

**Sir Mike Tomlinson's speech at the IfL awards ceremony
28 January 2010**

May I begin by thanking you for inviting me to this celebration of the success of so many teachers and trainers in further education. To all those receiving awards of Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) and Associate Teacher Learning and Skills (ATLS), today I say well done and congratulations.

With a lifetime spent in education, I am only too well aware of a major issue in both society and in particular within some elements of the education service. That is our attitude to, and value placed upon, vocational education. The issue goes back to the mid 19th century and continues to this day. In essence we have many individual freestanding vocational qualifications of high repute. But we do not have clear progression pathways readily understood by students, teacher, parents and some employers. Allied to this, we have allowed a teacher training system to develop that clearly places greater value (including salary) on those in schools teaching so-called academic courses.

Even with this situation, it remains true that governments, employers and economists envisage our future wealth producing activity will be centred on highly skilled individuals who can use knowledge to make things or provide services others wish to buy. The demand for such skills is increasing, not decreasing, and the level required is continually being raised – level 2, now more at levels 3 or 4.

This is not a dismissal of academic provision, more a plea for greater priority and credibility to be given to vocational education and to those who provide such high-quality teaching and training. In recent times, IfL has championed their cause, and with more than a little success. In a number of ways the requirements of FE initial teacher training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD) are more demanding and supportive of improved teaching than those used in the school sector, for example, at least 30 hours of CPD a year and a portfolio of evidence with some centred around specialist knowledge and skills for professional formation leading to QTLS. In schools, no portfolio is required and many teachers do not have access to subject-specific CPD as part of their five INSET days..

I have recently been chairing an inquiry on behalf of the Skills Commission into initial teacher training for vocational education. Our premise was the need for students to be taught by experienced practitioners, well trained and up to date in their specialist area. With a shortage of such people, we can ill afford to have in place systems that preclude their best use across the 14-19 age group in particular. Our report will be issued in late February, but at the heart of it will be recommendations for a unified schools and FE system in which previous experience linked to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) can be equal to a degree and QTS.

This would mean FE qualified teachers are not treated by salary or designation as second class, i.e. one set of conditions and salary scales. We will have to see how the political parties react.

Returning to the here and now, I believe strongly that further education and work-based learning trainers will be the driving force behind any policy designed to up-skill the UK workforce in support of the economy. I also believe that more and more 14-year-olds will opt for the vocational route, and from 2013 they will have to be in education until 17 and from 2015 until 18. The demands on FE and work-based provision are likely to grow yet further. To meet this, high-quality training allied to CPD is vital. IfL has proved its worth in relation to this need. I hope it will continue to build on this work. To you, I repeat my congratulations on your success. I wish you continuing success in your teaching roles.

I hope that the future will see you given more status and recognition and barriers between you and those in schools finally brought down to create a unified profession with the same conditions of service.