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Transitions from Vocational to Higher Education: The cases of England and Germany

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Hubert Ertl: *Transitions from Vocational to Higher Education*



Outline

- Background: HE expansion and access
- Transitions: From secondary to higher education
- Degrees of Success: Transitions from VET to HE in England
 - research questions
 - research design
 - first results: transitional landscapes
 - first results: learning experience

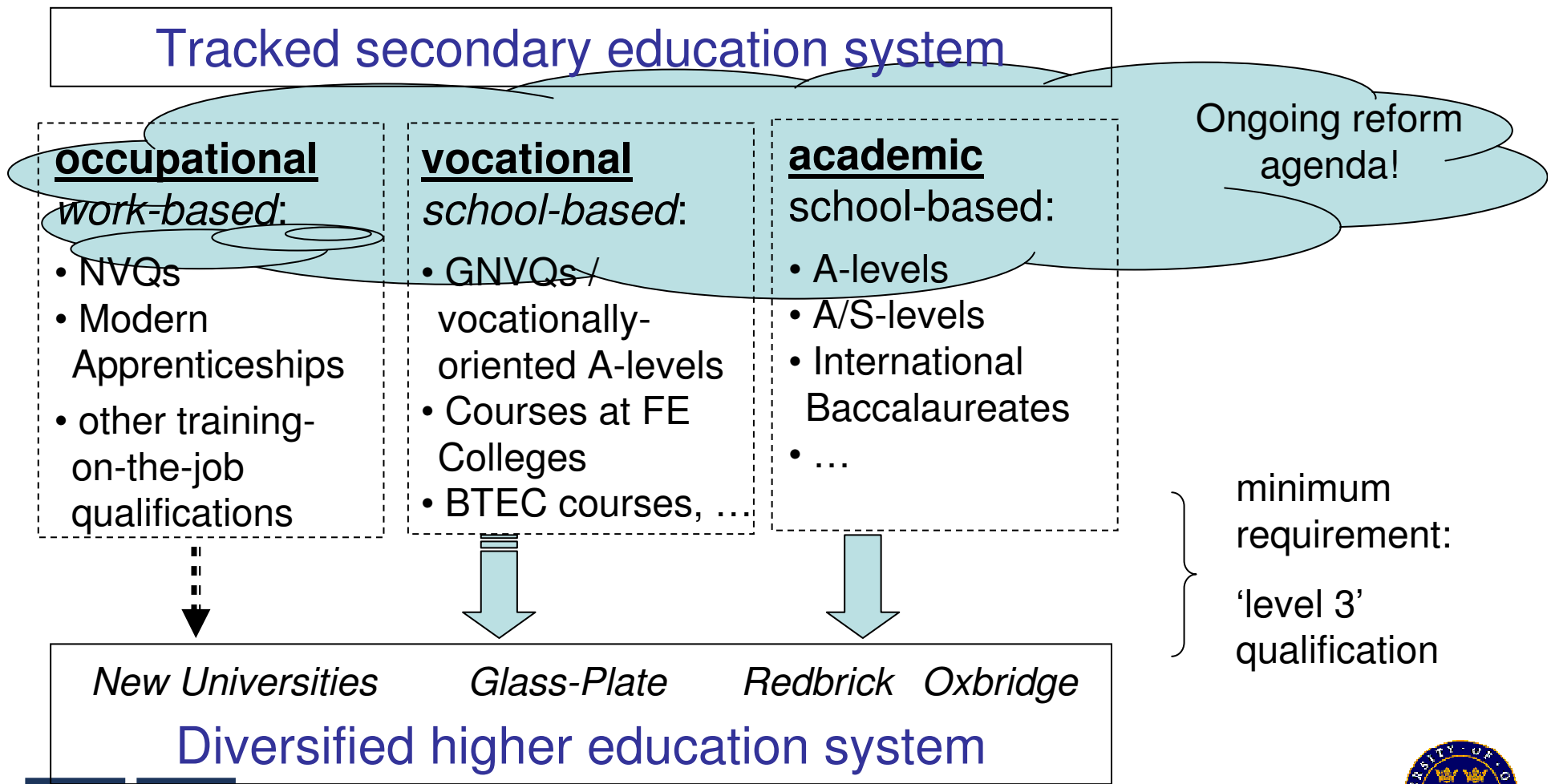


Background: HE expansion and access

- Massive increase in participation in full-time post-compulsory education since 1985
- Increased availability of vocationally-oriented qualifications aimed at 16-year olds
 - Post-compulsory expansion regarded as pre-condition for widening participation in HE
- Incremental growth in HE student numbers remains greatest for students with traditional academic secondary qualifications
 - 'vocational education at secondary level ... does inhibit students' chances of continuing on to college' (Arum & Shavit, 1993)
 - 'mirage of wider opportunities' (Pugsley, 2004)
 - social selectivity of secondary education (PISA Study 2000)

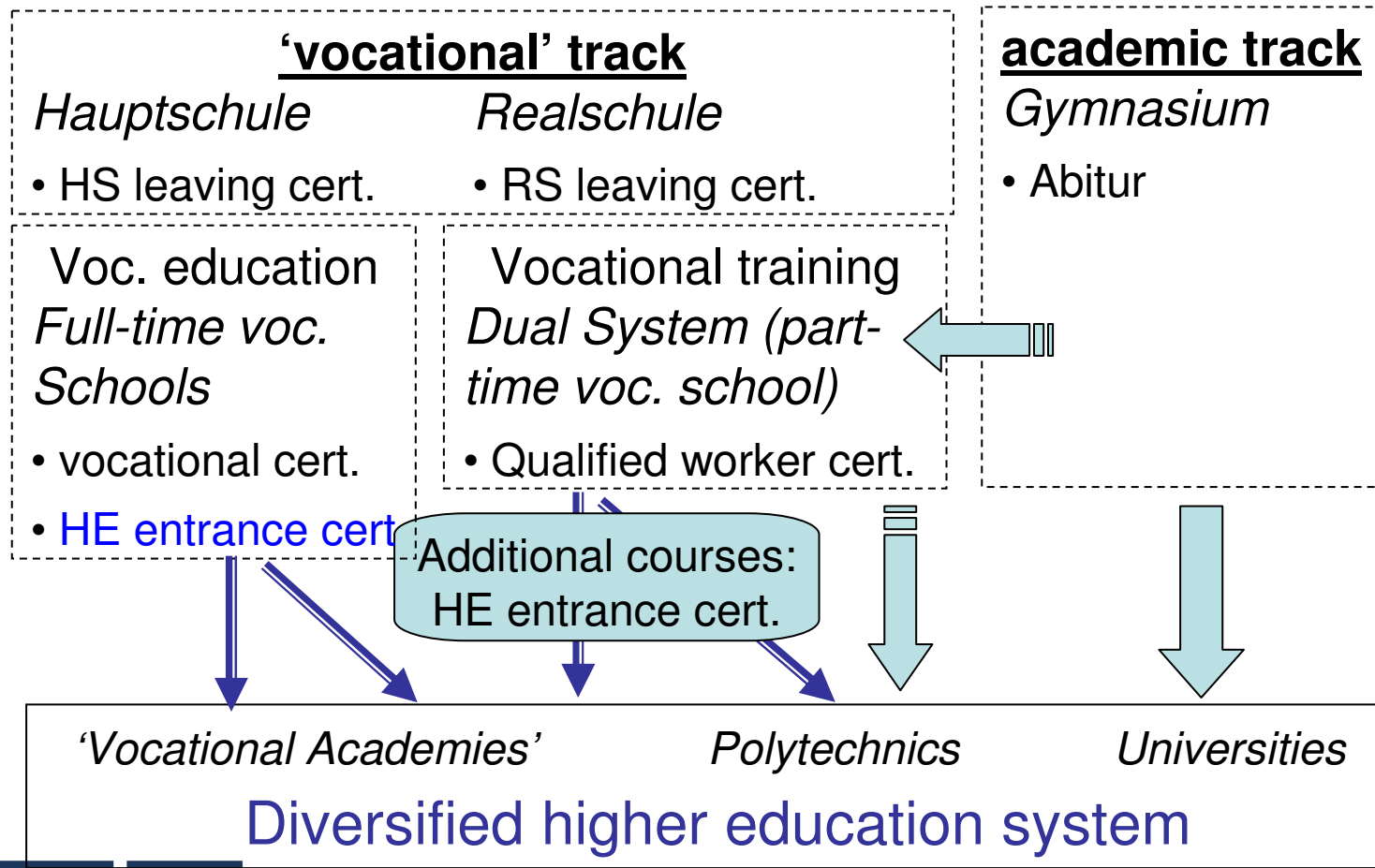


Transitions: Secondary to higher education in England



Transitions: Secondary to higher education in Germany

Early selection in secondary schooling



Transitions in comparative perspective

- High-status academic routes into HE (A-levels / *Abitur* regarded gold-standard)
 - Different status of vocational route (higher in Germany)
 - Formal HE entry level clearly defined in England across tracks (level 3) but HEIs free to select students: vocational qualifications less accepted
 - Mainstream vocational qualifications in Germany do not give access to HE: diverse system of additional qualifications which, however, provide 'real' HE entitlement
- Different ways of attaining, and different values of formal HE entrance qualification



Degrees of Success: Transitions from VET to HE in England

- How many people with vocational qualifications go on to HE?
- At what HEIs and in which programmes do people with a vocational background study?

→ Quantitative analysis of data sets (UCAS, YCS, etc.)

→ Multivariate analysis methods

Systemic perspective: transition landscapes



Degrees of Success: Transitions from VET to HE in England

- What is the experience of students with a vocational background when they make the transition to HE?
- To what extent are these students prepared for studies in HE?

→ Qualitative investigation of student experience at 5 HEIs (interviews, questionnaires, etc.)

→ Institutional diversity: intake patterns, modes of study, regional, institutional type

Pedagogical perspective: learning experience



Degrees of Success: Transitions from VET to HE in England

- How could the transition between VET and HE be smoother and easier to manage?
- What curricular, organisational and pedagogical changes are needed to facilitate the transition between VET and HE?

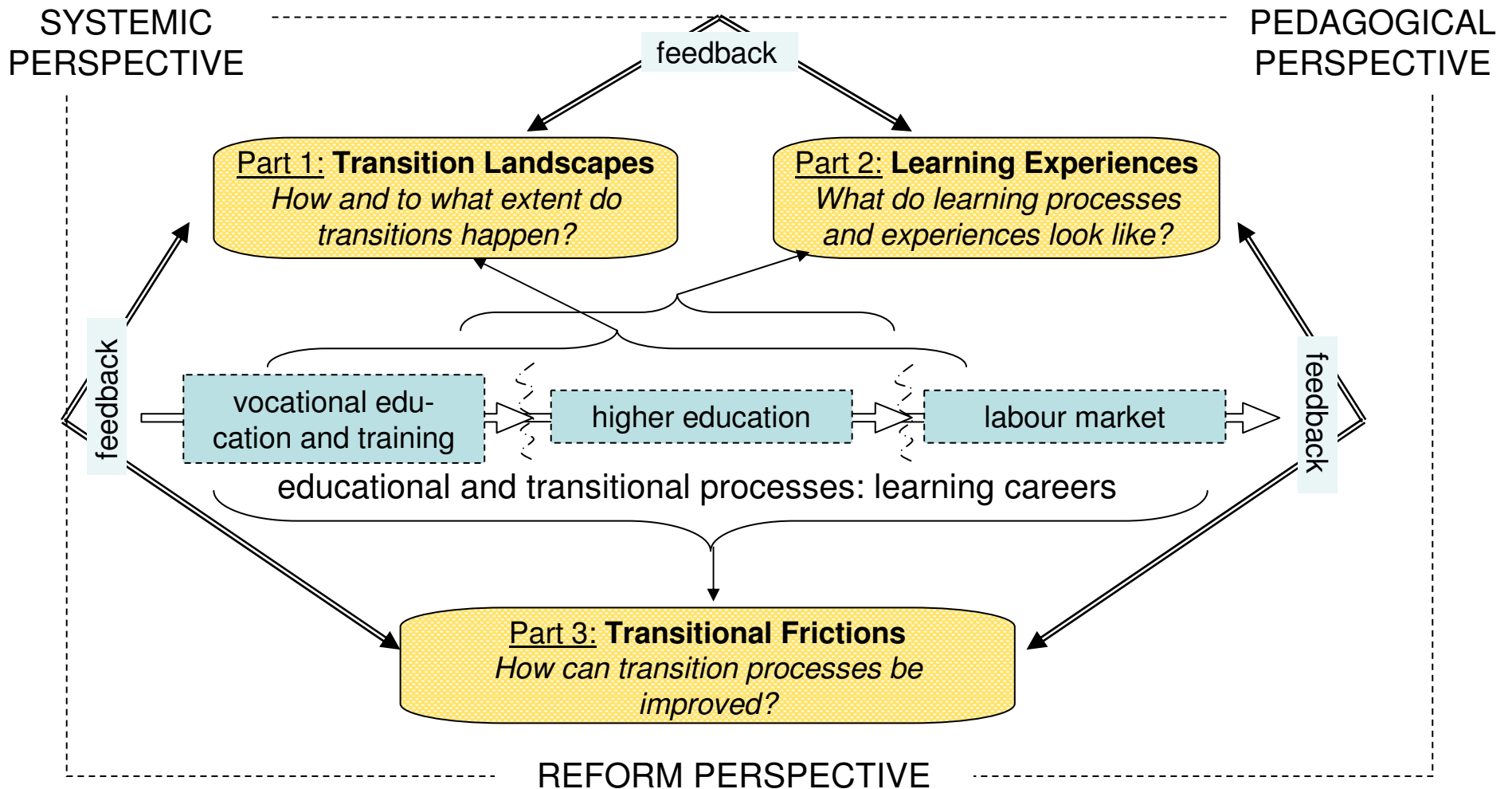
→ User Forums: stakeholders of HE and VET communities (UCAS, QCA, etc.)

→ Involved in refining/posing research questions and disseminating findings

Reform perspective: reducing transitional frictions



Research Design



First results: Transition and educational pathways

	1995	2004
Only A-levels	59.2 %	54.5 % ←
Only vocational	13.7 %	10.8 % ←
Only Foundation- /Access-courses	6.2 %	4.3 %
Only "Other"	3.4 %	6.5 %
A-levels and vocational	3.6 %	6.0 % ←
A-levels and other non-vocational	7.5 %	7.7 %
Any other combination	.0 %	3.9 % ←
No qualification given	6.4 %	6.3 %
<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>369.701</i>	<i>413.334</i>

Source: Analysis of UCAS application datasets

First results: Compositional differences between pathways

- Applicants with VET backgrounds
 - Men are overrepresented
 - Older than A-level-applicants, much younger than FaA-course- and “Other”-applicants
 - Have together with FaA-applicants lowest socio-economic background

→ Big differences within the different pathways concerning “traditional” dimensions of diversity

→ Students with vocational qualifications extremely interesting in terms of diversity/widening participation



First results: learning experience

Learners regard their transition from VET to HE as a particularly critical and difficult decision in their individual learning career. Frequently mentioned difficulties include:

- *decision to enter HE has far-reaching 'social' consequences*
- *lack of preparation within the VET contexts for what is expected of them in HE*
- *demands posed by specific study areas (e.g., mathematics) and/or assessment tools (e.g., essays and portfolios)*
- *finding a balance between their studies, family commitments and the jobs they need to pursue to finance their studies*

→ Support for learners making the transition needs to be responsive to their individual needs. Standardised support mechanisms often fail to provide this.



First results: learning experience

Many HE lecturers have limited awareness about the diversity of the qualification backgrounds of their students and its possible impact. Some observations:

- *general interest in the question of how students with a VET background fare in and upon entering HE*
- *but: lack of knowledge about vocational qualifications*
- *formalised mechanisms for judging the quality of applicants applying with vocational backgrounds/qualifications are often not very transparent*

→ Supporting endeavours in HE to develop better understanding of students' VET backgrounds is a necessary pre-requisite for developing more appropriate approaches to teaching and learning.



... thank you for your interest!

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<http://www.tlrp.org/project%20sites/degrees/index.html>



Preliminary results (I)

- Database

- 1995 and 2004 (covering 10 years)
- UCAS Applicants dataset
- Focus on students with vocational education and training background

(Problem: Variables describing prior qualifications change slightly over time)



First results: Compositional differences between pathways

GENDER

Qualifications	Women	Men
Only A-levels	53.4%	46.6%
Only vocational	49.3%	50.7% ←
Only Foundation- /Access-courses	69.4%	30.6% ←
Only "Other"	55.5%	44.5%
A-levels and vocational	55.6%	44.4%
A-levels and other non-vocational	67.6%	32.4% ←
Any other combination	66.6%	33.4%
<i>Total</i>	55.7%	44.3% ←



First results: Compositional differences between pathways

AGE (in years)

Qualifications	MEAN
Only A-levels	18.7
Only vocational	20.3
Only Foundation- /Access-courses	29.8
Only "Other"	28.9
A-levels and vocational	19.3
A-levels and other non-vocational	22.1
Any other combination	22.7
<i>Total</i>	20.6



First results: Compositional differences between pathways

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (1 = high, 7 = low)

Qualifications	MEAN
Only A-levels	3.1
Only vocational	3.9
Only Foundation- /Access-courses	4.1
Only "Other"	3.6
A-levels and vocational	3.6
A-levels and other non-vocational	2.8
Any other combination	3.4
<i>Total</i>	3.3

