

Education and Employers Taskforce Third Research Conference

Exploring school-to-work transitions in international perspectives: Abstracts

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Looking back: Are career talks with outside speakers associated with higher wages? An analysis of the British Cohort Study

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Work related learning activities' impact on young people's transition to adulthood has become widely acknowledged by researchers and policymakers. The international literature suggests there is something meaningful happening where young people with more access to the types of programs and activities (e.g. work experience, career talks, workplace visits etc) are equipped with better networks and knowledge of labour market and make more informed decisions leading to a more successful transition to adult employment (OECD 2010; Symonds et al. 2011).

Evidence from the United States suggests young individuals who participate in schemes with high levels of employer engagement perform much better than their peers in the labour market (Kemple 2008). UK policy proposes that work related learning exposure in schools can lead to greater labour market success because it provides young people with 'employability skills' and provides practical experience highly valued by recruiters (Wolf 2011). Analysis by Mann and Percy (2013), based upon a survey of young adults recalling school-age employer engagement activities, shows that the variation in young individuals' success in the labour market, mainly in terms of earnings, is positively correlated with the number of employer contact experiences that their school or college had mediated for them.

Despite the recent literature emerging in the field of employer engagement in education and the impact on young people's transition to labour market, there exists a shortage of quantitative analysis that enable longitudinal controls for prior background. This paper intends to add to the existing knowledge by focusing on the following question in its analysis of longitudinal data: is there any statistically significance relationship between the extent of teenage workplace exposure at key stage 4 and income at age 26 and unemployment between age 16 and 26.

Methodology: The study uses analysis of British Cohort Study 1970, a longitudinal data set which allows researchers to follow many thousands of individuals from birth to adulthood. As well as the desired outcome variables and detailed control variables (incl. family background and academic attainment), BCS data records the number of workplace visits, careers talks and work experience activities individuals experienced aged 15 and 16. To test the hypotheses multivariate regression methods are employed using SPSS software.

Keywords: Work-related learning, employer engagement in education, labour market outcome, school-to-work transition, British Cohort Study, longitudinal analysis

"They told me I was going to have to wait for the baby boomers to die": A textual analysis of young adults' perception of the value of school-mediated workplace exposure

Dr Steve Jones (University of Manchester) and Dr Anthony Mann (Education and Employers Taskforce)

A number of recent studies have identified statistically significant positive labour market outcomes associated with school-mediated employer engagement. Studies by Kemple (2008), Mann & Percy (2013) and Percy & Mann (2014) find that variation in young adults' labour market success, notably in terms of wage premiums, is positively associated with higher volumes of school-mediated employer contacts (e.g. work experience, careers events, mentoring, enterprise activities). Stanley & Mann (2014) have offered a potential explanatory framework for understanding such early labour market benefits drawing on theories of human, social and cultural capital accumulation as interpretative models.

This paper draws on new data to test whether (and how) young adults perceive the school-mediated employer contacts they experienced between the ages of 14 and 19 to have been of value to their early labour market progress. We do this by discussing recurring themes in the data, such as the perception that workplace staff communicate more directly and truthfully about labour market realities ("[they] told us straight") and that students therefore attribute greater authenticity to them as source of information ("you got advice that seemed more genuine").

Many students, especially those from the independent sector find the opportunity to build networks most useful. However, for those in the non-selective state sector, a more commonly reported benefit was the confidence to reject particular vocational options ("it made me realise which types of job I didn't want") and work harder at pursuing alternative route ("[it's] why I made an effort to get a better education". We assess whether beneficial experiences can best be understood as impacting most significantly in and through social capital (improving access to reliable information through extended networks), human capital (technical or 'employability' skills accumulation) or to influence cultural capital (in terms of changes to dispositions and attitudes/habitus).

Methodology: Our data comes from a 2011 YouGov survey which included an open question on what, if anything, 986 young adults (aged 19-24) gained from school-mediated employer contacts. All valid responses were subjected to a textual analysis which explored perceptions of human, social and cultural capital accumulation relevant to adult experiences of employment and continuing study.#

Keywords: Employer engagement in education, human, social, cultural capital formation, textual analysis, labour market outcomes.

Employer Engagement in Education - Quality and /or Quantity?

Dr Pat Morton, Jill Collins and Glynis Dean (Sheffield Hallam University)

This paper explores how specific targeted programmes of employer engagement with schools can add value to career learning, address stereotypes and widen access to career choice for young people. While the range of employer based interventions delivered to a mass audience of 'young people' can be shown to offer some value (Mann and Percy, 2013; NFER, 2013) there remain a number of tensions, not least being the debate about who will benefit (Edge, 2010) and how such schemes might be embedded in school career education.

Issues of equality, identity, class and inter-sectionality can be invisible, diluted or ignored in the adoption of large scale schemes, yet the concerns about challenging occupational stereotypes and widening access to the professions remain strong within research and review (OFSTED, 2011; Francis et al, 2005; Hatcher and le Gallais, 2008). In addition, concerns about the impact of policy on career learning for disadvantaged groups has been raised by interested parties and stakeholders (OFSTED, 2013, Bridge Group 2013).

We review a range of targeted schemes where employers have worked with education providers to benefit particular groups of young people. This includes work experience led by us or delivered in collaboration with others and wider employer visit schemes (Wider Horizon + JIVE, RAF-WISE, Careers Academies, Generating Genius and PRIME) in order to identify and offer some common learning points and at the same time, make some recommendations of how good practice in this area should /could be embedded in wider schemes.

Programmes of work-related learning, targeted at under-represented groups such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, those from lower socio-economic groups, will be discussed. Different approaches by a number of employers will be explored and some of the creative methods used by organisations will be highlighted. The ways in which employer organisations can benefit from engagement in work-related activities, such as identifying future potential recruits and fulfilling Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agendas is also discussed.

Methodology: A mixed method approach will be used. A review of literature will be undertaken and data collected as a result of a longitudinal study will be used. The paper will draw on existing evaluations and reports of schemes along with a small number of selected interviews.

Keywords: Work-related learning (WRL), gender, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), social class, work experience, widening participation

Investigating employer needs in a holistic vocational qualification – the research behind the City & Guilds TechBac

Zeeshan Rahman and Patrick Craven (City and Guilds)

According to City & Guilds research, employers in England find that young people are poorly prepared for employment and lack the right attitude and skills to succeed at work. Employers tend to look favourably on potential recruits who have vocational qualifications, strong core skills and work experience over those with just academic qualifications, but have been unable to fill many vacancies that exist in their businesses, due to the quality of the applications they receive. A staggering 33% said they were preparing to look overseas for new recruits. These findings, alongside changes in education policy, including the rise in the UK school leaving age, and the high youth unemployment has created an urgent need for a rigorous vocational programme of study that identifies a credible alternative to the existing academic offer.

City & Guilds has recognised the importance of dealing with these issues, and, as a consequence, is developing the City & Guilds TechBac[®]. The aim of this proposition is to provide students with a balanced programme of vocational study which develops their technical knowledge alongside a wider set of skills demanded by employers. By involving employers in developing and endorsing the qualifications within the TechBac[®], we hope to give students the best chance of gaining employment or progressing to further study.

City & Guilds has undertaken a research programme to inform the design, development and delivery of the TechBac[®], including a survey, focus groups and interviews with employers as well as consultations with HE representatives, learning providers and students. All groups felt that alongside a robust technical qualification, the inclusion of work placement, an extended project and broader business skills would provide better preparation for work than the current academic curriculum. They however expressed concerns about the perceived parity of vocational qualifications against their academic alternatives.

In this paper, we discuss our research findings from an employer perspective, including their views on the current education system, work readiness of recruits, skills shortages relating to young people, as well as their perceptions on specific aspects of the City & Guilds TechBac[®]. In addition, we draw on relevant findings from our recent research by the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development and the Centre for Real World Learning [‘How to teach vocational education: A theory of vocational pedagogy’](#). We also look to the future and start to consider measures of success relating to the TechBac[®] and the impact it may have on school-to-work transition.

Methodology:

- Online survey with 1,005 employers
- Face-to-face focus group, online discussion groups and in-depth telephone interviews with 22 employers
- Face-to-face/online consultations with 20 representative from higher education, 20 potential learners, and 20 learning providers
- Desk based research, including a literature

Keywords: Vocational education, qualifications, employers, young people

The impact of work experience on HE student outcomes: Implications for policy and practice

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This paper sets out to demonstrate how experiences of work can impact upon student outcomes; including progression to a graduate level job, attainment of a good degree and avoidance of unemployment in the period immediately following graduation. Data included is based on a longitudinal research study of student/graduate career development undertaken between 2006 and 2012, known as 'Futuretrack'. The authors then explore the nature of university-business collaboration in respect of the provision of work experiences (work-based learning and work placements) to identify the components of 'quality' work experiences and the ways in which employers engage with both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the UK. The paper concludes with a commentary on the implications for institutional policy-making and practice at course level and identifies key messages for HE stakeholders about how to position undergraduate and postgraduate work experiences to best equip students and graduates to make a successful transition to the labour market.

Methodology: The presentation will comprise a formal input of key outcomes of the research followed by discussion.

Keywords: Student, graduate, work-based learning, work experience, transition to the labour market, employer engagement in higher education.

Mickey Mouse Learning - Discourses of the Vocational/Technical in Higher Education

Richard Sanders and Harriet Richmond (Newman University)

Within the frame of UK HE policy making, discursive distinctions between ‘academic’ learning and ‘vocational/technical’ skills for ‘employability’ are being used to justify contemporary reform of Higher Education. This economy driven reform context can be characterised by top down ideological interpretations of subject area value and workforce ‘skills’ needs (Ball, 2008), bottom up student choice (Willett and Cable, 2011), perceived employer requirements (Moreland, 2011) and ‘supply-side strategies’ (Mills, 2002). This reform climate can be seen to be engendering a climate of autocratic control (McGettigan, 2013), where the voice of academic practitioners is becoming increasingly marginalised.

This paper seeks to investigate this reform agenda from a practitioners perspective using two case studies from Newman University: the first explores an attempt to move beyond deficit models of graduate skills gaps, drawing upon current practices in work-based/related learning within undergraduate programmes at Newman University; and the second investigates the discursive marginalisation of media studies, its subsequent excision from the portfolio of courses offered at Newman and associated wider implications of reform in terms of preparing students’ for their career aspirations.

Through the linking of these case studies, the authors are seeking to enter into a constructive debate around what graduates need in order to further their careers. The *Confederation of British Industry* (CBI) and *Association of Graduate Employers* (AGR) have been highlighting increasingly complex career requirements and the need to smooth the transition into the workplace (CBI, 2009). Our experiences, as well as the experience of others within HE (Sarson, 2013), suggest that the current reform agenda will not successfully address this perceived employer need. Both case studies highlight the importance of formative learning for career development - in terms of its reflective, metacognitive and critical functions (Mills, 2002) that cannot be easily quantified and valued economically (Collini, 2012). Here we would argue the distinction between ‘academic’ learning and ‘vocational/technical’ skills is not useful for students or employers, and a more nuanced understanding is required.

Methodology: Case studies, utilising discourse analysis methods. The excision of media studies case study specifically utilises Critical Discourse Analysis, incorporating corpus linguistics methods as a starting point for qualitative interpretations.

Keywords: employment, employability, vocational, technology, subject value, humanities, reform, discourse, Higher Education, critical, neoliberal

The rhetoric and the reality of apprenticeship: A comparative study of the English, Finnish and French apprenticeship systems for 16-18 year olds

Dr Anna Mazenod (University of Roehampton)

The policy rhetoric around apprenticeships doesn't always translate into reality. In England, politicians have put apprenticeships forward as a solution to a number of different policy problems, such as youth unemployment and improving intermediate technician level skills. Furthermore, the role of employers in apprenticeship has been portrayed as pivotal, and recent discussions have centred on the role of employers as drivers of the funding system.

This paper reports findings from a study of the English, Finnish and French systems of apprenticeship for 16-18 year olds to provide a comparative perspective to the discussion of the role of employers in England. Rather than focusing on the often-studied German model of apprenticeship, this study examines three different European systems where apprenticeship for 16-18 year olds remains a pathway for the minority. It compares the role or roles employers have been prescribed in the policy rhetoric, and the kind of employer engagement is suggested by the reality, as evidenced by academic research and data on the take-up of apprenticeship.

The paper begins with an overview of the apprenticeship system in the three countries and compares the scale and the breadth of the training programmes. The paper then examines the roles of employers within the apprenticeship systems with respect to the financial and legal responsibilities set out in the official frameworks, and the opportunities afforded to employers to shape the system. The paper concludes that there is a disjoint between the official government policy rhetoric and the reality of apprenticeship for 16-18 year olds in all of the study countries, although the disjoint appears to be more significant in England and in France. The role of the state in the respective apprenticeship systems remains strong, and is as much about incentivising, encouraging or cajoling employers as it is about directing, legislating, regulating or funding the system.

The paper argues that in England and France, the multiplicity of policy aims set for apprenticeship in the policy rhetoric is diluting the meaning of apprenticeship within the respective country contexts and discouraging meaningful employer engagement both at the programme operational level, as well as at the level of influencing policy. The paper proposes that more streamlined policy aims, arising from a shared understanding of the meaning of apprenticeship for 16-18 year olds, developed with the key institutional stakeholders, including employers would enable more successful apprenticeship policies to be implemented in England in the medium and long-term.

Methodology: Available statistical data and systematic reviews of qualitative research on apprenticeship published between 1996-2012 in English, Finnish and French, complemented by an expert interview in each country. A theoretical framework was developed to undertake comparative contextual analysis.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, employer engagement, policy rhetoric, comparative vocational education systems

Stimulating interest in STEM careers among students in Europe: Supporting career choice and giving a more realistic view of STEM at work

Alexa Joyce, EUN Partnership AISBL (European Schoolnet)

In most countries in Europe, interest and achievement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) topics is declining. This in turn, leads to low levels of entry to STEM tertiary studies and STEM careers – posing a major challenge for the future competitiveness of European countries on the world stage. By 2020, more than 800 000 technology posts will be unfilled due to the skills gap, and even lower level positions will require increasing levels of STEM knowledge and competence.

Hence, it is critical to address this issue. Numerous efforts have been made across Europe to better engage pupils on several levels, including: increasing students interest in STEM by enlivening STEM lessons at school with new and improved pedagogical approaches, giving students a better understanding of the relevance of STEM to life through informal and formal education, linking the world of work in STEM and the classroom, engaging students in awareness-raising activities around STEM jobs, and organising STEM fairs.

All of these measures have presented some degree of success, but need to be taken up more widely. We will review key examples in Europe, and examine barriers and facilitators to wider uptake of approaches to support students in choosing STEM.

Methodology: This paper will review the situation in terms of skills gap in Europe, from a general STEM perspective but also with a review of existing data on specific sub-areas of STEM skills. We will summarise results from European STEM education research and awareness-raising projects taking place over the last five years, which each cover between three and thirty countries. We will categorise projects according to a typology developed in previous STEM education research. Recommendations will be given for future areas of research which remain to be explored.

Keywords: Science, technology, engineering, mathematics, careers, jobs, Europe, pedagogy, awareness-raising

Do educational pathways matter? Educational trajectories and job satisfaction

Dr Ricardo Sabates and Emma Salter (University of Sussex)

What do employers want from education? More specifically, what characteristics are employers looking for in the employees they seek to hire? And what role does education play in developing these?

The value of education is often only viewed in terms of levels of qualifications or years spent in the education system, while outcomes of education are defined as the economic return to the money and time invested in obtaining that education. We wanted to look at this from another angle. What pathways are young people taking through post-compulsory education? What are their characteristics? And what are the wider outcomes and benefits to them and their employers of the routes they take?

Using data from two national annual surveys, the British Household Panel Survey in England and the Socio-Economic Panel in Germany, we identified the diverse pathways people took through post-compulsory education in the 1990s and 2000s and classified them into four distinct categories: vocational, academic, vocational and academic and no post-compulsory qualifications. We investigated who was most likely to be on these separate paths in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics, for example, parental education and occupation categories and housing tenure at age 16.

Furthermore, we identified a number of social outcomes, including those that are beneficial for employers: health and health behaviours; and beliefs and attitudes such as self-efficacy and trust. A healthy workforce is of great value to an employer, while self-efficacy and trust are prized for their links to motivation, performance and employee engagement. We looked at the associations between the educational pathways pursued in post-compulsory education and these wider outcomes.

Methodology: Quantitative analysis of the British Household Panel Survey

Keywords: education; employability; vocational; academic; trajectories; outcomes; job satisfaction

Industry School Partnerships: Boundary crossing to enable school to work transitions across three targeted industries

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Industry-school partnerships (ISPs) are increasingly being recognised as a new way of providing vocational education opportunities. However, there is limited research investigating their impact on school to work transitions. This paper reports on a government-led ISP, the Gateway to Industry Schools Program, established in Queensland, Australia. The QLD State government facilitated the ISPs across 3 industry sectors: minerals and energy; building and construction; and aviation. This research adopted a qualitative case study methodology and draws upon boundary crossing theory as means to understand each industry sector. We distinguish four types of boundary crossing mechanisms which align with principles for effectiveness in ISPs. The main findings were that boundary crossing mechanisms assist ISPs to develop industry-based contextualised curriculum and to prepare school students for employment.

Methodology: This research adopted a qualitative case study methodology to investigate three ISP partners: (a) participating schools; (b) industry; and (c) leading partner organisations. Data was drawn from documents and interviews exploring participants' perspectives on the workings of the ISP.#

Keywords: boundary crossing, school to work transition, partnership, education, industry

Poverty and school leavers' outcomes in Glasgow secondary schools

Dr. Stephen J McKinney, Stuart Hall and Kevin Lowden (School of Education, University of Glasgow)

This paper reports on quantitative and qualitative research undertaken by researchers from the School of Education, University of Glasgow, in partnership with researchers from Glasgow City Council.

The quantitative research aimed to examine the effects of poverty on pupil success in public examinations and in attaining initial positive school leaver destination in Glasgow City Council secondary schools. The team adopted a tripartite measure of poverty: entitlement to free school meals (Glasgow schools record high levels of entitlement); the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and data on staged interventions. The tripartite measure was correlated with academic achievement and initial positive school leaver destination in Glasgow secondary schools. One of the surprising results indicated that some schools achieve high levels of initial positive leaver destination, despite being located in areas of high deprivation.

The second phase of the research (qualitative) sought to understand the factors that supported high levels of initial positive school leaver destinations in some Glasgow secondary schools in areas of deprivation. The researchers focused on a sample of schools and conducted a series of interviews with key informants. Factors that supported high levels of initial positive leaver destinations included: leadership; operational work by designated staff and external links; the role of careers advisors; intervention at an early age and targeted intervention. The pre-eminent feature, however, was the importance of strong leadership committed to supporting strategies for positive school leaver destination, whether directly or by distributed leadership. In some of the schools, however, there may be an over reliance on the charismatic leadership of one person who inspires and motivates others. This paper discusses these issues and argues that a move to the creation of more concerted policy and structures would possibly ensure greater continuity of intervention in these schools.

The findings of this continuing research, although limited in scale, have very important implications for policy and practice within schools serving areas of deprivation across the UK and the initial employment opportunities of school leavers.

Key words: Poverty, School leavers; positive leaver destinations

Evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials: Implications for young people gaining experience of the world of work

Sarah Lynch and Tami McCrone (National Foundation for Educational Research - NFER)

The DfE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake an independent evaluation of the Work Experience Placement Trials between May 2012 and July 2013. The final report was published in October 2013 and included the steps that a college, school or work-based provider should take when providing quality work experience.

Findings indicated that the work experience trial was widely perceived by students, colleges and employers to have helped develop the skills necessary for employment, including team work, communication and interpersonal skills, enabling students to be more work-ready. The principal factors contributing to successful work experience placements were effective communication, good matching of students to placements, ensuring students were well-prepared for placements and flexibility in timing of placements.

The evaluation methodology comprised the following activities:

- **a scoping study** to analyse pilot colleges' action plans and progress reports and an email survey of colleges;
- **case-study visits** to ten colleges offering varied approaches to work experience where views were gathered from senior leaders, work experience coordinator, teaching staff, employers and young people;
- **analysis of MI data** collected from pilot colleges which explored, for example, the *number* of placements provided overall, the number and size of *employers* who had participated, the length of *placements*, total expenditure, and the cost of placements;
- **an assessment of value for money** which included a descriptive analysis of financial data, alongside qualitative assessments.

This NFER session will draw on the findings from the work placement research and interpret what they mean to young people in terms of education to work transitions and the good practice implications for schools and colleges. In so doing we will also examine wider NFER evidence from our Research Programme strand: *From Education to Employment* and consider the importance of experience of the world of work for all young people. We will explain why we believe young people gaining experience of the world of work is important; when it should ideally happen; and what we think it should encompass.

Methodology: The paper will draw on various primary research projects using qualitative and quantitative methodologies and on secondary literature reviews.

Keywords: Work experience; employer engagement; experience of the world of work; impact on young people and employers; transition from education to employment; employability skills.