

Abstracts

Education and Employers Taskforce Research Conference 2010

The point of partnership: understanding employer engagement in education

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Listening to learner voices: a study of vocational aspirations and educational choices among young learners (Heidi Agbenyo)

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Studies show that lack of clarity regarding the steps required to reach specific career outcomes can result in a growing gap between aspiration and achievement. This can ultimately lead to disillusionment with and exit from education and training (Alexander, Entwisle & Bedinger, 1994). It is therefore important that learners develop a realistic understanding of career options and the educational paths available to enter these careers. Vocational educational pathways are valuable routes for many young learners, yet they are often not well signposted or understood.

Instead, there is a widespread assumption that young people need to engage in higher education, rather than vocational education and training, for their future progression into work and prosperity. As a result, messages aimed at young people are often skewed towards promoting HE options rather than VET. The resultant poor perceptions of vocational education can lead young learners to discount this route prematurely and unfairly (Raffe, Brannen, Fairgrieve & Martin, 2001).

While much research conducted from a policy maker perspective explores a range of contributory factors such as poor careers advice and guidance provision (e.g. Wright 2005; Stanton, 2006) and the role of key influencers such as parents and teachers in the decision making process (e.g. Saiti & Mitrosili, 2005), there is a lack of research which explores young learners' perspectives on the barriers to engaging with vocational education and training.

The City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development is undertaking a qualitative survey of young people in three countries (England, South Africa and the Netherlands) which examines these issues by listening directly to young learner voices and putting forward their recommendations on how the issues can be addressed. This paper will present the results of this survey, with the aim of highlighting how young people perceive vocational options, how these options might be better signposted to them, and how different culturally embedded attitudes towards vocational education relate to these perceptions

Methodology

Qualitative survey (mixture of focus groups and one-on-one interviews), focused on young learners in the 14-16 (schools) and 17-20 (colleges) year age ranges.

Each group is at a different stage of progression enabling us to explore key stages at which there are changes in attitudes, experiences and perceptions of VET.

Keywords

Vocational education, careers, guidance

National Qualifications Frameworks: solving the education/labour market ‘mismatch’? (Dr Stephanie Allais)

Dr Stephanie Allais

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National Qualifications Frameworks are an increasingly popular policy internationally. One of their key aims is to bridge the gap between education institutions and labour markets, and provide greater transparency for employers. In many countries the success of qualifications frameworks is premised on the involvement of employers, but at the same time qualifications frameworks are seen as a mechanism to facilitate greater employer involvement in specifying appropriate competencies for educational qualifications. Many countries are turning to this approach, in some instances to improve on previous competency-based vocational education systems, and in others to reform their entire education and training systems.

Although qualifications frameworks are being implemented in many countries, and much is expected of them, there is very little empirical research into them. This study, commissioned by the International Labour Organization, examined the implementation and impact of National Qualifications Frameworks in 16 countries around the world. It is the first study to take a critical comparative look at attempts to implement qualifications frameworks internationally, and examine the results.

The study found very limited positive evidence in favour of national qualifications frameworks. While in many cases this could have been because of the early stage of development of the framework, it also found considerable evidence of many difficulties. Among these, a key one was employer involvement: in a nutshell, in nearly all cases employers did not participate in structures designed for them to lead, despite the desire of policy makers for employer leadership. In other instances, it seemed that emphasis in improving assessment mechanisms could undermine employer organizations with a history of involvement in assessment and certification. Further, the idea of prescribing outcomes or competences to educational institutions met with various problems.

The study suggested that a sectoral focus which did not have to operate within a one-size-fits-all framework, and which emphasized employer-education institution relationships as well as research into areas of future growth may be more effective. It also emphasized the need for building and sustaining strong educational institutions with the capacity for research and responsiveness.

Methodology

Countries were selected to represent Europe, Africa, Asia/Pacific, and the Americas. For the five oldest frameworks, case studies synthesized existing research. For the 11 newer frameworks case studies involved interviews with policy makers, employer and worker representatives, and education institutions, as well as documentary analysis.

Keywords

National qualifications frameworks, outcomes, competencies, education and labour markets.

Making Jobs ‘Thinkable’: engaging with the complexity of young people’s career aspirations (Prof Louise Archer)

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This paper seeks to help increase understanding about the complexity of the processes through which young people come to formulate their aspirations and their ideas about future occupations. In so doing, it argues that there is a potentially important and influential role that might be played by employer engagement with education, not least in terms of helping to make particular areas of work more ‘thinkable’ for young people.

The paper draws across several pieces of funded empirical work, conducted within the field of sociology of education, that the author has been involved with over the past ten years. These include: A study of 118 working class 16-30 year olds and their reasons for not going to university (Archer et al., 2003); a longitudinal study of 89 urban pupils (aged 14-17) and their aspirations and educational dis/engagement (Archer et al 2010); an ESRC funded study of the reasons for the educational success of 80 British Chinese pupils aged 14-16 years (Archer & Francis 2007) and an ongoing ESRC 5 year longitudinal study of the science aspirations of children aged 10-14 years (Archer et al., 2010).

It is argued that ‘race’/ethnicity, social class and gender all play a key role in shaping not only the nature and direction of young people’s aspirations, but also the processes through which these aspirations are formed. The impact of these social axes are highlighted and discussed in relation to three key themes that shape the formation of careers aspirations:

- Knowledge and ‘cultural capital’
- Identity and cultural factors
- Structural factors and ‘horizons of possibility’

For instance, attention is drawn to the ways in which working-class and middle-class families tend to differ in their use of (and their expertise in using) particular types and sources of knowledge when making educational decisions, with differential weightings being given to direct/ interpersonal (‘hot’) knowledge versus formal, ‘official’ (‘cold’) forms (Ball & Vincent 1998). A case is made for understanding the complex workings of identity and cultural factors and the ways in which these can shape what young people see as possible and achievable for ‘people like me’. Illustrations are provided in respect of the use of ‘known’/‘safe’ routes among particular communities, such as the British Chinese and in terms of engagement with STEM across differently classed, gendered and racialised groups of young people. Attention is also given to the importance of both school and home contexts in terms of fostering aspirations both generally and specifically in relation to STEM occupations.

Finally, the paper concludes with some thoughts for how employer engagement with education might help to broaden young people’s participation in a range of careers.

Methodology

As detailed above, the paper draws on four externally funded empirical pieces of research. All are qualitative studies that use a combination of semi-structured interviews and/or discussion groups with the samples outlined above.

Developing young people’s international communication skills through employer engagement in language learning (Michelle Brassell)

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There is an increasing demand from employers for employees with an understanding of other cultures and languages to enable them to access new markets and compete successfully in the global marketplace. The UK's poor record in language learning however, leaves our young people at a disadvantage in comparison to those from other countries.

In light of this, this paper will first of all seek to establish the current thinking on the significance of language and intercultural skills for the UK economy and highlight employer needs for language-related skills. It becomes clear that the UK is facing a widening skills gap when we compare the trends in language learning at all levels of education against the dissatisfaction among employers of school, college and university leavers' language and intercultural skills.

The second half of the paper will examine current practice of employer engagement in languages and the extent to which this is helping to address the skills gap. Over 300 employers from across a range of sectors are currently supporting language learning in schools to help raise awareness of the relevance of learning languages through the Business Language Champions programme. This section will focus on best practice examples and the impact of employer education partnerships on young people.

The final part of the paper will reflect on the challenges and needs for further development to encourage more effective employer engagement in language learning.

Methodology

This paper draws on a number of sources 1) previous quantitative research using econometric models to examine the linkage between language skills, cultural competence and exporting performance (Hagen 2007, & Formen-Peck, 2008) 2) statistical evidence from longitudinal studies (Language Trends, CILT/ALL & Education and Skills surveys (CBI) 3) case studies and qualitative research with employers & EBPs (IEBE/CILT/BITC/EdComs).

Keywords

Languages; intercultural skills; global economy

Widening horizons in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) work experience (Jill Collins and Dr Pat Morton)

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The IEBE's survey (2008) of young people in work experience found that they overwhelmingly value their placements and see them as having a positive impact on their motivation to learn. As the need to attract more young people with science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) qualifications continues to be a major concern (CBI, 2009; DIUS, 2008, DCSF, 2006) the interest in STEM related work experience, as a means to discovering careers in the sector has grown. There remains considerable potential to expand access for young people to stimulating STEM placements that raise aspirations and widen access to STEM careers. While there is clear research evidence to confirm that access to work experience can be gender stereotypical (Hamilton, 2002; Francis et al, 2005)) and /or limited by class, gender and ethnicity (Hatcher and Le Gallais, 2008) there is also evidence to suggest that examples of effective ways of tackling inequality in work experience are still rare (Emmerson et al, 2005). The authors have been involved in work to promote gender equality for a number of years, including the development of a successful work experience scheme directly aimed at challenging gender stereotypes in STEM related employment sectors (Wider Horizons, won an Institute of Careers Guidance Award in 2005). The authors are currently involved in a major government project to make STEM careers more visible and attractive to all young people and as part of this project we are working with partners to develop resources that will promote equality of access to STEM related work experience. The paper will draw on the findings of previous research, the Wider Horizons scheme as well as work with partners in the current project to pose challenges and some solutions to widening participation in STEM work experience for all young people.

Methodology

A literature review of specific and relevant recent equality and diversity research on impact of and limits in STEM subject areas and in work experience, also drawing on the evaluation research of the Wider Horizons award winning work experience scheme. Feeding in the findings and activities from current consultations with a range of work experience stakeholders and six test bed schools undertaken as part of STEM Subject Choice and Careers project.

Keywords

Work experience, STEM, equality and diversity, gender stereotyping

INDUCT - Recruitment, induction process and development of career entrants as an indicator for the quality of educational systems? (Marthe Geiben, Dr. Philipp Grollmann, Dr. Georg Hanf)

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Aim of the study “INDUCT” is to discover the relationship between a country’s VET system and employer’s recruitment and training practice. Four countries (United Kingdom, Spain, Finland and Germany), which were selected in order to capture a wide variety of VET systems, are participating in this feasibility study that aims at the development of an instrument for further use in large-scale transnational surveys capturing a wide range of occupational sectors. For the time being the study concentrates on jobs in the car service sector and in business administration (in the production industry sector) at the intermediate skills level.

In a first step, case studies were held in each sector in each of the four countries. Main focus in these studies were the recruitment strategy of enterprises, an estimated gap between needed and existing competences of new employees, especially of job entrants and the satisfaction of employers with the national / local VET system.

As a result of the case studies, we can see inter alia the following aspects:

Concerning entrance pathways into the considered employment sectors there are great differences in the different countries.

- A greater homogeneity can be seen in car service than in business administration as regards to recruitment process, job profiles and work process.
- In all of the countries and in both employment sectors, transversal skills and competences (i.e. methodological, personnel, social skills and competences) are regarded as important as professional skills and competences.
- Concerning the satisfaction with the VET system, we found that, in general, employers are rather satisfied with the existing VET-system and don’t have many problems to fill vacant positions.

Those results led to the creation of a standardized questionnaire that will be used in the four countries in July and August 2010. First results should be available by the end of September or beginning of October 2010.

Methodology

Information will be gathered through surveying literature and secondary data, expert reports from the participating countries and case studies, which will include up to 3 companies per sector per country. The information gathered will then be used to develop a survey design, which will be pre-tested in the four countries.

Keywords

recruitment, induction process, quality of the educational system, job entrants

Employer Engagement in the FE and Skills Sector - A Strategic Review (Sarah Gracey, Raj Patel)

Research by LSN Centre for Innovation in Learning with support from ALP, 157 Group and AoC

This research report details the findings of LSN research undertaken between March and June 2010 to conduct a strategic review examining how support for employer engagement in the further education and skills sector can be strengthened and improved.

The methodology consisted of a web-based survey sent to relevant leads and senior management at colleges and training providers across the country, followed by a focus group to explore some themes and examine issues in greater depth. The scope of the survey was greatly informed by discussions with Alp, 157 Group and AoC.

We wished to identify real needs and challenges from delivery-end professionals, which would then feed directly into the recommendations for an improvement strategy and even the design of support programmes developed by those who had successfully won bids to develop the LSIS employer engagement support programmes. The aim was to help ensure that the sector can drive forward its own development, which becomes ever more crucial in these times of financial stringency as government agency budgets are cut and providers themselves increasingly lead on developing improvement, quality assurance and support programmes. The report thus acts as a strategic document of importance both to policy-makers and practitioners in this field, detailing practical steps to inform the development of sector-led support programmes in improving employer engagement services.

The project aimed to analyse in detail the factors that would shape and nurture support programmes on the ground, and affect provider's ability to respond to a changing financial and economic context. Themes which emerged through the survey and focus group and are explored in detail include:

- What providers experience as the barriers and challenges to accessing support around employer engagement and to improving their service offer
- How providers can be helped to move to full-cost recovery models and respond to changes around Train to Gain and Apprenticeship programmes
- Opportunities for growth in new occupational sector areas and the tensions between specialisation and breadth of provision
- Providing services that add value to employers, including whole business planning, quality assurance and demonstrating impact and added value to the business
- Developing holistic packages of support and the opportunities for collaboration with other providers
- How providers want support and development needs delivered, whether through workshops, face to face, web-based support or through secondments

The research findings will add real value and understanding to the area of employer engagement as the sector develops and responds in a time of great change. We would be delighted to outline these findings at the conference and share discussion with colleagues.

Nurturing engineering talent in the inner city (Dr Annie Haight)

Dr Annie Haight

Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University

This paper analyses data from a 2008-9 study into issues of recognising and nurturing young people's talents in engineering in a disadvantaged borough of London. The research, commissioned by the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust, investigated the attitudes of learners and teachers from secondary to HE phases, in:

- the pilot year of the Specialist Diploma in Engineering
- vocational engineering courses (Levels 1 to 3) in an FE college
- a university Access course in engineering.

Data was collected from a baseline, mixed-ability sample of secondary and FE students regarding learning preferences, motivation, sources of support and aspirations. This was supplemented by and compared with case study interviews with secondary, FE and HE students nominated by their teachers for particular talent in engineering.

Case study interviews were also conducted with secondary, FE and HE teachers to identify their views on:

- the defining characteristics of potential and talent in engineering learners
- appropriate strategies for teaching such learners
- key constraints and drivers in their education, training and preparation for employment.

Results are considered in the context of the scholarly literature and recent policy documents on education and social mobility, talent in vocational areas, and engineering education.

Key findings include:

- a passion among learners in all phases for practical, applied and collaborative types of learning
- the central importance of dispositional characteristics such as personal drive and autonomy in teachers' views of engineering talent
- the crucial role of further education as a bridge into higher education for talented 'non-traditional' vocational learners, demonstrated *inter alia* by a notably high level of aspiration among apprentices in the sample to enter university
- an imbalance in support and resources from external professional bodies to Specialist Diploma programmes on the one hand, and FE vocational programmes on the other
- problematically low levels of mathematics among learners at every level
- structural problems with the university Access course preparing vocational learners for BEng degree courses, including lack of time and an overly full syllabus
- difficulties in organising employer involvement, industry input, work experience and student placements
- the potential of a broadly-defined view of engineering to serve as a vehicle for social mobility.

Methodology

Methodology for the empirical research involved: a baseline survey, administered online, with 94 Diploma and vocational students in an FE college in a disadvantaged borough of London; case-study interviews with a sample of 6 teachers and 10 talented learners at secondary and FE phases in the college, and on an engineering Access course at a London university.

Keywords

Engineering, Specialist Diploma, vocational talent, mathematics, STEM

What makes a course vocational? School-based work-related programmes in Canada (Prof Jeremy Higham)

Professor Jeremy Higham

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The paper addresses the vocational aspects of the curriculum of a selection of the work-related programmes of a school board in Canada. The fieldwork on which this paper is based was carried out in autumn 2009 and involved an investigation of the vocational dimensions of the learner experience on five work-related programmes located in different secondary schools.

These case study programmes form part of a wider provision of multi-credit courses within the school board. This provision includes both academic and vocational programmes. Those that are work-related could be considered as 'school-work transition programmes' and cover a range of occupations or vocational sectors such as car maintenance, construction, law and order, carpentry, hair and beauty, the arts, information technology and catering. A key driver for these board-wide programmes is success for all students to minimise school drop-out and enhance life chances through increased graduation rates and appropriate progression to further study, training and work.

Central to the paper is a consideration of the concept of vocationalism and the work-related learning embodied within the activities and assessment tasks on these programmes. Of particular interest are the views of employers, local policy-makers and teaching and support staff, as well as student dispositions, for example their learning and career aspirations and their attitudes towards their programme, curriculum activities, pedagogy and assessment tasks. The paper will argue that a key influence on the vocational dimension of the programmes is the background and experience of the teachers as well as the availability and nature of resources and facilities. This includes access to resources in other schools, colleges, the community and local employers.

The paper will present vignettes of each of five case study programmes and discuss the extent and ways in which employers were involved in and engaged with each work-related programme. It will also propose a framework for exploring the vocational dimension of school-based courses.

Methodology

The study included three days case study fieldwork in each programme using a range of methodologies including observation of school and work-place activities, individual interviews with key administrative, teaching and support staff as well as employers, small group interviews with students and documentary analysis.

Keywords

vocational; work-related; employers; Canada

‘They’re already IN the labour market!’ Working pupils: challenges and potential for employers and schools (Dr Cathy Howieson, Sheila Semple, Prof Jim McKechnie)

**Dr Cathy Howieson, Senior Research Fellow; Sheila Semple, Associate Researcher
Centre for Educational Sociology; Professor Jim McKechnie, University of West of Scotland**

Employers’ views about the lack of preparedness of school pupils for work, especially in respect of generic skills, have been well documented. Yet a majority of these same school pupils have been able to successfully enter and hold paid part-time employment while at school and to carry out activities in their jobs that require the skills that employers note as lacking in new school-leaver entrants to full-time work. There is an apparent paradox here: employers feel that some school leavers do not have the requisite generic skills but at the same time their part-time pupil workforce carries out activities that require such skills. While schools are working hard to set up work-related activities with employers, many of their pupils are in employment and already in the ‘sphere of influence’ of employers. It seems, however, that pupils’ ‘naturally occurring’ experiences in the workplace are generally overlooked in efforts to develop links between education and employers.

These issues were highlighted in a national study of the extent and nature of school pupils’ part-time employment in Scotland (Howieson et al 2006). This paper draws on this research to consider the opportunities for learning and skill development that (some) part-time work offers and asks whether and how schools and employers might build on pupils’ own experiences in employment.

It was evident from the research that much part-time employment provides opportunities for pupils to learn and attain skills, especially core and employability skills and to practise and model study, work and life balance. The employers interviewed thought that part-time work exposes pupils to the ‘reality’ of work in a way that work experience does not and rated applicants’ part-time work more highly for recruitment purposes. Pupils and their parents considered part-time work more ‘real’ than school-led work experience. We suggest that education and employers might consider:

- should the learning gained in part-time employment be linked into formal schooling?
- how work-related learning might build on working pupils’ experiences?
- what would be gained, and what lost, by such links, and what would be the challenges involved?
- how might employers be encouraged to support the development of core and employability skills in their pupil workforce?
- is there a role for trade unions in supporting the development of pupil workers in the workplace?

(Howieson, C., McKechnie, J and Semple, S. (2006) *The Nature and Extent of School Students’ Part-time Employment*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive)

Methodology

- a survey of a nationally representative 10% sample of Yr10- Yr13 pupils (n= 18,430)
- pupil focus groups (n= 376) and a survey of their parents/carers (n = 275)
- telephone survey of a sample of 42 employers reflecting the range of employment undertaken by school pupils.
- interviews and group work with a range of teachers (46 participants)
- interviews with seven Careers Scotland staff
- two surveys of all 32 Scottish local authorities;
- case studies of 12 working pupils including: event recording by the pupils, observation by the research team; and interviews with the pupils and their employers.

Keywords: School pupils’ part time work; work experience; employability skills; generic skills; personal development; work-related learning; employers’ roles; school teachers’ attitudes

Employer Engagement in Curriculum Development in England - The new Diploma qualification (Prof Prue Huddleston, Dr Andrea Laczik)

**Prof Prue Huddleston, Director;
Dr Andrea Laczik, Research Fellow
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Employer engagement within the compulsory phase of education has been a contested area for over thirty years. Governments, of both political persuasions, have been supportive of employer involvement in education, initiating national programmes and encouraging a vast number of local activities.

The latest manifestation of employer engagement is the development of the new Diploma qualifications, to which employers were invited to contribute. Policy documents (QCA *et al.*, 2005, 2006 and 2007) outlined expectations that employers were to lead the development of the Diploma qualifications. Diplomas were introduced as part of the 14-19 education reform (DfES 2005) in England. They cover 17 lines of learning, of which 14 relate to industrial sectors. Diploma development is led by the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and Diplomas are, supposedly, employer-designed qualifications; knowledge and transferable skills are developed in an applied context. Diplomas are envisaged as leading to higher education or employment.

The following questions will guide the discussion:

How have employers been involved in the development of the Diploma qualifications? What is the evidence for Diploma qualifications being employer-led?

What worked well and what are the challenges when attempting to involve employers in education, both in general and, specifically, in qualification development? What can we learn from the Diploma development experience, about employer engagement?

It will be argued that employer involvement in Diploma development represented an extreme manifestation of employer engagement. On the basis of the research data employers showed enthusiasm and commitment to the development of Diplomas. They expressed their appreciation of being able to participate in shaping the education landscape in such a significant way. At the same time the question is raised whether employers are stretched beyond their capacity.

Even though a large number of employers were mobilised to contribute to the Diplomas, there have been clear insufficiencies in the process. Considering the size and spread of employers in England, the number of participating employers was small and so could not be representative.

Most employers have not been involved in qualifications development before, and some who have, worked with occupational qualifications. Many employers were not familiar with the technicalities of qualifications development, and many felt that their initial vision and content suggestions were not transferred as the qualification developed.

Despite employers' good will, the question is raised about sustainability of existing employer engagement in the current economic climate, let alone the intensification of it.

Methodology

The 'Reviewing the Diploma Development' (Ertl *et al.* 2009) project was conducted in 2008-09, and was to evaluate the design of the Diploma qualifications. The project was exploratory in nature and took a qualitative approach to data collection. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and were analysed through content analysis.

Keywords

Employer engagement in compulsory education, employer input in curriculum development, Diploma qualification, education reform in England

The notion of the 'Employee Governor': an analysis of type, motivation and role in relation to the dynamics of institutional change (Prof Chris James, Christian Percy)

Professor Chris James – University of Bath; Christian Percy – Education and Employers Taskforce

Governing bodies comprise members of diverse groups of stakeholders who bring varied perspectives and valuable capabilities to their work as school governors. Many governors can be termed 'employee governors'; that is, they volunteer to be governors but are in paid work outside the education system. These employee governors bring particular benefits to schools by applying their work-related capabilities to governing; facilitating relationships between their employers and the school; and helping to bring the school and the community together.

Employee governors are however extremely varied and the different categories are not clearly understood. The lack of an analytical framework for categorising the different types of employee governor limits understandings of: their motivation to be involved; their particular contribution; and the barriers to their participation and how to overcome them. This paper seeks to develop a framework that enables the notion of the employee governor to be understood more fully and the different kinds of employee governor to be clarified. Three perspectives are invoked to develop such a framework.

The first perspective considers two binary characteristics that permit a categorisation of employee governors.

- (i) An employee governor's route into governing and whether that route is related to their work organisation
- (ii) The support of/connections with their work organisation that they are able to draw upon to support or link with their school.

Different combinations of these characteristics generate a grid of four 'groups' of employee governor. In the paper, we argue that there is potential for the development of all groups and identify the different forms of support that each group may require to reach their full potential as governors and developing opportunities in their place of employment.

The second perspective uses the notions of capability, motivation and opportunity to enrich the insights from the first perspective. Employee governors operate in a strategic environment, where different employers, volunteers, fellow governors, headteachers and schools have different capabilities, motivations and opportunities. Although there may be considerable overlap, analysing these differences can inform understandings of the behaviour, recruitment and retention of such governors.

The third perspective acknowledges that schools are in various stages of change – improvement, progression and maybe decline all of which will be influenced by the context. Schools in varied settings in different states of institutional change, require governors with different capabilities and motivations which in turn has implications for what 'employee governor' can best contribute.

Methodology: The categories will be illustrated by case study examples of school governor schemes organised by various companies, and from the study of the governing of 30 primary and secondary schools with varied levels of performance in diverse socio-economic contexts and in various states of institutional change. Appropriate reference will be made to existing theories of volunteering, accountability and/or team structure and performance. Comparisons with the study of structures employed in corporate governance, including non-executive chairmen, may also be helpful.

Keywords: School governance, employee governors, volunteering schemes

What is apprenticeship? (Dr Susan James)

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Apprenticeship has a lengthy history in England and for a very long time was the only formal learning route in the workplace. It clearly held a certain cachet. However, the Industrial Training Act of 1964 was the beginning of the State, in various ways and through deepening measures, taking control of apprenticeship, specifically as an instrument of government policy. Moreover, since 2004 ‘apprenticeships’ have been used as a brand name encompassing all government-funded youth training schemes (except E2E) and now covers Young Apprenticeships for 14-15 year olds, Apprenticeship at Level 2 (L2), Advanced Apprenticeship at Level 3 (L3), and Programme-led Apprenticeship (PLA).

Investing in skills and training is important for any business. This paper raises three issues for further exploration. First, what is the value to the taxpayer of offering public support to employers’ existing induction and initial training, unless this leverages a much increased volume of training (with a considerable financial contribution from the firm), clear progression routes, and training and certification that is widely valued in the labour market? Second, why is so much of our apprenticeship provision aimed at Level 2, when in competitor countries Level 3 is the norm? Such concerns are all the greater given the problems of equating a Level 2 NVQ with its academic equivalents. Third, why has our official conception of apprenticeship as a learning route become so narrow?

A number of companies, for example Flybe and Network Rail have introduced their own apprenticeship programmes. For the purposes of this paper, however, the McDonalds apprenticeship provides the opportunity to unpick the concept of a popularist apprenticeship to a) ascertain what it involves that justifies public support, and b) address the issue of qualification equivalence.

Education and Industry – Taking Two Steps Back and Reflecting (Prof Ewart Keep)

Professor Ewart Keep

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The field of education/industry interaction has been studied now for over three decades. The current moment seems a good one for some serious reflection, with hard choices facing both parties about resources for current and potential forms of activity.

The paper will argue that education/industry liaison/interactions raise issues at three levels:

1. **Micro** – around demands being placed on employers by policy, the quality of employer representation and the forms that interaction can take.
2. **Meso** – around employer demands for enhanced employability; zero-sum game competition between employers, occupations and sectors for what are perceived to be scarce pools of talent; patterns of recruitment and selection that send powerful (sometimes perverse) signals to young people; and questions about who, in a post-Leitch era pays for and delivers what types of E&T.
3. **Macro** – around over-qualification and mis-matches, impoverished and weak demand for skills, lack of employer ambition, and the persistence of low paid, ‘bad’ jobs.

The paper will concentrate the bulk of its attention on 2 and 3, and will build on some of the issues raised in Huddleston and Keep (1999), and Gleeson and Keep (2004), as well as the author’s work on incentives to learn (2009) and patterns of recruitment and selection (Keep and James, 2010). The aim will be to explore topics that sometimes get shunted to one side. With youth unemployment high and rising, public money scarce and about to become scarcer, educational institutions under severe pressure, and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2009) offering a fresh definition and analysis of the causes of the UK’s ‘skills problem’ (one based around weak demand and poor skill utilisation, rather than failings of supply), the time seems ripe to pose some big questions about the conceptual backdrop against which the bulk of education/industry collaboration takes place.

Methodology

The paper will draw on a detailed analysis of policy documents (from government and its agencies) and from the extensive body of research on current LMI and employers’ patterns of recruitment, selection and reward within the labour market.

Keywords

Underlying structural issues, incentives, rights, roles and responsibilities

Perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates (Kevin Lowden)

Kevin Lowden: Research Fellow, SCRE Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow

For over two decades, the concept of employability and concerns over promoting such capacity has been prominent in UK compulsory education and post-16 training sectors. More recently, the importance of inculcating employability skills and attributes has featured in the Higher Education Sector (for example, the Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team 2002-5), often in response to concerns from Employers and their representative organisations such as the CBI. While the definitions of employability are subject to frequent reformulation, there is a level of agreement that employability skills, dispositions and personal attributes include certain achievements, understandings, team working, communication abilities (including verbal, written and ICT) and a positive attitude that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in employment and indeed as citizens.

The significance placed on graduate employability and its claimed inherent link to economic progress (e.g. Archer and Davison, 2008) has raised the issue's political profile and put pressure on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to play a greater role in addressing employability. Within this context, in 2009, the Edge foundation commissioned the SCRE Centre at the Faculty of education, University of Glasgow to conduct a major study to explore the perceptions of employers, Higher Education Institution staff and partner organisations concerning the employability skills of new graduates and to identify practice across these partners that has helped promote graduate employability.

This paper will highlight the main findings from this study concerning:

- the perceptions of employers and Higher Education Institution (HEI) staff and other key stakeholders concerning the skills, knowledge, attributes and characteristics which help undergraduates /new graduates to be employable.
- whether employers' perceptions vary across sectors (public, private and third sectors) and size of employer (small, medium and large).
- the informal and formal strategies of HEI staff and employers to provide support, activities and learning opportunities to enhance students' employability skills
- what formal or informal methods are used by employers to assess graduates' employability skills as part of their staff recruitment process.
- whether there are differences in desirable employability skill sets across those who have graduated from programmes of study that have included a greater or lesser amount of work-based and work-related learning (or learning approaches that inculcate such skills).

The findings will be placed in the policy and wider economic context and will emphasise practical measures for employers and practitioners who wish to promote the employability skills of graduates.

Methodology: The research commenced in 2009 and will be completed in Late summer 2010. It has two main methodological strands to address the research aims:

1. Scoping Strand: Examining relevant literature and gathering information using qualitative proforma and telephone interviews from a range of key stakeholders across the UK representing employers and education providers to: explore definitions of employability; identify salient issues and implications concerning promoting the employability of new graduates and suggest potential case studies of good practice.
2. Main Strand: Conducting 10 in-depth case studies of UK employers and their Higher Education partners involving semi-structured interviews; focus groups, observations and documentation analysis to highlight examples of employers, higher education institutions and other partners working to promote graduates' employability skills.

Keywords: Employability, New graduates, Employers, Higher Education, Policy, Practice.

Partnerships for enterprise education in Europe: states of play and potentials to develop (Dr Andrew McCoshan)

Dr Andrew McCoshan, Associate Fellow
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Current policies across Europe stress the importance of developing enterprise – or entrepreneurship – education: it has a vital role to play in the creation of the next generation of entrepreneurs. Recognising this, the European Commission has recently called for a step-up in activity as an important component of delivering on the strategic long-term goals of the EU in terms of growth and competitiveness. More than that, it has called for more systematic approaches to be developed by Member States. Effective partnerships between education and employers are seen as having a central role to play in delivering this agenda; without it, there is unlikely to be a significant upscaling in the quantity and quality of entrepreneurship education.

In light of these developments, this paper seeks to map the current state of play across Europe, and the challenges likely to be encountered in attempting to scale up activity to the levels required. It provides a context within which activity in the UK can be understood and reflected upon.

The paper begins by scoping out some of the important relationships which underpin developments. Using data on business start-ups and attitudes towards entrepreneurship, it shows the scale of variations across the EU and some of their inter-relationships. It then turns to two questions: what is entailed in current EU policy in terms of the development of the entrepreneurship education 'ecosystem', and how well placed are European countries to respond? The paper shows the extremely uneven nature of developments to date and highlights the key gaps. It examines the critical roles played by teachers and schools on the one hand and businesses and business organisations on the other.

The paper then turns to look at the potential for EU Member States, including the UK, to respond to the challenges. Returning to the initial analysis of contextual data, and using a conceptual framework to understand Member State variation, it presents an examination of how enterprise creation and cultural attitudes to entrepreneurship interact with the structure and practice of education and training systems. It concludes by showing the importance of individual Member State's 'ecosystems' in determining the potential for the development of more systematic approaches to entrepreneurship education, and the lessons for the UK. Particular attention is paid to the roles played by teachers, schools and businesses.

Methodology

The paper combines data and concepts from a number of sources: (i) recent discussions with senior government officials across Europe; (ii) an original analysis of attitudinal and business data; (iii) theoretical academic literature to present a conceptual framework to help understand variations and their consequences.

Keywords

Enterprise education Entrepreneurship education Europe Partnerships

Youth transitions: exploring the reality of young people in jobs without training (Prof Sue Maguire)

Professor Sue Maguire

Centre for Education and Industry (CEI), University of Warwick

Young workers who are defined as being in Jobs without Training (JWT) have been catapulted into the policy limelight, following the decision to raise the participation age (RPA) in learning to the age of 17 by 2013 and to the age of 18 by 2015. However, in recent years, very little policy attention has been given to young people who move into the labour market outside of accredited training programmes and, therefore, the level of understanding about the composition, needs and motivations of the group is limited. The definition of what constitutes a young person in JWT also varies, depending on the data sources used to quantify the population. Furthermore, the demand from the labour market for young workers, as well as the level of training and development that exists for them within the workplace is ill-defined.

This paper will map the challenges facing the proposed implementation of the RPA, by drawing on the findings from two recent complimentary research studies. The first study, which was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) was qualitative research with young people, parents and employers in two contrasting local labour markets. The evaluation of the Learning Agreement Pilot (LAP), which was a policy initiative targeted at the JWT group and their employers, comprised both longitudinal quantitative and qualitative elements. The research highlights a diversity of experiences of young people in JWT and question the validity of the term 'JWT' to define some young people's position within the labour market. It also establishes their routes into work and employers' recruitment and selection methods. The paper will conclude by questioning the extent to which the learning and support needs of young people in JWT can be reconciled with the demands from employers for youth labour.

Employers! Put your best where it will do the most. Some emerging messages from good practice research (Dr Linda Miller)

Dr Linda Miller, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Employment Studies

Employers appear to see engaging with school pupils primarily as a cost: something to place on the 'corporate responsibility' side of the balance sheet, with few corresponding benefits. Some employers still seem to hold a similar idea about equal opportunity initiatives too. This paper will review research undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies that has looked at the impact of employer initiatives aimed at engaging with a more diverse cohort of pupils and students and will consider the outcomes from the employer perspective. What types of initiative work best? What age group(s) should employers best target? What are the benefits for employers. The review will draw on the following research:

In the first project, IES examined the factors affecting the position of women in the London workforce. The work was commissioned by the GLA, and researchers spoke to employers, undergraduate and postgraduate students and school pupils as part of the overall programme of work. The research revealed that schoolchildren were often keen to find work placements in sectors in which employers were keen to recruit a more diverse workforce but work placements with such employers were hard to come by. Conversely, employers in those sectors often sought to attract a more diverse applicant pool by attempting to attract graduates from under-represented groups, with little or not effect, often spending large amounts of money in so doing.

In the second project, examining attempts to mainstream equal opportunities within Young Apprenticeships, IES explored the types of employer engagement with, and work experience placements offered to, young people as part of these qualifications, and the impact of their work experience on young people's views of the sector. The work revealed that early engagement with employers can be a fast and effective way of removing myths about a sector. Employers have found that the work experience often provides a way to pre-screen and (ultimately) recruit enthusiastic young people to apprenticeships or other post-16 training programmes.

From these findings, it would appear that employers would find engaging with school age students to be a more cost-effective – and more effective – approach to addressing workforce shortages and profiles than recruitment aimed at relatively small groups of graduates. It can help with building a wider range of job applicants, while young people benefit from gaining real life experience in work. Young people often make their education and qualification choices based on a lack of knowledge, rather than any real understanding, of the possible jobs on offer, leading to the currently small numbers of women in sectors such as engineering and IT. More engagement by employers with school pupils would help inform young people's subsequent qualification choices, while lessons learnt from good equalities practice could help employers make better decisions regarding where to target their attempts to engage with education.

Making it happen: employers working with disaffected learners in key stage 4 (Faith Muir and Caroline White)

Faith Muir – CEI Regional Director; Caroline White – Research Fellow
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Ofsted (2008)¹ defines disaffected learners as those who display one or more of the following behaviour patterns: regularly non-compliant, but not aggressive or threatening, and causing repeated low-level disruptions; regularly disruptive and/or challenging, leading to repeated entries in a school's incident log, recurring fixed-term exclusion or both; quiet, withdrawn and uninterested in most lessons. Disaffection does not necessarily equate with low intellect or learning difficulties. However, the underlying causes, circumstances and consequences are both varied and complex for each individual young person, often changing rapidly over time, and thus are likely to pose a considerable challenge for those working with them, including employers and training providers. The range of short, medium and long-term interventions developed to deal with this group of young people tend to fall within one of two types: those aimed at *preventing* disengagement or disaffection taking hold in the first place, for example inclusive approaches such as business mentoring or alternative curriculum opportunities built into the mainstream programme; and those which focus on *re-engaging* learners who are already disengaged or excluded from mainstream education. These include offsite learning provision, such as programmes run by Connexions centres or Pupil Referral Units. Currently, a significant feature of many successful models is that they provide a balanced combination of careers, work-related learning (WRL) and enterprise education (including financial capability), in line with the national curriculum statutory expectations for economic wellbeing, which is personalised to meet individual needs.

As long as interventions are carefully selected, planned and – most importantly – fully integrated into the overall learning programme, the motivation of disaffected learners can be greatly enhanced by activities such as extended work experience placements, work-related simulations, enterprise projects and vocational 'tasters' or accredited courses and work-based learning opportunities. Given the essential contribution of employers/training providers to such provision, the importance of establishing effective support systems that recognise and meet employer needs as well as those of the learner cannot be underestimated.

This paper presents findings from a recent study of work-related learning provision for disaffected and disengaged learners aged 14-16 years. Drawing on data collected from learners, teachers, support agencies and programme deliverers, including employers and training providers, it examines key factors for successful partnership and collaboration in work-related contexts. It considers the extent to which practice may have changed, for example, the use of 'planned' mentoring (Philip, Shucksmith and King, 2004)² as a support mechanism, and concludes that approaches developed by those working with disaffected young people could assist employer engagement in a far broader range of education settings.

Methodology: A qualitative methodology was used to gather and analyse data from a range of sources: policy documentation, evaluation reports and associated literature; case studies, including semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews, and activity observations; scrutiny of exemplar materials provided by 30+ schools and off-site centres as well as supporting organisations.

Keywords: Disaffection; disengagement; work-related learning; extended work placements; mentoring.

¹ Ofsted (2008): *Good practice in re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools* Philips, K. et al

² (2004) *Sharing a laugh? A qualitative study of mentoring interventions with young people*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

How does term-time paid employment in Key Stage 4 relate to participation outcomes in Key Stage 5? Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (Christian Percy)

Christian Percy, Education and Employers Taskforce

One element of work-related learning is to mimic the experience of being in employment, develop competencies and a sense of responsibility, as well as to provide an opportunity for young people to understand the links between education and future employment.

Academic literature has tended to focus on the impact of post Key Stage 4 part-time employment on outcomes, leading to contested interpretations. Some surveys (e.g. Dustmann and van Soest 2007, Jethwa 2001) suggest it provides a time-consuming distraction from education and skills acquisition that makes future participation either in education or the job market less likely. Others (e.g. Schill, McCartin and Meyer 1985, Payne 2003) argue it can develop similar benefits to those hoped for from work related learning. Paid employment is a different activity to work-related learning. However, it is possible to explore the points at which part-time working becomes burdensome on students (if appropriate), and what different environments affect this, in a way that is relevant to the study and implementation of work-related learning.

The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) provides a means to explore how the effects are different for different groups of people. It is a government-funded annual survey tracking the opinions, activities and outcomes of initially over 15,000 of the same young people each year, who turned 14 during academic year 2003/04. Six years of survey data are now available. The survey informs us whether a young person worked part-time in years 9, 10 or 11, and the average hours per week worked and weekly wage. Different measures of term-time working will be included in analyses of the young person's time spent NEET after KS4, aged 16-17. We will control for socio-economic status, gender, prior attainment, ethnicity dummy variables, and prior opinion on the usefulness of their education.

Data can also be linked to school level data and we can analyse whether education providers with high CVA, FSM or rurality indicators affect the relationships of interest. For instance, we may observe that in affluent areas, time spent working is correlated with more successful participation, with a reversed relationship in areas of higher deprivation. Where meaningful relationships are identified, these may not be linear. For instance, we can test Payne's (2003) conclusion that part-time working at low intensity may have a small positive link to participation outcomes whereas high intensity working might have a reverse correlation. However, using the granularity of the LSYPE we can drill into this relationship and ask whether it is qualitatively different for different genders or those from different backgrounds. The paper will explore these issues.

Methodology: Statistical analyses using SPSS on the longitudinal data-set, placed into context via brief literature surveys and policy reference where appropriate. The variable of interest is censored, in that the majority of young people are not NEET for any period aged 16-17. Therefore a maximum likelihood/latent variable analysis will be employed. This work builds on internal work conducted for the Taskforce, which has benefited from comments by academic reviewers and government analysts. These comments have both motivated the relevance of the work and provided a clear way to develop and improve the work.

Keywords: Part-time employment, term-time employment, longitudinal studies

The impact of practical and applied learning on 13-15 year olds of high ability in England and Wales (Prof William Richardson & Dr Sue Sing)

Professor William Richardson; Dr Sue Sing
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Within the very substantial literature on development projects relating to school-age applied and practical learning in the UK, hardly any concentrates specifically on 'academically-able' young people. Moreover, most literature on the work-related curriculum has focussed 'on implementation rather than impact' (Saunders *et al.*, 1996).³

The research reported in this paper concerns evidence as to the effect of practical / applied learning at school on 13-15 year-olds of above-average attainment. Attention in the project is focussed on students' motivation, their choice of post-14 and post-16 learning routes and links they perceive between experience of different forms of learning and their potential career options. This one-year project (October 2009-September 2010) has two comparative strands. First, there is an Anglo-Welsh dimension related to the potential impact of the Welsh Baccalaureate and Diplomas on students with high prior attainment; second, it compares the experience of students in selective and non-selective secondary schools.

The study was undertaken with samples of Year 9 and Year 11 students and their teachers in six schools: two in Wales and four in England, including two selective grammar schools. The research participants in each school were groups of students of above-average prior attainment, along with selected teachers included for their insights into the overall curriculum strategy of the school and the way the school selects / targets / guides its students onto courses during the 14-16 phase (or 13-15, if following an accelerated curriculum).

The impact of the research will rest on the richness of the case studies, the amount of complementary analysis they allow, faithful portrayal of the distinctive settings in which applied / practical learning occurs in these schools and the impact this has on the experience and outlook of the high-attaining teenager.

In particular, it is anticipated that worthwhile conclusions will be drawn as to:

- the range of learning at school that high-attaining teenagers find enjoyable and motivating;
- the specific impact of practical and applied learning on their self-image and sense of potential;
- the value they place on different types of learning and how this, combined with enjoyment and motivation, relates to their subsequent options and career choices; and
- the implications of these findings for the structure of the Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 curriculum in England and Wales and patterns of participation.

Methodology: Two-day field visits were carried out in six schools, comprising:

- questionnaires for Year 9 and Year 11 participants, plus follow-up focus groups;
- interviews with teachers (heads of Year 9 and 11; head of information, advice & guidance; deputy head responsible for the curriculum);
- telephone interview with head teacher.

Keywords: Work-related learning; high ability; motivation; options choices; career choices

³ Saunders, L. et al. (1996) *Literature Review of the Impact of the Work-Related Curriculum on 14-16 Year Olds*. London: Department for Education and Skills, available at: <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/dfes/resbrief/brief33.htm>

The benefits of employer engagement with education (Andrew Wilson)

Mr Andrew Wilson, Corporate Citizenship

The City of London Corporation commissioned Corporate Citizenship to undertake a research study to examine the skills and competencies employees can develop through active participation in employer supported volunteering programmes.

This link between volunteering and skills development has been well-developed in previous research. This study sought to strengthen understanding of this issue through an extensive analysis of volunteers operating across a range of initiatives in education including: reading/number/language partner programmes; other student mentoring; providing enterprise workshops in schools; and acting as school governors.

The research draws on the experience of employees in sixteen major companies operating in London. It tracked the learning and development experienced by almost 550 volunteers who are supporting students and staff in schools and colleges across the City. The majority of respondents report that volunteering has developed their skills and competencies across a broad range of business relevant areas including: communication skills; coaching skills; adaptability; and influencing and negotiating skills. In addition, the research shows how different volunteering activities can be used to develop different skills and competencies.

Importantly, the skills development claimed by volunteers is not simply a self-reported gain. The evidence was corroborated by the overwhelming majority of their line managers who feel that volunteers acquire useful skills from their volunteering experience. Further, there is clear evidence that the competences developed through volunteering assignments are of direct relevance to the companies involved. Many of these skills feature in the competency frameworks used by companies to monitor and guide staff development; and all of the companies are investing in training and development programmes to build these competencies in their staff.

The research found that volunteering offers an experiential development process that sets it apart from more traditional approaches to training. Volunteering requires employees to step outside their normal working role and build relations with people who perhaps have a very different world view from their own. Respondents report that moving outside their "comfort zone" in this way is extremely useful in both developing skills and transferring them back into the workplace.

However, we know from the work of Kolb and others that for a genuine learning experience to occur, the volunteer does need to have the opportunity to reflect on the learning and have the proper analytical skills to apply their experience. The research shows that if companies are to harness the power of volunteering as a route to development they need to manage the process properly. This involves integrating volunteering activities into mainstream HR processes of appraisal and development.

Finally, while not a direct aim of the study, the research has also shown that employees benefit from improved morale and increased job satisfaction, motivation and commitment to the company as a result of the opportunities afforded by their volunteering experience.

Overall we believe the findings provide a strong articulation of the benefits of employer engagement with education.

Methodology: The primary research method was a survey, asking volunteers to reflect on whether they had developed skills and competencies through their recent volunteering experience. This was launched in November 2009 and sent to all volunteers in education based initiatives in the sixteen participating companies. It remained 'in the field' until January 2010 during which time the research team received 546 useable responses. The survey instrument was designed in collaboration with CSR and HR practitioners in the sixteen companies, together with senior representatives from professional bodies in the HR field including CIPD, MCI and the City HR Association.

Keywords: Volunteering; skills development; education; experiential learning

Understanding the Learning-Working Nexus in Higher Education (Dr Margaret Wood & Arijit Chatterjee)

Dr Margaret Wood and Arijit Chatterjee
York St John University

This paper will explore the nature of the dynamic between higher education students' work-related experiences and their engagement with undergraduate study.

Tutors in higher education can sometimes bemoan the fact that their students now are compelled to work, often substantial hours, in order to finance their university studies. The view of this which is often expressed is that this is to the detriment of their academic studies.

The aim of this paper is to re-orientate this discourse by taking an appreciative view of the relationship between student engagement in the workplace and the benefits of this for academic study. The focus is therefore a positive one in seeing links between the combination of work and study and benefits produced such as motivation and opportunities to gain transferable skills relevant to study and lifelong learning.

Student engagement with work-related experiences can take many forms. It may be work that is not immediately related to the requirements of their programme of study for example a casual job taken to help to finance the studies, or it may be as a planned work-experience placement component to their course. Drawing on data from a small-scale qualitative research study of the views and experiences of a sample of full-time undergraduate students at a university, this paper examines how work-related experience including student volunteering, paid employment and work placement, appears to have the power to motivate and give more meaning to academic study.

The research has uncovered some of the factors that influence students' perceptions of the value and importance of different aspects of their academic study and its wider relevance to their lives. The paper will share this understanding from the student perspective as uncovered through their narrative accounts of their varied work-related experiences. It will seek to shed light on questions of: how students draw on their skills and experiences from the workplace to make sense of and give meaning to their higher education studies, career goals and aspirations; how tutors recognise and value work-related learning in the higher education curriculum and transfer this more directly into academic study; and how higher education and employment can be seen as complementary rather than in conflict.

Methodology

The paper reports on an on-going qualitative research project to investigate undergraduate higher education students' perspectives on the nature of the relationship between their varied work-related experiences and their academic studies. Data has been collected via email interviewing with the purpose of uncovering the students' perceptions through their on-line narratives.

Keywords

Employment, work-related learning, benefits, higher education, study, student voice