

Best of Both Worlds or Falling Between two Stools? The case of hybrid qualifications in England.

Hybrid Qualifications – Increasing the Value of Vocational
Education and Training in the Context of Lifelong Learning

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Structure

- Focus of empirical study
- Overview perceptions of hybridity
- Design, delivery and assessment
- Student and provider perspectives
- Perspectives from employment
- Issues affecting prospects for HQs
- Conclusions

Focus of empirical study

- Perceptions and attitudes
- Experiences of hybrid qualifications
- Challenges and opportunities
- Best practice

Perceptions of hybridity (1)

- Lack of clear identity – falling between two stools

“I don’t think it’s (HQ) a great concept, no. I think they are happy accidents if you like uhm when they do coincide...you just need to be careful...you end up trying to be all things to all men [sic] and that’s a fatal mistake to make” (SM Exam Bd)
- The story of the Advanced Diploma

Perceptions of hybridity (2)

- But the HQ model can integrate theory and practice which is valued by tutors, students and (some) employers
 - “...in Health and Social Care it’s the work experience opportunity, because they get to do 100 hours in real settings, which means that 1) they get an opportunity to see what the job actually might entail, which is useful to them obviously, and they get a big opportunity to put theory into practice in real working environments” (Programme Leader, Health and Social Care)

Perceptions of hybridity (3)

- Advanced Apprenticeship located in the employment paradigm
- Strong LM linkage but progression to HE more difficult

“Employers are convinced because people do it in the workplace. It’s convincing HE that’s the challenge” (NAS)

Perceptions of hybridity (4)

- BTEC Nationals – occupying a distinctive hybrid space?
- Experience of a successful qualification shapes perceptions of HQs at an ideational level.
- Offers “the rigour of an A-level but the flexibility of an NVQ” (awarding body) – accrues UCAS points
- At ‘best’ offers ‘best of both worlds’ but lack of standardisation, sectoral differences leads to variation
- A successful brand, established over time



Design, delivery and assessment

- Potential for flexibility greater in hybrid model in comparison with A level
- Potential for enrichment within and beyond the core programme
- Course work vs exams
- Danger of overly complex models – Advanced Diploma
- Apprenticeship designed around outcomes not processes



Student and provider perspectives (1)

- Appeal of practical learning and currency for entry to HE
- Preparation for industry/sector and HE

“I quite like the BTEC because it prepares you for the industry you’re going into... you’ve got work experience...units that are relevant to what you’re doing, it all adds up...if it’s higher education or straight on to working” (BTEC National Diploma, health and social care)

Student and provider perspectives (2)

- Tutor support – student-centred approaches
- Work experience – variable opportunities, sectoral and local differences
- Institutional positioning – contrast between sixth form college and FE college
- Lack of standardisation – the same course experienced very differently in different institutions

Perspectives from employment – Clare's Story

- Local authority, social care sector
- Fragility of post-16 system, weak safety net
- Serendipity (employer attitude to training and progression)
- Scope for individual agency
- Tension between competence-based qualification, model of work organisation and progression – easy to get stuck
- Importance of general educational attainment

Perspectives from Employment: Managers

- Recognition of value of hybrid model for social care theory and practice important for quality of care, career progression and ability to meet changing organisational/sectoral needs
- Workforce development and progression often impeded by division between VET and HE systems
- Entry requirements differ by HE institution – employer needs flexible, collaborative approach

Good Practice

- Integration of theory and practice
- Currency of qualification(s) for employment and HE – dual/multiple awards
- Example 1: bachelor degree with NVQ3
- Example 2: enrichment of BTEC National programme with employment-relevant awards
- Example 3: Combined A level(s) and VQ

Issues affecting the prospects for HQs (1)

- Fragile identity within a segmented qualification market
- Importance of brand (private ABs) in a 'marketised' system
- Lack of standardisation – likely to be reinforced by Wolf Review
- 'Education logic' dominates transition system despite academic pathway being minority route (stratification)
- Linkages between vocational education and employment generally weak – reflecting limited labour market regulation

Issues affecting the prospects for HQs (2)

- Apprenticeship characterised by ‘employment logic’ which affects progression to HE (very small pathway in England)
- Relevance of sectoral/occupational recruitment and career traditions and practices
- ‘Good’ hybrid models emerge through local improvisation and creativity and ‘trust relations’ between educational institutions and employers

Conclusions

- HQs in England fall short of strong definition for HE & LM
- AQs fall short of strong definition for progression to HE too
- Full access to LM depends on sector traditions/conditions including regulation – value of qualifications contingent/dynamic
- Limitations of L3 as fulfilling HQ status – but L4/5?
- Issues with concept of HQ suggest dual qualifications may have more potential

Implications?

- HQ findings expose dominance and weakness of linear, vertical models of articulation which characterise existing transition system
- Ladder of progression works straightforwardly for academic pathway but not for vocational and work-based pathways (when often have to go down before going up)
- Need to replace ladder with climbing frame model to capture and facilitate routes involving horizontal as well as vertical progression pathways