

Degrees of Success –
user engagement and dissemination
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The HE experience of students with
a VET background

Hubert Ertl

Harriet Dunbar-Goddet

Department of Education, University of Oxford



The Project

Degrees of Success aims to investigate the ways in which people with Vocational Qualifications (VQs) make the transition to Higher Education (HE)

1) Landscapes of Transition

Analysis of large-scale datasets to determine transition patterns and factors influencing transitions into and progress within HE

2) Learning Experience

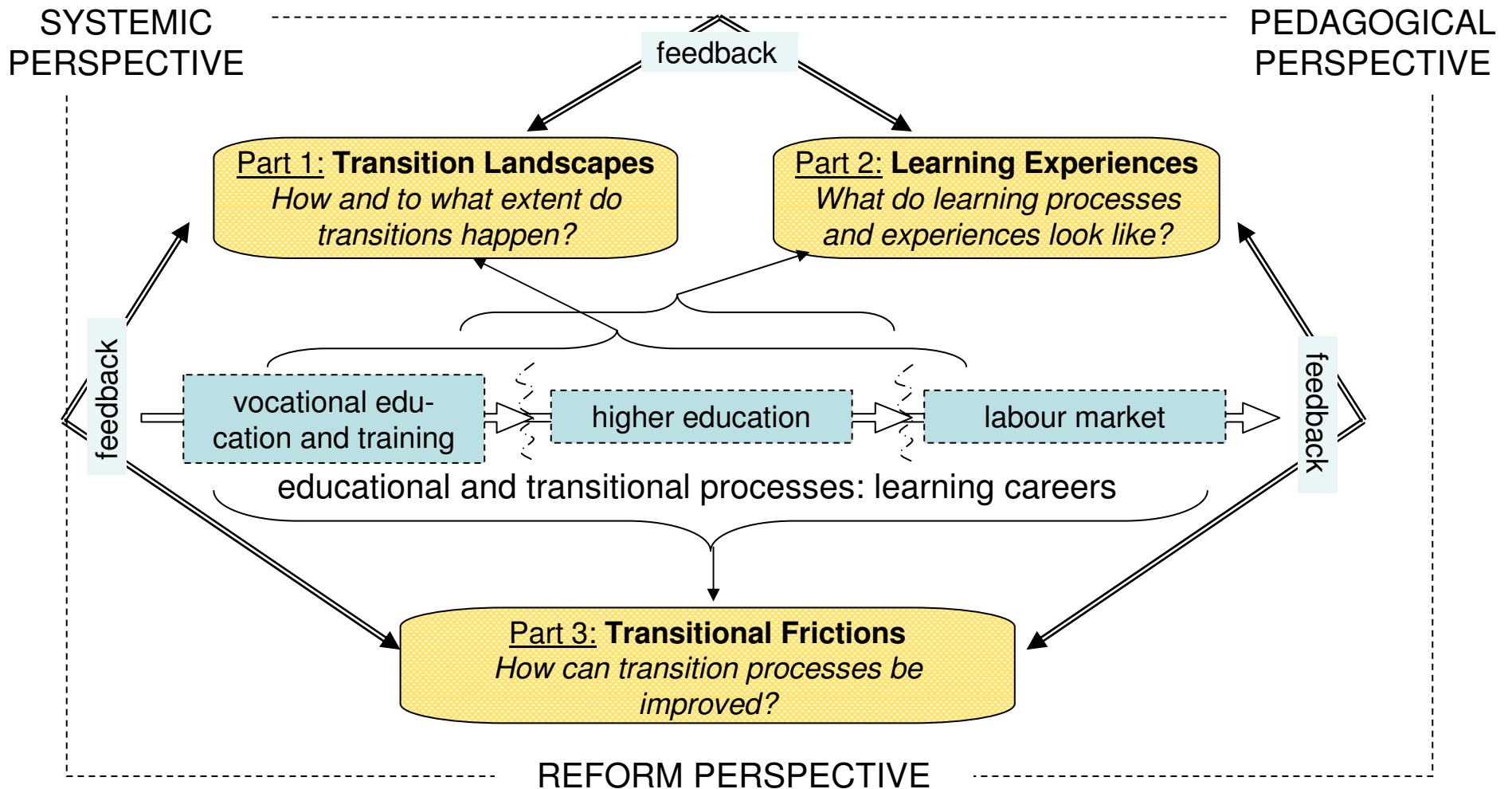
Questionnaires and interviews with students and HE staff to examine the ways the experience of diverse students group in the first year of their studies

3) User Forums

Discussion of findings and development of strategies with VET and HE user groups



Research Design



Learning Experience

This part of the project compares and contrasts the background of students with vocationally and academically-oriented entry qualifications, and their respective experiences of the learning environments provided by HEIs:

- What are the **expectations** of students with a vocational background when they make the transition to HE?
- To what extent are these students **prepared** for studies in HE?
- What mechanisms are in place to remedy any lack of preparation?
- What are the main factors that shape the HE experience of these students?



Sample: Subjects

- Business
- Computing
- Nursing

→ Considerations: offered by our 5 HEIs, gender distribution, sizable proportion of students coming from VET, ...



Sample: Institutions

HEI 1: medium-sized, Post-92 University; South East England; students with varied qualification background; achievable entry standards; local catchment area

HEI 2: large, Pre-92, campus University; East of England; high entry standards; students from across the UK

HEI 3: large, Post-92, city-based University, Scotland; predominantly local catchment area; well-stated widening participation agenda; high entry requirements

HEI 4: small FE College, North West England; local catchment area; students with very few prior qualifications; provides opportunities to progress into HE at the college, in partnership with local universities

HEI 5: large FE College, Scotland; local catchment area; students with very few prior qualifications; provides opportunities to progress into HE within or outwith the institution



Questionnaires

- 1) Transition into HE Questionnaire
- 2) Expectations of HE Questionnaire

Areas of investigation:

- different educational and social backgrounds of students
- expectations with which students start their studies
- different perceptions of their new learning environment
- perceived degree to which students feel prepared for their course by their previous educational pathway
- challenges encountered in the first year of studies
- students' perceptions of the teaching modes and of learning support experienced



Questionnaires

Responses across institutions and subjects:

	HEI 1	HEI 2	HEI 3	HEI 4	HEI 5	Total
Business	91	73	132	15	31	359
Computing	108	73	156	12	37	369
Nursing	155	59	-	34	129	377
Total	354	205	288	61	197	1105

Questionnaires

Qualification pathways:

Qualification Pathways	Proportion of students in our sample (%)	Proportion of UK students applying to HE (%)
Only A-levels or Scottish Highers	41.6	54.5
Only vocational qualifications	11.9	10.8
Only Foundation-/ Access course	4.4	4.3
Only 'other qualification'	4.1	6.5
A-levels/Scottish Highers and vocational	12.1	6.0
A-levels/Scottish Highers and other non-voc.	11.0	7.7
Any other combination	9.0	3.9
No qualification given	5.8	6.3
Total number of applicants		413,334

Questionnaires

Qualification pathways across 3 English HEIs:

Qualification Pathways	% of students at HEI 1 (Post-92)	% of students at HEI 2 (Pre-92)	% of students at HEI 4 (FE College)
Only A-levels or Scottish Highers	38.4	46.8	6.6
Only vocational qualifications	9.6	11.7	26.2
Only Foundation-/ Access course	7.9	10.2	0
Only 'other qualification'	5.6	4.9	8.2
A-levels/Scottish Highers and vocat.	12.1	5.9	6.6
A-levels/Scottish Highers and other non-vocational	1.7	2.9	1.6
Any other combination	17.5	15.6	19.7
No qualification given	7.1	2.0	31.1

Questionnaires

Qualification pathways – age differentiation

Age Range	Academic	Vocational	FaA	Ac+ Voc	...	Overall
Under 18	30 6.5%	4 3.1%	0	3 2.3%	...	75 7%
18-21	391 85%	64 48.9%	18 37.5%	82 62.1%	...	718 65%
22-25	22 4.8%	14 10.7%	10 20.8%	21 15.9%	...	127 12%
26-30	11 2.4%	13 9.9%	2 4.2%	12 9.1%	...	56 5%
Over 30	6 1.3%	36 27.5%	18 37.5%	14 10.6%	...	123 11%
Totals	460	131	48	132	...	1099

Questionnaires

Preparation for studying:

Item 12a: Preparation	1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how prepared you feel for your current course (1=unprepared, 5=well-prepared)</i>	1.8%	5.3%	37.3%	42.9%	12.7%	100

Item 12a: Preparation	Acad- emic	Vocat- ional	FaA	Ac+ Voc	Over- all
<i>Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how prepared you feel for your current course (1=unprepared,5=well-prepared)</i>	3.50 (.80)	3.64 (.86)	3.42 (1.08)	3.68 (.81)	3.59 (.84)

→ No significant differences according to pathways

Questionnaires

Preparation for studying – Sources

(Item 12b: *What makes you feel prepared?*)

Pathway	Category	% within pathway
Academic	Academic preparatory work	25.77
	Prior qualification	24.23
	Advice and guidance	19.07
	Motivation and family support	11.86
	Prior work experience	10.82
	Time and activity organization	8.25
	Total	
Vocational	Academic preparatory work	10.17
	Prior qualification	16.95
	Advice and guidance	22.03
	Motivation and family support	11.86
	Prior work experience	15.25
	Time and activity organization	23.73
	Total	

Questionnaires

Preparation for studying – Sources

(Item 12c: *What makes you feel **unprepared**?*)

Pathway	Category	% within pathway
Vocational	Lack of academic skills and confidence	32.2
	Lack of personal organisation and motivation	20.34
	Lack of information and guidance	13.56

- Sources of preparation differ according to qualification pathways
- Information and guidance seems to be particularly important for students with VET background

Questionnaires

Expectations:

Items 15b and 18b: Expectations of ...	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Course: <i>Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how far expectations have been met to date (1=not met, 5=completely met)</i>	6.4%	7.9%	39.9%	35.6%	10.2%	100%
HEI: <i>Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how far expectations have been met to date (1=not met, 5=completely met)</i>	2.3%	5.6%	33.6%	40.6%	17.9%	100%

Items 15b and 18b: Expectations of ...	Acad- emic	Vocat- ional	FaA	Ac+ Voc	Over- all
Course: <i>Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how far expectations have been met to date (1=not met, 5=completely met)</i>	3.33 (.96)	3.31 (1.04)	3.15 (.86)	3.37 (.98)	3.35 (.99)
HEI: <i>Please indicate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how far expectations have been met to date (1=not met, 5=completely met)</i>	3.63 (.85)	3.59 (.96)	3.32 (1.07)	3.76 (.91)	3.66 (.91)

→ No significant differences according to pathways

Questionnaires

Expectations – Specific areas

(Item 18a: *Please tell us what expectations you have of your University/College*)

Pathway	Category	% within pathway
Academic	Provide a qualification	24.61
	Provide a learning environment	31.94
	Provide support and guidance	18.32
	Provide facilities or resources	12.04
	Provide a social environment	9.95
	No expectations	3.14
	Total	
Vocational	Provide a qualification	13.64
	Provide a learning environment	29.55
	Provide support and guidance	27.27
	Provide facilities or resources	4.55
	Provide a social environment	4.55
	No expectations	20.45
	Total	



Questionnaires

Expectations of courses and institutions:

- Expectations of students to a certain extent dependent on previous learning experience
- Assessment of what HEIs offer positive across student groups
- Information and guidance expected particularly by students with VET background



Interviews

- Lecturers / teaching staff
- Admissions tutors
- Students (mainly with VET background):
 - educational, social and personal backgrounds of students
 - motives of students in applying to study in HE
 - the coherence/discrepancy between their previous and current learning experiences
 - perception of support for their studies
 - links between previous knowledge and experience and current learning



Student Interviews

Student support in their current learning environment?

There is plenty of support available here. The lecturers were very helpful and approachable. (...) The lecturers were also always available out of the classroom as well.
(Andrea, Business, HEI4)

When I got the results of the first exams, my tutor knew that I got trouble with the examinations. (...) The tutor gave me the examination booklet to see how exam techniques might helped me (...)
(Franni, Business, HEI4)



Student Interviews

Student support in their current learning environment?

*I did not see any advisor during the whole of my placement at all (...) I did not know what to do when I had difficulties.
(Jenny, Nursing, HEI2)*

*I assumed that tutors know about students' background, but as classes are just huge (...) there is limited scope for tutors to communicate personally with the students. (...) Students help each other and have good relationships (...)
(Garry, Business, HEI1)*

Student Interviews

Link between previous knowledge and experience and current learning?

Lecturers consider students to be of their own level. (...) They lecturers prefer students who have previous experiences and are able to contribute, to those who do not have any experience.

(Angela, Nursing, HEI2)

Lecturers have never asked me to share my experience of working as an auxiliary nurse.' (...) On Fridays we have a system of learning from the other students in the facilitation group. This works very well because listening to lectures can be monotonous and boring.'

(Jenny, Nursing, HEI2)



Student Interviews

Link between previous knowledge and experience and current learning?

I worked full time while doing my college qualification (...) and was self-employed as hair dresser as well. These work experiences have helped in my current study. (...) A number of people in my class are 5 to 6 years younger than me, have no work experience (...) and struggle. (...) Practical application of knowledge helps to understand the course (...)

(Sara, Business, HEI3)

Workshop 1

What support do students need to navigate successfully through their HE studies and into the labour market?

Group 1: What kind of support do VET students need at the different stages of their HE studies?

Group 2: Which actors in HE can provide which kinds of support?

Group 3: What kinds of support are required by which group of students?

Please join the group in which you can best use your expertise. Please prepare to report your group results back to the plenary in 35 minutes.

