

The Evidence-Based Edit

Welcome!

...to the June issue of The Evidence-Based Edit, your essential, concise guide to cutting-edge educational research tailored just for you!



In Research... Applied, we strip back rigid tracking metrics and top-down data to ask what true inclusion looks like in FE. **Featuring Harrogate College Principal Danny Wild**, we debate whether prescriptive teaching frameworks empower classroom creativity or simply codify the life out of pedagogy. Is adaptive expertise purely a discipline of the mind, or does the daily reality of dual-professional teaching prove it is actually a discipline of the heart?

Don't let the research end here - great pedagogy never rests! Join us in September for our next live *Post.Script* forum to tear apart the research and turn theory into practice. Your voice belongs in the debate!



Triumph with Tech!

Our learning spaces are evolving rapidly to meet future industry demands, but the systems around us are struggling to keep up.

The latest [Ufi/AoC report](#) highlights the growing tension between ambitious, tech-driven delivery and rigid assessment frameworks. Why is digital innovation ahead of the curve and how can we get exam bodies to catch up?

Read more on page 3.

New and Ongoing Research



A Strategy of Struggle

Are we accidentally over-protecting our learners?

Discover why well-intentioned scaffolding could quietly wipe out independent thinking, how standard college routines pressure us into lowering the bar, and how to redesign our curriculum to shield the vital, productive struggle learners actually need to thrive.

Read more on page 3.

Research... Applied.

Scaffolds, Not Cages: Cultivating True Adaptive Expertise

How do we bridge the gap between prescriptive secondary school research and Further Education leadership? While [*Phil Stock's 2026 Greenshaw Research*](#) warns that over-standardising frameworks turns pedagogy into a performative, process-led exercise, applying this to an FE campus requires a radical shift. Consultation with **Harrogate College Principal, Danny Wild**, reveals that true inclusion is not driven by complex tracking matrices, but by combining predictable baseline structures with deep relational trust.

To navigate this, we must separate adaptive teaching strategies from true adaptive expertise. Adaptive strategies represent the tactical toolkit: the prepared, visible modifications a teacher uses, such as [*modelling*](#) or [*digital tools for accessibility*](#). Adaptive expertise, however, is the fluid cognitive mindset dictating how and when to deploy those tools. It is the real-time discipline of professional *noticing* where a teacher pivots mid-stream. As Wild notes, an inclusive environment requires that the teacher has *"the skill to actively adapt their delivery within a session"*.

"The constraint creates the creativity and the constraint creates the inclusion." - Danny Wild

FE is a complex landscape of mature young-adult dynamics and dual-professional lecturers transitioning straight from industry. Harrogate reframes Secondary rigidity by viewing structural constraints as drivers for creativity. Wild champions a consistent lesson structure loop: a relational starter, learning intentions, a learning episode, assessment, and a plenary. As Wild explains, *"the constraint creates the creativity and the constraint creates the inclusion"*. Much like this structure provides a reliable framework, a baseline toolkit of adaptive strategies is absolutely necessary to allow the teacher to actively respond. A teacher might notice a need for adaptation, but they cannot meet that need without the concrete strategies to execute the pivot. For dual-professionals, this framework provides clear, reliable reference points as they manage the initial transition from industry to the classroom.

While Secondary research promotes frameworks like Greenshaw's [*Barrier-Action-Outcome*](#) loop, Wild pushes back on this administrative burden. At Harrogate, the primary mechanism for overcoming student barriers is intentional relational investment. Wild argues: *"The biggest way that we overcome the barriers to learning... is about that strengthening of that relationship piece"*. Once established, learners *"build more trust therefore will be more vulnerable and more honest about how they're progressing"*, opening the door to genuine adaptive teaching. This begins by dedicating the first 30 minutes of the week to [*"circle up"*](#) time, a relational approach that recognises titles no longer command automatic respect; respect must be earned by showing professional interest and care.



This focus is backed by hard data: by embedding these routines, Harrogate has seen sustained positive growth in student attendance on last year. Simultaneously, the campus has completely closed its on-program satisfaction gap between SEND and non-SEND learners from five percentage points to zero.

To protect well-being and maintain high expectations without causing burnout, Harrogate operates on a pragmatic "7 out of 10" teaching paradigm. Wild is explicit: *"We can't expect them to deliver 24 hours of teaching that is 10 out of 10 all the time... if we can guarantee that our teachers deliver a 7 out of 10 lesson, every lesson of the week... the impact of that over time will be dramatic"*. By keeping the focus narrowed to core priorities - standardised structure, 'Even Better If' feedback, and precise digital tool deployment - the college can guarantee a uniform baseline expectation for learners and staff that supports the consistency of progress.



Walking the floor gives you the true pulse of a campus.

Furthermore, gathering an authentic understanding of everyday quality means navigating leadership visibility. Wild candidly notes that *"it's now nearly 10 years since I did a week of teaching and... you do get disconnected"*. Beyond time away from active practice, a principal's executive title can inadvertently get in the way of a true coaching culture. To balance this, Wild maintains a genuine pulse on campus by prioritising student rep. meetings, surveys, physically walking the floor, and reflecting on spontaneous, authentic conversations with staff.

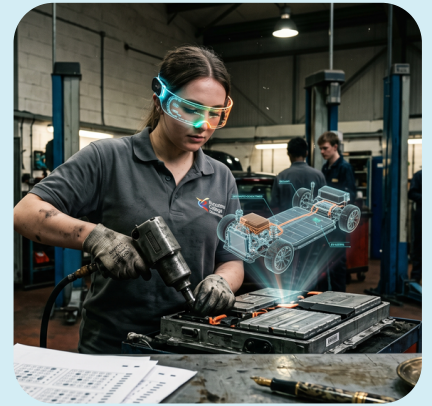
Ultimately, this highlights exactly where Danny Wild's philosophy sits within the wider national discourse. Phil Stock's school-based research warns that institutions have codified the life out of pedagogy, arguing that inclusion is realised only when we liberate a teacher's real-time decision-making. Wild does not disagree with this destination, but his FE reality reframes the journey. While the secondary sector attempts to build adaptive expertise through complex cognitive frameworks, Wild asserts that in FE, the ultimate adaptive framework is human emotion. By prioritising a '7 out of 10' baseline of structural safety, he frees up his workforce to make the most radical instructional adaptation of all: authentic care.

This leaves our sector with a profound, provocative question: If the Secondary model teaches us that adaptive expertise is a discipline of the mind, does the FE reality prove that it is actually a discipline of the heart? Perhaps true educational autonomy is not found in the freedom to abandon the framework, but in having a foundational framework so secure that a teacher can afford to look away from the script and look directly at the human in front of them.



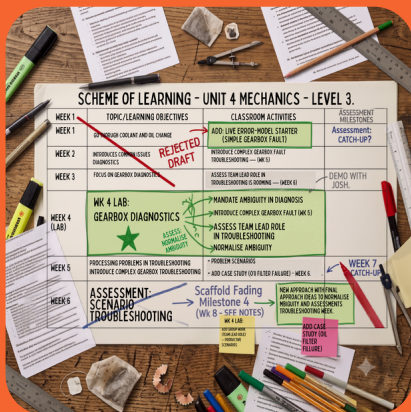
The VocTech Paradox

The *Ufi and AoC strategic partnership report (November 2025)* offers a thrilling baseline look at how Vocational Technology is reshaping our sector. Strikingly, 64% of college staff leverage Artificial Intelligence, moving far beyond traditional management software to automate lesson planning and resource generation. This signals brilliant pedagogical innovation, with mobile polling, interactive slides, and immersive suites actively driving engagement.



However, a critical lens exposes a jarring structural friction: while educators push boundaries, awarding body assessments remain outdated and completely unaligned with modern digital practices. This creates an operational paradox where frontline-delivery software fails to match the real-world tools local employers expect. Consequently, while senior leadership surges ahead with high-level AI strategies, frontline practitioners must balance high-tech innovation with archaic, rigid assessment criteria.

To bridge this gap, the report champions *Jisc* and *DfE*-backed digital charters alongside *AoC-led sector collaboration*. As these advanced tools continue to influence our delivery models, we must critically reflect: *how can we actively influence awarding bodies to modernise, ensuring our cutting-edge digital training is matched by industry-standard assessments rather than outdated criteria?*



A Strategy of Struggle



Anchoring the *Education Endowment Foundation's framework for high-quality teaching* against *Lorna Shires' (2018) curriculum theory review* reveals that the real enemy of strategic course design is learner negotiation. While robust schemes of learning must balance raw facts with expert 'syntactic' thinking, introducing high-ambiguity, open-ended problem-solving can trigger fierce resistance. To avoid failure, anxious learners negotiate complex tasks down into safe, low-risk routines - a capitulation delivery staff often make to preserve pass rates against rigid

vocational metrics, leading to unintentional over-scaffolding that compromises long-term retention and widens the attainment gap for disadvantaged and SEND learners in particular.

To combat this, our updated planning must embed structural strategies that protect productive struggle. We must mandate '*live error-modelling*' where delivery staff deliberately demonstrate how to navigate professional confusion, build un-graded, messy troubleshooting scenarios into lesson starters to normalise ambiguity, and explicitly map '*scaffold fading*' milestones to systematically withdraw scaffolding tools as the learner progresses. This active shielding prevents the deletion of difficulty from our curriculum, forcing learners to actively monitor their own cognition, overcome any learned helplessness, and build true workplace-ready independence.