

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

Country Report: England
University of Southampton
28-29 June 2010

Alison Fuller and Gayna Davey

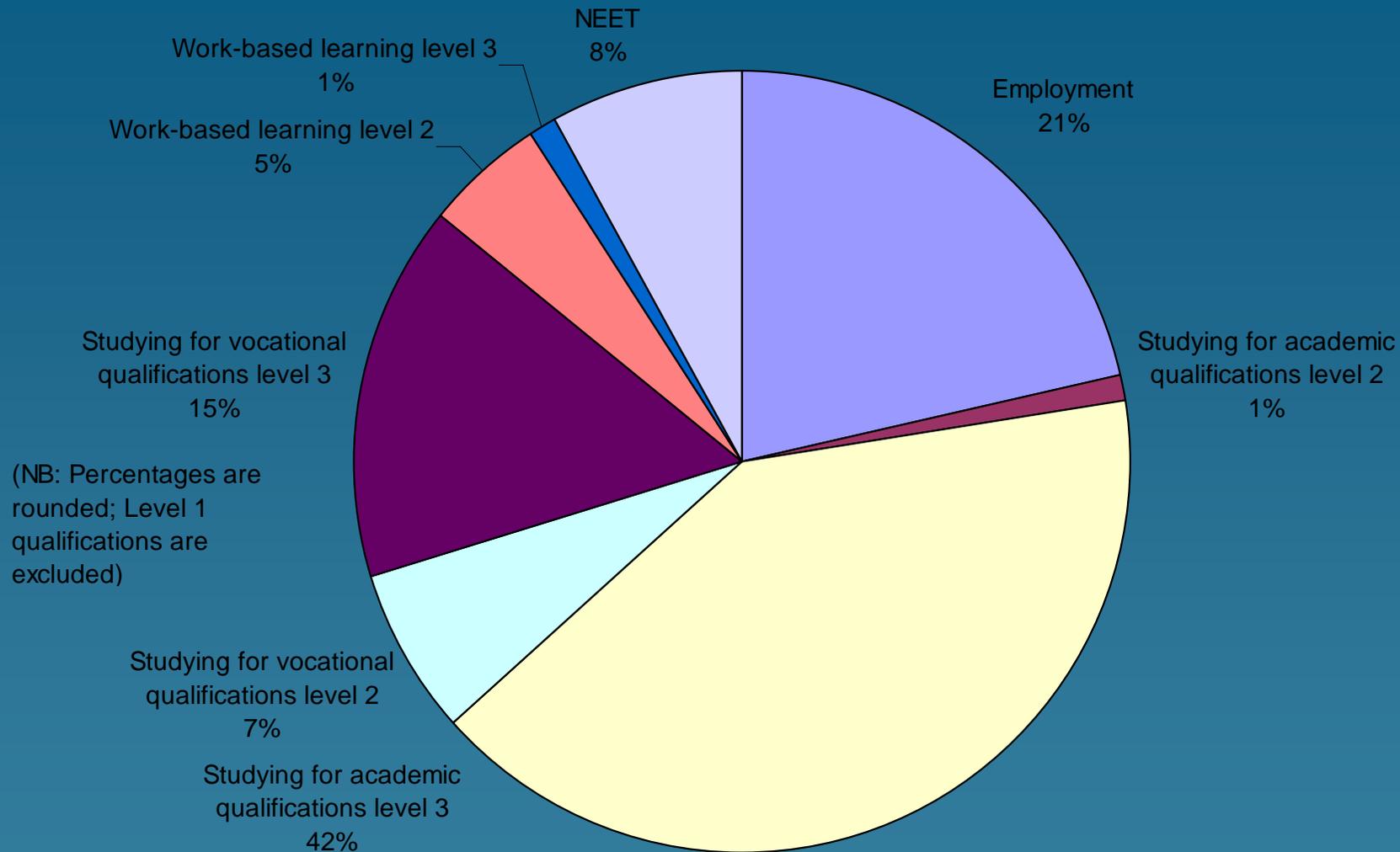
Backdrop

- The aftermath of a General Election and transition to a new coalition government
- Uncertainty as to the policy remit and future direction
- The raising of the participation age from 16 to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015
- Increasing differentiation at 14 (KS4) (14-19 reform)

Setting the parameters within which to identify 'hybridity'

- The concept of 'level'
Constructs which aim to equate disparate types of attainment within one rubric
'Level' is not necessarily a straightforward indication as to the meaning, worth and exchange-value of qualifications as they are constructed through practice
- National Qualifications Framework (NQF)
An umbrella for the spectrum of academic, vocational and occupational qualifications from L1 to L8, basic to doctoral level
- Our primary focus is on Level 3 – normal entry to HE – pursued mainly by 16-18 year olds but also adults
- QCF launched in 2008, currently only populated with (some) VQs

Snapshot of young people's activity (aged 17 in 2008) (data drawn from YCS/LSYPE/SFR)



Academic qualifications as sorting and sifting young people

- Achievement at 16 – an important performance indicator and channelling device but sorting started much earlier (KS1, KS2, KS3 levels)
- The symbolic and cultural capital wrapped up in ‘5 good GCSEs’
- Qualification route to Level 3- dominated by GCE A level
- Although a growing number of vocationally-related qualifications – poorly represented through UCAS tariff
- Paucity of data available
- Recent increase in apprenticeships as part of government concern with UK’s ‘skills’ position relative to other OECD nations (180 sectors)
- Although not a qualification in itself, the Advanced Apprenticeship programme is positioned as a full Level 3 programme and in theory includes two Level 3 qualifications!

Progression to Higher Education

- Prior attainment of 5 'good' GCSEs followed by 3 or 4 A levels remains the most common 'standard' route to HE
- Entry to HE via vocational routes – highlighted within recent policy initiatives e.g. Lifelong Learning Networks
- Hoelscher et al. found that transitions from vocational routes to HE are associated with 'post-1992' institutions
- Gittoes tracked BTEC National qualifiers – 41% progressed to some form of undergraduate study and 42% to study within a further education (FE) college (HEFCE 2007)
- Gittoes tracked Advanced Apprentices who progressed to HE within one year of completing their programme. Between 2002-3 and 2004-5 an average of 5% progressed to HE (HEFCE 2009)

Progression to the Labour Market

- Policy focus is on transitions to HE – limited data available on transitions to employment with VQs
- McIntosh (2004) found that attaining vocational qualifications at any level improves labour market opportunities for young people, but...few unqualified school leavers pursue vocational qualifications
- Positive wage returns for VQs (e.g. BTEC) at L3
- Approximately 90% of apprentices in employment on completion of programme, positive wage returns

Contextual Factors

- The UCAS 'currency converter' fails to reflect the full range of Level 3 qualifications; HE entry criteria still often ask for A level grades
- Difficult to establish the worth of qualifications as routes to particular HE institutions/courses as exchange value is contingent within fairly autonomous and hierarchical institutional structure and tradition
- The Advanced Apprenticeship is positioned as a full Level 3 programme, but does not attract UCAS currency in its own right – most qualifications included in AA frameworks are not in the tariff
- Routes to the labour market - dynamic and context dependent (e.g. sectoral traditions, regulation, professional bodies)
- Two examples: accountancy and retail

Funding

- A complex system for 14-19 resource allocation
- Further complicated by the very recent 'LibCon' coalition and uncertainty as to future strategy
- At present, funding allocated according to a 'demand-led model' which distributes resources according to costs associated with delivery of a programme
- Funding for post-16 provision is more complex due to the loss of resource suffered if students fail to complete their programme of study
- Funding is a key lever over provider behaviour

Didactic patterns/assessment/curriculum

- The notion of 'Guided Learning Hours' (GLH) as a measure of qualifications' substance relative to others'
- Academic qualifications externally-assessed and with a combination of coursework and examination (pass grades = A* to E) – different awarding bodies involved
- Academic qualifications are 'self-standing', so students may take a number of GCE A levels, for example, and failure in one will not jeopardise their attainment in others
- BTEC and OCR programmes – assessed by assignments and projects by teachers or trainers available in three sizes: award, certificate and diploma (6, 12 and 18 units); single awarding body involved
- Students must attain passes for all units in order to attain the qualification (units graded as Pass, Merit and Distinction)
- Curriculum based on National Occupational Standards
- Labelled as 'vocational', but very little work experience mandated

Cont.

- The newly implemented Advanced Diploma – comprises ‘principal learning’ (related to the student’s chosen occupational field); ‘generic learning’ (functional skills in English, maths and ICT, together with a project); and ‘additional and specialist learning’ (students may opt to take a BTEC or GCE A level for example). 10 days’ work experience is included as part of the ‘generic learning’
- Advanced Apprenticeship consists of competence-based component (NVQ3), knowledge-based component (Technical Certificate) and other bits and pieces; apprentices normally have day-release option, most have time away from the ‘work-station’

Conclusions (1)

- The qualifications we have investigated have different levels of currency for exchange in the labour market and higher education
- Their worth is often established in practice and through time
- Two paradigms have been identified: education and employment – and the challenge within the English system is to transcend the longstanding legacy of the academic/vocational divide through a ‘hybrid’ paradigm’
- Our analysis presents three candidates for ‘hybrid status’ at L3
 - Advanced Diploma
 - BTEC Nationals/OCRs
 - Advanced Apprenticeships (Expansive model)

Conclusions (2)

- Phase 2 of this research will seek to explore the strengths and weaknesses of these potential candidates for 'hybridity' as they are experienced and understood in policy and practice