint				hands on	handouts and powerpoint	powerpoint	handouts	handouts and powerpoint
Would you attend this college again next year?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	think so	yes	yes
Would you recommend this:														
a) Course to your friends?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
b) College to your friends	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
What are you going to do when you leave this college?	no idea	going on to study hair and beauty and get info on being a lawyer	get a job in hairdressing	get a job in hairdressing	get a job hairdressing	performing arts	not sure	full time job	get a job	get a job, go back to college later on	get a job in hairdressing	don't know	become a hairdresser	get into hairdressing

Responsees	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
How old are you?	15	14	15	15	15	15	15	14	16	40	15	16	16	14
How long have you been attending college?	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	32	33	7	7	7	7
What made you choose this course?	wanted to do hair and beauty		want to do hairdressing	want to do hairdressing	want to do hairdressing	want to do hair and make up	like hair	likes hairdressing	school	retrainin g	like hair	thought it would be fun	like hair and beauty	
What do you enjoy about the course?	everything	practical	practical	practical	learning different techniques	practical and paperwork	practical and theory	hands on	practical	learning new techniques	everything	learn different sections of things	its interesting	
What don't you enjoy about the course?	don't know	writing/theory	theory	theory	theory	not taught on real people and not taught cutting	nothing	theory	theory	not enough funds	writing	writing	nothing	
How would you rate the teaching on this course?	4.00	4	4	3.00	3.00	2	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5

Why?		give us real clients	real clients	have a good time	explains well and helps us	not taught correctly just have to get on with it		helps me if I get stuck		makes class enjoyable	helps us	understanding	like way she teaches	
How well do you feel this course has helped prepare you for the following:														
a) Getting a job in a salon?	4	4	4	3	4	3	5	5	4	3		4	4	5
b) Working with others in a salon?	2	4	4	3	4	2	5	5	5	3		4	4	5
How difficult was the theory part of the course?	1	4	4	4	3	2	2	4	4	4	2	2	2	4
What improvements would you like to see on the theory side?	none	not so much	not so much or more time	not so much	more teamwork	more creative leaflets and more themed work	more fun		more time	more demos			nothing	easier

What other things would you have liked to do on this course?	cutting and bleaching	beauty	beauty	beauty	cutting and barbering	make up	cutting and beauty	cutting		more clients			nothing	
What ways have you found most effective in learning, eg power point, handouts, hands on tasks?	powerpoint	powerpoints	powerpoint	powerpoint	powerpoint	hands on and independent researching	powerpoint	all of them	powerpoints	all ways			powerpoint	
Would you attend this college again next year?	yes	maybe	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	no	yes	yes		yes	don't know
Would you recommend this:														
a) Course to your friends?	yes	yes	no	maybe	yes	maybe	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
b) College to your friends	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	maybe	yes	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
What are you going to do when you leave this college?	full time job	don't know	hair or beauty	hairdresser	job in hairdressing/barbering	makeup	hairdressing	work in salon	go to Langley college	carry on studying		do another course	apply to come back	

Respondees	Summary of Results			
How old are you?	16 years			
How long have you been attending college?	31.5 weeks			
What made you choose this course?	75% = interest in hairdressing			
What do you enjoy about the course?	79% = enjoyed practical			
What don't you enjoy about the course?	61% didn't like theory			
How would you rate the teaching on this course?	4.1	86% = rated teaching good	14% = good to average	
Why?				
How well do you feel this course has helped prepare you for the following:				
a) Getting a job in a salon?	3.9	50% = very well and pretty confident	14% =exceeded all expectation	18% =more confident than when first started
b) Working with others in a salon?	3.8	39% = very well and pretty	28% = exceeded all	

		confident	expectation	
How difficult was the theory part of the course?	2.9	71% = theory difficult		
What improvements would you like to see on the theory side?				
What other things would you have liked to do on this course?				
What ways have you found most effective in learning, eg power point, handouts, hands on tasks?				
Would you attend this college again next year?	yes = 71%	no = 11%	undecided = 11%	unanswered = 7%
Would you recommend this:				
a) Course to your friends?	yes = 79%	no = 11%	maybe = 7%	unanswered = 3%
b) College to your friends	yes = 82%	no = 11%	maybe = 3.5%	unanswered = 3.5%
What are you going to do when you leave this college?		43% = want to stay in hairdressing		

Employer Questionnaires

	Responsees										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
How long have you owned/managed the salon you are currently in?	8	5	20	6	7	20	24	16	15	12	
How many staff do you currently employ in the salon?	70	25	10	5	5	100	3	2	15	16	
How many of these are trainees with less than 12 months experience in hairdressing?	15	0	2	1	1	3	0	0	3	2	
On average how many trainees do you tend to take on a year?	15	3.5	2	2	1.5	7	1	1	6	2	
What age range are they generally?	16	16	16-19	16	17.5	16	16	16	18.5	18	
Is there any particular reason for this?	lower pay,more trainable	lower wages. Start off with Saturday girls and they work their way up	most applicants are this age range and funding more generous than for 19+	no bad habits, mouldable	fulltime college doesn't work	lower wage and more mouldable	mouldable	lower wage mouldable	more right person for job	lower wages	costs entusiasm
When employing trainees do you look for the individual to hold a specific qualification in hairdressing and if so what?	no	No	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes
How many new trainees/year would have - Level 1	All, do own	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	

	training										
How many new trainees/year would have - Level 2	none	3.5	0	1	1.5	4	1	7	6	0	
What are your reasons for choosing that particular level?	basic start , dont employ students on FT jobs	all round experience	they come from school with that qualification	we have a grading system of prices		have some knowledge	we automatically do level 1 as Saturday staff	bit more all round knowledge, show willing by sticking to a course	all round knowledge	mouldable	
In your experience, how would you rate the trainee's skills in your salon immediately after completing full time hairdressing study?	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	
How would you rate the understanding and theoretical knowledge of hairdressing, gained during their time studying?	1	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	
In your experience, what do you look for when employing a trainee directly after completing a hairdressing qualification?	personality more than qualifications	good practical skills, good image, ability to work as a team	good practical skills,	sparkle and passion for hairdressing	motivation attitude	real experience in a salon and professional image	manners image grades	willing to learn good attitude	willing to learn and good attitude	open minded eager to learn	confidence self motivation
What of the above is often lacking in a trainee?	innovation, motivation	practical ability	ability and experience	lack of work ethic	kids pushed into industry	kids pushed into industry from school because they are not educators. Having the burden of teaching key skills at 16+	no practical experience	no communication skills, high expectation but little effort	poor image, not team players	no social skills, over confident in their ability yet no practical use	self motivation

<p>If yes, how do you see this taking place?</p>	<p>college visit salon to get up to date industry experience</p>	<p>I don't but still think there should be some bridge building</p>	<p>tutors have to stop feeling threatened by industry employers and work with them</p>	<p>experience in salons. Less students in classes. Salon owners to do taster sessions.</p>	<p>taster sessions in next level. Salons going into colleges</p>	<p>with difficulty. Colleges need to be more answerable to the standards they allow. Colleges need to get more involved in industry</p>	<p>keep up the relationship between college and salon</p>	<p>log of turning up. Salon owners to go into salons, free session in salons. Learn rapport with customers. Get students working in salons early on</p>	<p>more salon training and engaging with tutors. Work together, standardisation meetings locally and nationally</p>	<p>students to come into salons for more work learning, salon owners to get into colleges, give incentive to salons to take these students on, colleges to get industry training</p>	<p>have studied for block periods in salon from college</p>
<p>If no why not?</p>		<p>like there own system don't want to get involved with college</p>		<p>they offer all this already</p>					<p>;</p>		

	Summary of Results				
	Average				
How long have you owned/managed the salon you are currently in?	15 years				
How many staff do you currently employ in the salon?	23				
How many of these are trainees with less than 12 months experience in hairdressing?	3				
On average how many trainees do you tend to take on a year?	4				
What age range are they generally?	17				
Is there any particular reason for this?					
When employing trainees do you look for the individual to hold a specific qualification in hairdressing and if so what?	yes =9%	no = 91%			
How many new trainees/year would have - Level 1	0				
How many new trainees/year would have - Level 2	3				
What are you reasons for choosing that particular level?					
In your experience, how would you rate the trainee's skills in your salon immediately after completing full time hairdressing study?	2	3	1 = 90%	4 = 10%	
How would you rate the understanding and theoretical knowledge of hairdressing, gained during their time studying?	2	2	1 = 60%	2 = 30%	3 = 10%
In your experience, what do you look for when employing a trainee directly after completing a hairdressing qualification?					
What of the above is often lacking in a trainee?					

What frustrates you as an industry employee, when taking on college students?					
Are you aware of the current structure of hairdressing qualifications according to government standards?	yes = 55%	no = 36%	some = 9%		
Where do you feel there are gaps, if any, for a career in hairdressing based on the current learning system?					
Do you feel there should be more of a relationship between salon owners and colleges?	yes = 91%	no = 9%			
If yes, how do you see this taking place?					
If no why not?					

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusions

Ethical issues

I have endeavoured throughout this project to keep and maintain my credibility as an effective driver of change and as an astute political player. I have been very aware of the need to build trust with the people of differing views and values than mine.

Some of the people involved in this project have been my peer group and some indeed friends; this has had to be handled with sensitivity and anonymity. I have organised my ethical questions around, planning, action and reflection and have gone through the processes of consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

I have constantly asked myself which, and how people will be affected by my research so took a long look at the possible consequences of this project. I have negotiated where possible with authorities and participants for permissions and have said before each talk, interview or questionnaire that the participant is guaranteed confidentiality of their information, identity and data. I have also stated that there is no pressure for them to participate if they don't want to.

I feel this research project has allowed me to challenge the status quo and see how I and my organisation can do things differently. It has highlighted the areas of the educational system that I don't have the power to change but in the same breath has given me insight into a whole new way of looking at things and how I can progress forward in that.

I started thinking about this question two years ago when I started my teaching as for years I have felt that industry and college were worlds apart. I have constantly been frustrated by the perceived level of skill coming out of college into industry.

As one interviewee said, you are approaching the holy grail of subjects, in tackling this question.

I am surprised at how many people in industry are very negative about college training but in the same breath didn't want to partake in my research.

Data collection and chosen methods of analysis

Whilst there are a number of methods of capturing and analysing data, for the purposes of this piece of action research the following methods were selected to be the most appropriate:

Questionnaires

Using an anonymous approach, this allowed me to find out information that could not easily be ascertained otherwise and helped introduce my ideas to a specific audience and gain a true realistic feeling. I also found that by giving out the questionnaires regarding my teaching methods and their effectiveness, not only helped me to gauge a student's engagement in the course but, also evaluate myself in 'living up to' my learners expectations as a tutor. The data gathered following questionnaires was predominantly of a quantitative nature which was then numerically analysed.

The questionnaires were mainly completed by the current student cohort.

Interviews

Interviews are also a great way of capturing data; the face to face interaction allowed me to uncover and explore answers in greater depth. The majority of the data captured during interviews was of a qualitative nature and analysed by observing trends or similarities in responses.

The interview method of gathered data was mainly used with the salon owner cohort and ex-students currently working in hairdressing.

Observations

This is a good method for checking my own practice and also for observing how I might be influencing others educationally during my lessons. I had a colleague video some of my teaching sessions as well as other colleagues observing on other occasions. The recordings also helped me identify how my students were responding to what I was trying to put across to them. The outputs from these observations were analysed with the support of my critical friend during 1:1 discussions.

Discussion of findings

During the course of this action research three distinct cohorts were identified; current students, ex – college students working within Hairdressing and salon owners.

Current Students:

The age range was considered to be very broad in this cohort; 15 up to 40+ years old. The

The majority of the students interviewed were under 16 years of age and currently attending college through a school incentive scheme. However, 75% of the students stated that they took up the course because of an interest in hairdressing, while others (21.5%) felt school had pushed them into the vocational skill to achieve a certain standard of GCSE's.

When considering the elements of the course 79% of current students enjoyed the practical side of the course but when asked what they didn't like, 61% said the writing and theory involved. Despite this high figure, 86% rated the teaching on the course as 'very good' to 'excellent', with only 14% rating it 'good' to 'average'. When asked why, all of the students came up with the same comments: "They all liked the teaching styles", "the help they received" and "how much they had in fact learnt".

When asked how they felt the course was helping them to prepare for industry:

50% said they felt 'very well' and were 'pretty confident'

14 % said the course was exceeding all their expectations and felt very confident

18% said they felt slightly more confident than when they had first started the course

The results were much higher when asked; how do you feel this has prepared you for working with others:

39% said very well and felt confident

28 % said it had exceeded all their expectations

Due to most of the students coming from school environments where they were lower performers, it was no surprise to find 71% found the theory side of the course average to difficult. What was really interesting was even though the students didn't find the theory side

of the course easy, they didn't want it removing, and stated more time available would be of great help.

They all wanted to do more practical skills on the course, and when asked, what else would they like to learn the majority stated cutting and beauty. A significant majority (71%) said they would attend college again for further courses, with 82% wanting to return to the same college, in addition 78.6% said they would recommend this course to their friends.

We talked about what they feel the future holds for them and 43% said they wanted to stay in hairdressing at this stage, either in employment or on another related course at college.

Analysis of ex-students currently working in salons

This group had left college and moved onto full/part time employment in the hairdressing industry. I wanted to explore what their feelings are having attending college and now currently employed in the industry.

I interviewed hairdressers from the age of 22 to 46, with an average age of 30 years old. In terms of how qualified these individuals were, 67% left college with a Level 2 and 33% gained level 2 and 3.

Half of the people interviewed attended full time college with 17% attending both college and work placement, the rest solely work placement. Again the majority (66%) went into hairdressing through an interest in the subject, the rest through school incentive.

Whilst a large proportion (60%) felt the course actually equipped them for salon life 30% felt it didn't. The reason on the whole (75%) being the course was just too basic for the needs of industry they encountered as they entered the world of work.

Every person interviewed felt there was more than enough equipment and facilities available whilst they were on the course and 50% stated they wouldn't have changed anything about it. A significant majority, 67% would even consider returning to education, but only 30% of these preferred college whilst 50% expressed a preference for private training. When asked why they preferred private, 33% felt college tutors were not up-to-date with the industry and the private sector offered them more 'saleable' qualifications and experience. To quote one respondent, 'nowadays a quick course with Vidal Sassoon moves you up the career ladder a whole faster than trailing through an 18th month NVQ!'

However, when asked what they value in retrospect 90% said the theory and the methodical approach undertaken within the FE system. Even though all interviewed felt they were given enough advice regarding their career pathways, they felt there were still lots of barriers in the current learning system, some being:

- Too many students per tutor
- Theory too hard and not explained properly
- Out of date tutors

All the workers interviewed, enjoyed their college experience, but despite this 80% of them said if they were to give any advice to a student now, it would be to conduct a work based placement, which gets you into the salon environment more quickly. They felt on the whole the gaps between college and industry are massive.

When entering industry after college they very quickly felt overwhelmed and unprepared. As one senior stylist said, 'you come out of college thinking you know everything and very quickly realise you know very little at all'. There is a trend in the responses suggesting that colleges over compensate with students, which in the long term hasn't proved to be very helpful.

In discussions with colleagues from other colleges the common belief is they work in a system that is very rigid and leaves no room for creativity and individual attention. The reason for this is mainly due to the ever changing course content and unnecessary paperwork that the current learning system demands.

They would love to be more current in the industry in order to motivate and bring their students to a higher skill level but with ever increasing class sizes and masses of young adults, time does not seem to allow this luxury to take place. One colleague stated, 'you find yourself whizzing through masses of units and theory at break neck speed, just to get by and fulfil what the schools and college are expecting of you, in the given time'. The whole learning environment can at the best of times be impossible to manage and very challenging.

Another said, 'there is so much pressure to get these students their grades, in order for the schools to use you again and to secure the next lot of government funding.'

Analysis of Salon owners/managers

My next quest was to delve into uncovering what current salon manager/owners views are of the whole learning system and the standards they feel come out of the FE colleges. The salon owners were interviewed were from around the UK who had either owned or managed salons from 5 years to 32 years, with the average being 15 years. On the whole most of those approached were very courteous, but I was amazed at how many refused to take part in my research and were very single minded.

The number of employee's in the salons represented ranged from 2 to 100, with the average being 23.

Despite recession, from the salon managers interviewed an average 4 trainees with any experience are still being taken on yearly in this country but some of the larger salons took on up to 15, the ages of these ranged from age 16 to 19 years. The number of trainees taken on with under 12 months experience ranged from 0 to 15, the average being 3.

The reason for taking on 16-19 year olds was mainly in consideration of lower wages for this age group and the trainee's being more mouldable at this age. Overwhelming 91% of employees are looking for the trainee to hold no qualifications and want them to work towards a level 2 when starting employment with them. The salon owners also felt prior knowledge could sometimes be a bad thing and therefore caused hindrance; meaning that the students could feel they know everything already, when clearly they don't.

When asked to rate the trainees salon skills immediately after completing full time hairdressing study, a massive 90% felt their skills were poor, with 60% rating their theory knowledge as poor. An overwhelming amount of employers almost discounted their prior knowledge from a level 2 qualification and all felt once they had employed their trainees they would just start the training process all over again.

When looking for attributes when employing trainees they all said similar things:

- Good attitude
- Manners
- Good communication skills
- Good image

- Salon experience
- Willing to learn
- Ability to work as a team

Interestingly not many of those interviewed considered qualifications gained at school to be an important selection criteria as a trainee.

They all felt the same in the things they felt were lacking in students coming to them for employment:

- Very little self motivation
- No practical experience
- No social skills
- Their expectations are very high, but they seem to have no work ethic
- No Innovation

Their biggest frustrations when taking on students from fulltime education varied slightly, but a common theme ran through:

- Lack of ability, no clue of how industry works
- misunderstanding of industry
- manner, attitude and bored easily
- Leaving apprentices halfway through. No drive, no professionalism
- Molly coddled at college
- Having to keep a constant eye on them

I also decided it would be interesting to find out how much the industry knew about the current government structures of the vocational skills FE colleges offer. Of those interviewed, 55% stated they knew the current structure but when asked to expand, the truth was they knew very little and 33% said no and had their own training facilities and weren't interested in knowing or getting involved in the college learning system. Yet they had very strong views at where they felt the gaps were!

I have listed a few of the many views that kept reoccurring through my interviews with salon owners:

- Current qualifications are not specific to current industry.
- Old fashioned structure in colleges - very out of touch.
- Standards too low at college.
- Too many students to each tutor at college.
- Experience with colleges has been bad.
- No barbering taught.
- System not relevant to industry.
- No basic salon skills.
- Too many mis-sold courses.
- Lecturers not up-to- date.
- No relationship between colleges and industry
- No real hands on with clients.
- Teaching skills bad.
- Colleges take on too many low performers from schools onto vocational courses.
- Students lacking in professionalism, communication and learning. No concept of day to day in industry.
- No people skills.
- No incentives for salons to get involved with colleges.

Nearly all of industry questioned (91%) said they felt there should be more of a relationship between college and industry. We discussed at length how they could see these gaps being addressed and we discovered some interesting answers:

- Colleges need to visit salons, to get up to date industry experience.
- Tutors have to stop feeling threatened by industry employers and work with them.
- Students need to get experience in salons, early on in courses at college.
- Fewer students in classes.

- Offer taster sessions in next level once a student has completed a qualification.
- Salons going into colleges and do taster sessions and talks and generally getting more involved.
- Colleges need to be more answerable to the standards they allow.
- Log of students turning up to college and work placement.
- Give students free session in salons, to learn rapport with customers.
- Industry and colleges are to work together: using standardisation meetings locally and nationally.
- Give incentive to salons to take these students on.
- Have students go for block periods in salons from colleges as part of their course.

Results and conclusions

From these results gathered from the three separate groups of individuals key observations can be made with regards to this piece of action research and more importantly the question of how well equipped/confident do they feel college hairdressing is/has prepared them for a career in the industry.

Summarising the findings from the current students it is plain to see that overall college experience is a good, learning does take place and they like the style of teaching that I as a tutor currently deliver. They are on the whole developing more confidence in working with other people and however, the theory side of the course, which notably has always been an issue in hairdressing, is still an issue, as most students are creative and on the whole not academic.

The overriding responses from the ex-students currently working in hairdressing was interesting in the fact that whilst they valued the structured approach and retrospectively the theory a significant proportion found the experience too basic in relation to what was really needed in industry. As a consequence of this, the advice they would pass on to current students would be to also secure work based placement if they were seriously considering working in the industry.

The outcomes gained from researching salon managers/owners, clearly indicates that they take on school leavers to mould them into their own training schemes and ethos. They have little or no

engagement / involvement in affecting their career choice before this age. The industry, are angry and frustrated by what the current college system has to offer this age group in regard to their learning and potential gaps, with each system seemingly convinced that their way is **THE** best way. At present very few colleges or industry professionals interact and communicate between themselves in order to bridge some of the gaps and differences. Only one salon manager I interviewed was happy with the college learning system and had a good experience of them. She stated that she was very impressed with how much input the college had had with the student she had taken on for work based/college training. They had also in her opinion applied major effort in trying to help the student in placement.

Although all was not grim, all but two of the respondents said they would like to see more involvement from the college leadership and would be prepared to go into colleges to run taster courses and chats etc. All agreed that standardisation meetings and focus groups would be a great way of building bridges between industry and FE colleges.

In an attempt to pull some common themes and conclusions together from these three different groups I would say that there is a straightforward dismissal by salon owners of college students suitability for work, which confirms my initial thoughts at the outset of this piece of action research and from my own observational experience.

The students themselves do not necessarily feel they are being well enough prepared for industry as 'modern' techniques are not being taught but instead 'irrelevant' theory is! This current mindset is in reality exactly what ex-students experienced on entering the industry and again, succinctly put by one respondent; *'you come out of college thinking you know everything and very quickly realise you know very little at all'*.

In terms of addressing the gap existing between what a college 'produces' and what is 'acceptable' to industry is in my opinion some way off. There is some appetite to forge closer links but in reality I don't believe this is great enough to overcome the current status, leaving both to create training resources in isolation. Maybe the new government emphasis and focus on increasing the number of apprenticeships will force the two parties closer together and in so doing create more highly skilled and employable trainee hairdressers.

What have I learnt?

Even though it is very apparent there are massive gaps between industry and FE colleges, I have learnt quite refreshingly both sides want the same thing which is, that a fantastic work ethic, professionalism and high standards.

As mentioned earlier, it seems that on the whole most of the students in FE colleges I have spoken to have a positive experience and don't really see the downfalls until they reach the world of work and can look back in hindsight. Could it be that the negative attitude of the industry then affects their judgement of the whole experience or could it be that actually students are sold short in this country, not realising until they enter the world of employment how poor the standard of learning and the current system is in FE colleges.

For me personally, I have had the privilege to see behind the doors of a very old established college, a modern forward thinking college and a very small, more nurturing college. I feel the current system to an extent does let these students down; we are at worst very out of date and under pressure to achieve results and at best still in hope that change will and in fact has to come.

I have recently attended a network meeting heads of departments, operation directors, advance practitioners, programme managers, lead IV's and e-advisors from 20 different colleges across the South East. The aim of this meeting being to share views, update each other on their current situations and discuss ways forward, and how we can help each other.

With all colleges facing restructuring of departments, and losing staff in huge numbers at the moment it is even more important colleges and tutors within them we become centres of excellence. Interestingly enough a major part of the discussions were around colleges now taking on more apprentices at the same time as running full time courses. Not only is funding available for taking on apprentices but through my research it has become apparent that industry clearly likes the structure of apprentices in their workplaces. Through this scheme, the relationships we will have to form with the salons that will automatically gives us, as tutors, a way into industry.

A speaker at the network meeting, Jackie Page stated that over 80% of people would prefer to buy from a company that employs apprentices and 81% who employ apprentices agree they make their workplace more productive.' I would like to take these ideas regarding workplace apprenticeships back to my department head and discuss possible ways this may help our establishment move forward.

I would also like to use the relationships with local employers gained through this action research project to start and engage in a successful working partnership. I would like to get more involved in setting up focus groups with my colleagues and local businesses to start this process going forward. I believe from this research that employer engagement is the key to successful partnerships for the future and apprenticeships could be the making of these relationships going forward.

This could easily be run throughout the times at college when the fulltime students are on half term breaks. I feel utilising the college salon during half term would be a great benefit not just to our

income but again as a way forward with employers. It would bridge the gap between FE colleges and industry, where they could still grow their own talent but with the colleges' involvement.

Just by working in a salon as a stylist throughout this process, I have witnessed firsthand how difficult the trainees find the whole process of leaving college and joining industry.

Where I can make a difference?

I feel my approach to students can change, and my attitude to how I teach and create a better system in my own classrooms, will greatly improve students' chances and employability in the industry.

The theory aspect of the course was one of the areas that students felt they could have improvement in and I believe improvements in this area can come by greater use of technology. I am going to tap into the students who have smart phones as more of a resource and potentially create enhanced handouts and eBooks online via a tablet and Kindle which will make the theory easier and more fun. It will cut down the writing time significantly for the students and provide a fun, interesting way for me to provide them with revision, tasks and learning tools. I will also use this technology to update salon managers with what the students have learnt while at college in the session via mobile phone, to allow the salon managers to consolidate the students' learning during the weeks' work, editing it where they see fit.

I am also planning to create QR codes for the new term to tap into alternative technologies to engage a new stream of students and to be more up-to-date for their generation. This I believe will make practical tasks more fun and engage the new students very quickly. Due to the rate of change of technology and choices available via the web, I can see this creating a pot of resources very quickly that all my colleagues will be able to use and change, but also for industry to input into and have a part of. By making this available in our LRC as well, it doesn't exclude any students that don't have this technology on their phones.

I will introduce the students to Animoto on the computers and use this facility to take pictures of their work to use for evidence. This will enable their portfolio building to be fun and much quicker, in order for us to concentrate more on the areas that industry have highlighted to be lacking in trainees. I will also use this facility for revision, lesson refreshers and as a database for power point slides, that college/industry can add to.

I need to make sure the students learn quickly and put into practice how important it is they work as a team. This could happen with a mix of salon placements that I could organise for them throughout their college course and by having specific job roles while at college in our working salon. At the moment we have a rota for jobs e.g. salon manager, stock control, etc, however, I will now conduct formal interviews for students when they start college for the job roles this will then allow them to

prepare for interviews when they are trying for employment and help them to learn responsibility while at the college in our working salons.

I have also learnt that the importance of image cannot be learnt too soon. We tend to be strict at the bigger colleges and very lax in the smaller ones. I will now expect the same standard throughout, whether I am teaching 6 students or 60. This process I feel will be helped by bringing more professionals from the industry into colleges and am going to organise regular salon workers to come and talk to the students about salon life and skills. I believe this will increase their engagement in the hairdressing industry whilst at the same time conveying a realistic expectation of the real world.

I would also like to introduce taster sessions in my classes in the next few months for my September intake. This would involve inviting students to come in from the local schools for a morning or afternoon and experience the hairdressing environment at college.

This research project has been very interesting and I have journeyed through great prejudice in the learning system and industry, but along the way have also conversed with inspiring and engaging professionals. These individuals have helped me believe that there is hope for the future, in the amalgamation of college and industry.

I believe the project has equipped me with further ideas and systems that will inevitably help me in the future to not only become an excellent tutor, but someone who can make a difference in the environment I work in building relationships with other colleges and industry.

In addition to this I feel more able to produce the calibre of students that not only enjoy learning in their time with us but are ready, professional and employable when they leave. Throughout this journey I have learnt how to engage students more and show them through differentiation that learning can be fun.

This whole process has begun with an idea that in time has developed into practical steps that I can now take to become a more effective tutor, and indeed person. It has helped me to understand what drives my actions and work ethics; I have more clarity on why I do the things I do. I think over time it's possible with the technology changes I have mentioned previously and by changing the way I approach my planning and delivery to include industry more and more.

I would like to put forward further research on practically **how** the FE colleges and industry could successfully move onto to an fruitful relationship in the future recognising each others' strengths resulting in the 'production' of more skilled and able hairdressers.

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