

For 'fusion skills', properly understood

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A few weeks ago, Sue Pittock, CEO of the Nottingham and Derby-based organisation Remit Training wrote an article in the on-line publication *FEWeek* in which she said that the requirement for young people on apprenticeships to achieve Functional Skills, especially in maths, was causing many of them to fail and/or drop out. She maintained that this could be dealt with by replacing functional skills with 'fusion skills'. So what, then, are fusion skills?

A US version of fusion skills is described in the article by David Guile in this *PSE* (p21). However, in the UK fusion skills are the items listed in the box below. These 'skills' are the top twelve of a longer list derived from a poll of employers conducted in 2019, seemingly by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta) on behalf of the City of London Corporation. (The overall list was apparently drawn up in 2013 by two writers working for the Basingstoke-based SkillSet organisation.)

The employers polled look to have been drawn mainly from advertising agencies, video games developers and the like. They were asked to rank the skills in terms of what they seek when recruiting staff. Whereas the US idea of fusion cited by David is focused on the possible relations between workers and machines, SkillSet/Nesta/City of London understand it mainly in terms of the inter-relations between small businesses, their employees and sole trader subcontractors in the 'creative' field. One source that implies this is the 2019 'Fusion Factor: White Paper' by Anne Bamford, City of London Corporation Director of Strategic Education and Skills.

Those advocating this version of fusion skills appear unaware that around 1990 the CBI proposed a similar list as desirable components of 'the post-16 core' then under discussion. (They seem equally unaware of the more theoretical but worthwhile discussion about 'competences' - ie combinations of knowledge, skill and understanding - that went on at that time.) There is also not much sign of present-day FE decisionmakers latching on to fusion skills as an idea.

It would arguably be a step forward if awarding bodies start to include in Level 2 and 3 vocational course programmes a requirement for colleges to teach and students to achieve at least some of the 'skills' specified here. They would need to be integrated with vocationally specific course elements via assignments and project work, not in such a way as to constitute a further set of hoops that students must pretend to jump through, but rather via problems posed using a dialogic approach by teachers who understand - and are committed to - valid general education. The informed involvement of vocational course tutors would be crucial to this.

1. Oral communication/presentation skills

2. Collaboration and teamwork

3. Initiative

4. Problem-solving

5. Organisational skills (planning, time management, deadlines, prioritisation, multi-tasking)

6. Adaptability/flexibility

7. Written communication

8. Independent working/autonomy

9. Critical thinking

10. Resilience

11. Creativity

12. Analysis and evaluation skills