

Time on Trowel: The demise of skills in VET under Coalition
Government

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ABSTRACT

Following the Wolf Report (2011) the Coalition Government (2010-2015) introduced a range of policy reforms to Further Education vocational courses with the aim of streamlining provision and simplifying the qualifications framework. This qualitative study explores the impact of these reforms on curriculum and skills delivery, and on student experiences and progression.

It takes as a case study five Level Three vocational pathways (IT; Construction; Engineering; Childcare; Hair and Beauty) within one Further Education College in the North-East of England. It traces the development of the reforms in a context of both existing practices and prior policy. It explores how curriculum planning, skills delivery, and assessment have been transformed, and considers the views, garnered through individual interviews with students, tutors and local employers, in terms of their experiences and expectations of the new vocational courses.

Examination of policy revealed that while there was some continuity of existing practices in content and delivery on the ground, key differences emerged in terms of course specifications: these were removal of vocational specificity and more generalisation of skills. This study has revealed a tension between academic and vocational content of the courses, with a perception that theory has been put before skills: Tutors reported frustrations over altered pedagogical methods necessitated by the changes, with difficulties in reconciling what they saw as a skills-free curriculum with the employability agendas core to their teaching. Students viewed what they saw as academic content as less engaging and wanted more hands-on experience, but nonetheless felt their courses made them more employable. Employers saw students as emerging with fewer skills.

These findings are significant in terms of current thinking in FE policy which has returned to a focus on skills in the design of vocational courses and suggests these might align better with pedagogical expertise and student needs.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to attempt to determine the effects of policy / curriculum change on outcomes of Level 3 vocational pathways within FE under the Coalition Government (CG). It aims to:

- Gain understanding via critical examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the policy changes in Level 3 Vocational provision by the Coalition Government and in particular how those impacted in terms of skills delivery in the classroom.
- Generate insights into outcomes in terms of both changes in related employment and learner progress both before and during the policy changes
- Develop understanding of how these curriculum changes affected the employability of learners, and
- Gain insight into employers' expectations and perceptions of the changes to qualifications, and into learner experiences

1.1 Summary of the background to the study

In this study I present a case of the possible outcomes of vocational education and training (VET) policy reforms from 2010 – 2015 within one single instance of a Further Education college (FEC) in the North. This study examines the effects of policy reforms in different level 3 vocational pathways and the outcomes for learners, tutors and employers in the region. The study offers a view of the implementation of policy changes at the chalkface. Focus points of the study include a history and overview of VET policy and reforms, analysis of employment and destination data for FEC leavers, analysis of curriculum material, and a discussion on what form vocational skills took. The primary focus is on the experiences and views of the students, tutors and employers in order to understand the impacts of the reforms. Semi structured interviews provide the insights to experiences of what, if any, changes happened.

This chapter begins by examining the policy levers and drivers for VET reforms in the last three decades to understand the purpose and shape of the reforms within a historical and economic context.

Second a review of the literature on VET and policy provides a view on the debate on the shape and value of vocational education and skills provision and reforms and provide a critical outline on developments within the field of VET.

In the final section, having established what the levers were and how these manifested at the chalkface, I explore the structures that shape the courses. A general discussion of the qualification frameworks that are funded by the government and the frequency of change is followed by a review of the level 3 courses and options for 16-19 years olds within the studied years.

While in employment teaching in Further Education (FE) I experienced many versions of qualification format and structure, including three overarching qualification frameworks. In 2010, when the Coalition Government (CG) were in power, FE experienced a dramatic change in learner profiles and course structures as substantial funding was cut from vocational provision and adult students ceased to be funded in Levels 2 (GCSE level 14-16 years) and 3 (A level, 16-18 years). The vocational courses which maintained funding took a much more general shape in terms of content and assessment, focussing on a range of soft skills and less industry specific design. The CG claimed that the previous framework course models did not reflect the needs of their industry and that rigour and responsiveness were priorities. So, by changing the funding for learner age groups, changing the qualification frameworks and changing the format of the vocational courses, my experience was that the CG changed the student and teacher experience within the classroom. I wanted to explore what the views and experiences of key stakeholders (students, vocational tutors and employers) were and what they could tell us about the impact of the reforms. It was essential to determine the definition of skills by all three groups so that an assessment could be made of whether these interpretations of skills had been delivered on their course. Some vocational subjects such as Childcare, Hair & Beauty or Catering led directly into related employment and the A level route to Higher education (HE), but for the Business and Technology Council (BTEC) students, the intended destinations were arguably less clear.

The proposed trajectories of the learners are important in this study whether it is into HE or employment, the views from the learners will garner an understanding of progression from the student perspective. With growing numbers of vocational students entering HE in the UK, it could be an indication that it is a more popular destination than employment. The socio-economic background of a student can reflect their post-16 choices (OECD, 2010) and Sammons, Toth and Sylvia (2015) further suggest that students who live in poor areas are less likely to go on to HE than those in affluent areas. It is these students who make up the bulk of learners in FE. The CG attempted to address this by the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) which meant that unless a young adult was working, they must stay in education until they are 18. Students make choices about progression and assume that their chosen level 3 course will lead them to their desired

destination. It is the tensions behind the reforms and their outcomes that are of interest in this study.

The face of FE has undergone many changes through different governments and its status elevated as more focus on skills became popular “No longer marginalised between school and HE, FE has become part of a seamless policy connecting schooling, HE and work-related learning” (Gleeson et al, 2005, p.448). FECs have a long history with providing VET and their focus on providing popular science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses. Ainley and Allen (2010) term post compulsory education and training (PCET) as an extension to education and “education for employability” (p59). They suggest that what were traditionally seen as academic subjects moved to include a number of vocational elements such as work placements. As a result, Brown & Carasso (2013) claim that HE courses could be “broadly described as ‘vocational’” (p.7). The BTEC is the second most common route into HE (WVPC, 2014)

Policy levers for reforms in VET can include international competitiveness (and the UK’s weak position in this) and education league tables. Bosworth (2014) in describing the situation said:

it could be argued that the most pressing priority is to accelerate the rate of reduction in the size of the long “tail” of the low skilled in the UK population; both by supporting the progression of those already in the labour force and helping them to move up into the intermediate band, as well as by minimising the proportion of new entrants to the labour market who lack attainment at upper secondary level (p vii).

Increasing participation ages in education and providing an education that allows for progression to HE are two ways in which this tail can be approached.

There is much literature on the definition of skills and particularly in relation to young adults and employment, and much in relation to Widening Participation (WP) – initially devised in 1998, a Government initiative to broaden the intake to HE from more diverse backgrounds. The definition of skills was varied and the source of much discussion with further debate on what constitutes core skills and soft skills, or what the Department of Education (DfE) term ‘character’ skills. Identifying the definition and perception of skills is important to this study along with funding strategies from the government that drives them so that I could examine if these changes had any impact on the employment outcomes of the FE leavers. I was interested in policy changes prior to the CG to compare with those rolled out by the CG and wanted to see how those policies and reforms affected the shape of the level 3 courses and their content and structures.

The study took place during a time of sea change in FE. The UK was recovering from the recession in 2008, unemployment was still high and education budgets were being cut by successive

governments. The CG introduced several initiatives and reforms that affected FEC's directly including:

- Funding for change of qualification frameworks (2011)
- Removal of funding for adults at Level 2 and Level 3
- Wolf Report and her review of Vocational Education (2011)
- Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) (2013,2015)
- Increase of tuition fees in HE (2010)

VET provision in the UK evolves continually to meet the criteria and priorities of the governments in power and is seen to be shaped by new and legacy ideologies.

Since FECs came under the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) after the Learning and Skills Act 2000, there remains a tension between student achievement and pedagogical methods and the facilitation of learning. Courses became more dominated by their Learning Outcomes (LOs) and assessment criteria than by a holistic experience for the learner in the classroom. (Thompson, 2019, Lau, 2016))

1.2 Stating the research questions

While I was teaching in FE I experienced many changes in policy, qualifications and the effects of reforms which resulted in a change of my pedagogical practice and also the learner profile. I wanted to explore the changes from policy to chalkface and get a better understanding of the effects on a range of courses and the views of relative stakeholders. Hence, my interests were in examining:

1. What do the views and experiences of key stakeholders tell us about the impact of the reforms?
2. Is there evidence to suggest that any changes in employment outcomes can be attributed to the introduction of the reforms.
3. What shape did skills take under the reforms in terms of course delivery

Addressing the first question I intended to analyse the type of employment gained by the level 3 learners before and during the period of change (2010 -2015); this also encompassed assessing the views and experiences of employers' and students' understanding of skills and whether they were delivered. The second question was addressed by analysing employment data both locally and nationally and also progression data. Viable pathways are considered for these students and whether their progression choices were driven by impact of the reforms is analysed. The final question was addressed by interviews with all three sample groups and focus included understanding the perceptions of skills and delivery of skills and what, if any, impact this had in terms of successful related employment.

1.3 Outline of strategies & techniques used

This study began with an exploration of literature in VET reforms primarily by CG but also the previous government, New Labour for context. At the time of the start of the study, there was very little material available as the reforms were current, thus no historic data for analysis of the impacts or effects existed. It was not until later on in the study that academic studies started to appear, including research papers and articles. To support my research, I undertook an analysis of employment trends both locally and nationally. This had to be done retrospectively as the study started in 2012, and the period I was concerned with was 2010-2015. I undertook a pilot study consisting of interviews with students in 2014 to get a feel for responses, views and relevance. Later, in 2016 I conducted semi-structured interviews with three groups of participants: students, tutors and employers. As my case study was focussed in the FEC in which I worked at that time, the former two groups were accessible to me with ease; the latter proved a little more difficult, but I used contacts in the FE to help initiate leads. The larger national companies were more difficult to engage. I did however manage to interview a range of employers, five sectors, three different sized companies for each sector: small, medium and large. I interviewed 15 tutors; a senior tutor from each of the disciplines and two other tutors. All of the teaching staff had been employed at the FE since before the CG came into power and taught under different governments and different exam boards and qualification frameworks, which was necessary for a comparative view. The disciplines were; Engineering, Construction, Information Technology (IT), Childcare, and Hair & Beauty (H&B). Through the interviews I was able to identify repeating groups of information which I coded and then undertook an analysis on this coded data. Having identified the themes, I combined these with the findings from the curriculum material analysis, the employment analysis and the literature review then started my write up.

1.4 Structure of the thesis.

The next chapter is a review of the literature. It starts with discussion on some background of key developments in educational policy, education reforms, curriculum development and a historical view of reforms within the vocational education arena for the purpose of perspective. This is significant because it outlines the constant changes in VET under many governments and also provides context to the more in-depth discussion on VET under the Coalition Government (CG). The chapter then moves on to examine the neoliberal approach by the government and how this was related to educational reform. Gender and class are examined, and Young is used as a

framework for the study. The chapter will include an examination of key debates that commentators have engaged in and influential factors for educational policy changes, drawing theories about these policies through the research.

Chapter three provides an account of the understanding of the term skills. A key issue in VET has been what skills consist of, what value they have for employers and also how they contribute in the workplace. This chapter seeks to establish a common interpretation for use within the study. Chapter four is a discussion of my philosophical viewpoint and methodology. The aim of this section is to justify my methodological approach, the data gathering and analysis techniques relating to the various stakeholders included in the study and considers the issues of validity. The chapter also provides an account of the mixed-study approach adopted for this research as employment trends are examined and an analysis of curriculum assessment material are considered alongside the qualitative findings.

Data analysis on curriculum assessment material is undertaken in chapter five, A key concern in this study is the methods of assessment on unit criteria and learning outcomes on the Level 3 vocational pathways. This chapter presents an analysis of examination board curriculum and assessment material for both the years prior to and the years during the 2010-2015 period. The analysis seeks to provide evidence on what the examination boards considered skills and how these shaped pedagogy within the teaching constructs. The study also aims to look for evidence on how the assessment methods or types changed for many of the same learning outcomes and what impact this had for the learners.

Destinations are examined in chapter six. Background information on destinations of the learners is examined using progression statistics from the FEC. Employment opportunities and the nature of those opportunities are examined along with an analysis of local and national employment trends to assess if these were affected by the policy reforms or impacted on learner outcomes. Chapter seven considers the narratives and views of the stakeholders and their perceptions of how the reforms impacted on them. The chapter uses extracts from the learners' narratives to highlight the experiences of skills delivery and how this related to their employment opportunities.

The final conclusions chapter brings together the theoretical aspects discussed in earlier chapters, the employment opportunities and trends, the experience of the learners combined with assessment practices and then discusses the contributions of the findings in terms of research into VET and policy reforms.

1.5 Summary

Having been involved with teaching vocational education for some years, I wanted to determine whether or not the policy reforms had an impact on the learners once they left FE. I wanted to assess whether the changes in curriculum assessment methods actually affected the outcomes for the learners and how, if any, these changes were perceived by employers. Having identified approaches in the literature review, assessed patterns in the employment analysis, identified changes within the curriculum material analysis and identified themes from the interviews, I then concluded my findings. The next three chapters will include an exploration of the literature, an investigation into skills definition and the methodology used in this study

2 LITERATURE REVIEW OF POLICIES AND REFORMS

Now more than ever we need to ensure that more of our young people are leaving education, not just with the skills to succeed in modern Britain but to compete in an increasingly global economy. That is why the coalition government of which I am a part has put addressing the skills gap at the heart of our plan for education (Nicky Morgan speech, 20 November 2014).

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the policy drivers for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the UK in order to provide an overview of the reforms within the CG timeframe 2010 – 2015 (sections 2.2 and 2.3). The chapter contextualises the issues and approaches to VET and its reforms and includes perspectives on how the various governments perceived the impact of skills on the economic climate (Section 2.3). Section 2.3.2 takes an overview of the reform material specifically addressing FECs. Examined in sections 3.2 and 3.3 are the role of VET within FECs and then the teaching strategies for the delivery of skills; and section 3.4 examines level 3 provision in VET. 2.4 reviews Neoliberalism, in approach by the CG, in FE and in education. Section 2.5 goes on to examine gender and class divides in VET and examines work by Young. Qualification frameworks are discussed in section 2.6 with some background into how these govern the curriculum and skills delivery. This section also expands further, looking at level 3 across common examination frameworks. Progression options, student destinations, widening participation (WP) and options for level 3 students are discussed until I summarise in section 2.9

The literature and documents examined provide context and background to the reforms and skills development in VET and funding for 16–19-year-olds under the CG and their implications for VET in FECs within England. I show how ‘skills’ have different meanings for different bodies, and argue that policy adaptation from previous governments was commonplace. I present evidence of a core interest in skills within governments and the acquisition of those skills and how they relate to employability impact directly on labour market value of the courses. I argue that attempts to ensure that VET meets the needs of employers has been a common theme across governments since the mid 1980’s and suggest that there was a move to more quantifiable indicators of success measures through destination data and completion of course figures.

2.1.1 Policy levers and drivers for VET

Today, policies and reforms are formed to encourage students to continue their education into HE. One of the aims of many of the reforms has been a primary focus on improving the academic quality of education for students. While governments and industry representatives advocate strengthening learning and preparation for work, the definition of the skills that employers require still remains confused. It is necessary to examine the various reforms to understand government views on employability and skills.

Before expanding on the various resources on policies and reforms, it is important to differentiate between policy drivers and policy levers. The former is what drives the change, and the latter is concerned with the mechanisms to implement those policies or changes, as Coffield (2008) states when addressing drivers “the overarching aims that guide Government strategy” (p.141). Steer et al, (2003) in line with this viewpoint state “we use the term ‘policy lever’ to refer to the ‘governing instruments’ chosen to meet particular political aims” (p.45). An instance of this would be using financial incentives to reward institutes which had met their Widening Participation (WP) targets. These financial incentives were used as inducements for Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s) to participate in WP. The effects of WP were measured against sets of targets and to ensure that inclusivity was being met. This inclusivity was considered to be groups such as those from low-income backgrounds, low-participation neighbourhoods, those whose parents did not attend HE, those living in care, those with a disability, ethnic minorities and mature students. The more learners representative of these groups that enrolled in a HEI, the more inclusive it was considered to be. In 2018/19 the highest number of disadvantaged students entered HE according to Augar, yet still ‘huge gaps in access in progression remain’ (Augar, 2019, p.24). While WP is not directly linked to VET or FE, its adoption had an impact on the learners’ progression options and also on the curriculum model in FE at level 3.

Policy initiatives are not restricted to those which are visible, an example of which is WP and its funding strategies that include financial incentives for HEIs increasing numbers of WP students. Spours et al (2002) describe VET policy initiatives in terms of these key features:

- 1) Policy drivers and levers
- 2) The ‘bigger blacker box’
- 3) Targets and outputs

The authors claim that policy drivers and levers can be interpreted in many ways by different bodies, intentions and aims being perceived as different intentions dependent on who was

reporting their analysis. The 'black box' metaphor derives from Black and Williams' (2002) research. The black box notion is that various educational forms, for example level 3 vocational courses, have external invisibility to the internal forces operating them, such as teachers, students, management rules, resources etc, all of which shape policy initiatives. Evaluating success against a set of predetermined outcomes such as achievement, retention, attainment, can be inaccurate (not all factors may be taken into consideration for example, assessment methods, class sizes, prior learning) and leave much important data out (for example when considering whether any skills transfer has taken place).

We cannot examine policies and reforms in this study without including the context of VET and vocational skills. There has been a focus on skills and skills policy at national levels, and there is a wealth of literature which links local skills levels to the local area's labour market performance (Lee et al, 2014), however surveys by Employers Skills Survey contrast this with evidence that points to the demand for skills (Employer skills Survey, 2007;2009;2011;2013). Low demand for skills has implications for local labour markets as well as underutilisation in the workplace and unemployment. While this under-utilisation of skills is becoming more widely discussed, policies to address this have been limited (Keep and Mayhew, 2014). Research however has shown that employer-led demand for skills and their use in the workplace is critical for local economic development (Payne and Keep, 2011; Green, 2012). In response to this many of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) made a key priority the supply of skills and in particular addressing skills shortages and skills gaps. The LEP's consisted of local businesses and local authorities, chaired by a Board and Industry Chairperson. Many of the skills policies in the UK have focused on the supply side, both nationally and locally, and surveys suggest that the UK's demand for skills was problematic (Employer Skills Survey, 2007;2009;2011;2013). In 2014 almost half of businesses in the UK reported having employees over-qualified and over skilled for their roles, which equated to 16% of the workforce (UKCES, 2014). There is little evidence to suggest that policy makers were addressing the demand side of the problem (Keep et al, 2006; Green, 2009; Wright and Sissons, 2012; Keep, 2013.) The authors suggest there is little evidence of the marriage between skills policies and the wider economy. While there was a recognised need to improve education and skills and that the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA) initiative might address this in part, commentators such as Garthwaite (2011) suggested that focussing on the supply side of labour rather than demand, did little to address the problem. The RPA expands compulsory education for 16+ learners and requires that all young adults must remain in education or employment, from age 17 in 2013 to 18 in 2015. Authors such as Ray et al, (2014),

Sisson and Jones, (2014) and Mayhew and Keep (2014) suggest that when addressing policies to tackle youth unemployment and low paid, low skilled employment, the Government focussed on sectors of industry rather than the economy as a whole and was too narrowly designed. Skills and employment policy have switched between government departments or shared departments ten times since the 1980's. Between these different departments, they have produced 13 major Acts of Parliament. There have been 61 Secretaries of State responsible for policies in this area over the three decades and numerous reforms have been abolished. (City & Guilds, 2014).

Historically there has been much research into the shape and consequences of educational and vocational policy and reforms and how they are embedded in various institutions. Bernstein's concept of 'pedagogic device' (1996) describes the ways in which the power hierarchy in education systems and reforms influences both teacher identity and pedagogic practice and this research seeks to understand if the influences in management hierarchies and structures played any part in the teachers' curriculum delivery. This research in part examines how pedagogical practice is affected in the classroom by policy reforms. Coffield (1999, 2002, 2004, 2005) examined Bernstein's ideas and mapped them to post-compulsory education with a view to analysing how policy models related to improving pedagogical performance have evolved into a dominant theme in VET and PCET in the UK. The notion that national policy is 'mediated' in local settings, such as FEC's, draws on research by Shain and Gleeson who suggest that practitioners are 'strategic compliers' with policies at local levels (Shain and Gleeson, 1999). Coffield writes that policy 'levers' are mechanisms deployed by the state to bring about change (Coffield et al, 2008). He then suggests that these levers are used to influence the acceptance of policies within FECs. I will go on to suggest that Coffield's approach was in line with the changes that took place within the FE under the CG in terms of curriculum model change and pedagogical style. Similarities can be drawn from New Labour policies on compulsory and non-compulsory education with an emphasis on enterprise and business in the former and focus for HE in the latter by the CG, these are an example of bringing business and education together. More evidence of this can be seen in the *Positive for Youth* paper for schools, that align education with business values (Cabinet Office, 2013) New Labour's view that young people were consumers within education markets was mirrored by the CG, with educational choice as a mechanism for promoting industry and ergo standards across providers. This chapter examines some of the policy reforms which have shaped VET over the past few decades.

2.1.2 Educational policy and reforms – the history

While this chapter examines policy levers, FE profile, embedding skills and course structures, it is important to understand how education policy has evolved so that a more informed and reasonable assessment can be made regarding the reforms under the CG. Conclusions can be drawn about the shape of the reforms when a consideration of previous reform models is included. Over time, governments have attempted to address issues such as VET by examining other governments who may have operated within similar arenas, both educational and political, to establish if any legislation met the aims of the focus. Where similar solutions may be found, these may be replicated into a national policy framework. There were a number of continuities between policies of the CG and the previous government, the obvious being unemployment and UK debt. Themes emerged in terms of policy reforms and interventions. The *New Opportunities* white paper of the Labour Government in 2009 and the CG paper *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers Social Mobility Strategy* (2011) are examples of continuity between governments policies and approaches. Social mobility is relative here in terms of the CG approach to education: raising standards, narrowing the gaps in attainment and raising aspirations and WP for HE (BIS,2011). The result of this is a framework that gets retransferred from one government to another in some form. This constantly evolving VET model is essential in the development of skilled and competent workforce. Hume (2000) suggests that any changes to these policies might 'force' policy makers to engage in policy transfers on the premise that it is logical to borrow others' policy systems that have been used to address changes (p.79). FECs are well documented for their ability to change or respond quickly to policy changes. James and Biesta point out that FECs adapting to external policy changes was considered an interactive process with rising interventions (James and Biesta, 2007). Wallace and Hoyce comment "to adapt particular reforms to make them work" (Wallace and Hoyce, 2005.p.12) was more a singular prescribed approach to policy change unlike James and Biesta who state that it was a continuous changing process (2007).

One cannot understand the justifications for the policy reforms without examining previous models under previous governments and any measures of success or impacts. We cannot examine VET by excluding the role of the FECs. The traditional classification of FE colleges is steeped in historical industrial relations, local focus along with a strong emphasis on skilling the workforce which can be seen to have history back to the Industrial Revolution (Simmons,2014). The skills and services provided by FECs reflect local labour needs and market demands. In the UK there have been changes to the extent to which authority governs VET and whether autonomy is granted at local or national level.

At the end of WWII, the Education Act of 1944 brought FE under the control of the Local Education Authority (LEA). From 1960, more academic qualifications in the shape of O levels and A Levels were introduced. Sixth form colleges (post 16) also provided academic courses; however, the incorporation of the traditional FE did not come into place until the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 when FEC's were moved from LEA or local control to a regional service.

The provision of VET and skilling a workforce is not a new concept. In 1963 Harold Wilson (then leader of the Opposition) spoke at the Labour Party Conference about moving Britain forward in terms of "white heat of the technical revolution" which equated to "real training for real jobs". This essentially was the traditional method of day release by employers whereby employees would go to technical college to learn the skills for the job which was also considered as upskilling. However, critics such as Hall (1994) claimed that the 'gap filling' method of training was largely unsystematic and unregulated, relying on relationships between employers and local colleges (pp.43-45). Hall questioned the sustainability of this system and thus labelled it a stop-gap solution. As far back as the 1960s the training for jobs or vocational training was the main duty of technical colleges until the mid 1970's, when the introduction of training without jobs emerged (Ainley,2011). Funding for training in the 1970s suffered financial cutbacks plus growing involvement by the state. Training was still relatively work focused, but the model moved to pre-vocational provision and basic skills training as opposed to specific industry training. These training schemes evolved in the mid 1970's but their more formal shape was the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) rolled out in 1983 lasting until 1989. These schemes were often met with scepticism and classified by some as cheap labour and critics such as Hickox presented analysis for this shift in state involvement (Hickox, 1995). While these YTS schemes proved to be a failure, they were considered a successful stage in the vocational course development by some (Armitage et al, 2007, p.26). As unemployment rose the YTS scheme became known as a scheme for "less able, less motivated and above all less employable" learners (Raffe, 1990, p.63). Other commentators such as Main and Shelley argue that the YTS gave young people the opportunities to acquire 'work disciplines' and gave potential employers the opportunity to undertake a screening process (Main and Shelley, 1998).

The 1990s saw a qualification growth (and employment fall) and while the range of qualifications and attainment numbers grew significantly, critics such as Phillips claimed the system was a sham (Phillips 1996). His view was that qualifications were being created for previously unskilled roles and questioned the vocationalism of such courses. There was a widely held belief that vocational courses had little to do with employability skills (DfEE, 1995a). Underpinning this view of a move

from vocationalism to employability is highlighted in the Report of Social Justice, from which government policy makers and the educational institutes moved towards education and learning as opposed to vocationalism as stated by Avis et al (1996. p180). The Kennedy report (1997a) and its promotion of Lifelong Learning saw a move towards education or learning to National Vocational Qualifications NVQ level 3 status, which at the time, had very low standards (Armitage et al, 2007 p.29).

2.1.2.1 1988-2000

In 1988 FECs had control of funding, staffing and planning which was transferred from Local Education Authority (LEA) control to more autonomous bodies. These bodies had stronger links to business and other external bodies such as examination boards. Such was the design of the quasi-markets that it led to FECs being responsive to local markets and influence, providing young learners a second chance (Spours and Lucas,1999). This move meant that any collaborative relationships that had been developed under the LEAs and therefore open to scrutiny were gradually replaced by private arrangements (between the FEC and local businesses / industry) and these relationship links were largely unmanaged and unregulated.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) emerged in the early-mid nineties in response to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ's) developed in the 1980s (Young, 2003). Originally, they intended to create a framework for qualifications from basic levels to 4/5, including both academic and vocational.

The establishment of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) saw a more formal reclassification of the FE sector in 1993 with regard to funding and Quality Assurance (QA). But, as Green and Lucas (1999) point out, the creation of the FEFC did nothing to nationalise the post 16 sector. This viewpoint was further endorsed by Robertson and Hillman (1997) who state that this status was hardly a good starting point for the New Labour administration in 1997 due to the number of controlling agencies such as FEFC for colleges, LEA's for schools, the Funding Agency for grant maintained schools and the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) for youth and adult training. This made any planning involving FE very difficult. The FEFC assumed responsibility for the funding of FE but also clawed back funding if targets of recruitment, retention and achievement were not met (Gleeson and Shain, 1999). There is much discourse on the incorporation of these significant changes and also the value of the changes within colleges (Briggs, 2005). It was argued that this culture forced colleges to move away from their student-centred culture to a more competitive one with marketplace survival strategies (Withers 2000,

and Hannagen et al, 2007). Non-prescribed courses such as Higher Nationals offered in FE came under the funding responsibility of HE via HEFCE (other non-prescribed HE remained within FEFC, then became responsibility of the HEFCE in 1999). This unfortunately was problematic in that the complexity of delivery and qualification coupled with increased workload for HE meant that regulation was weak, and questions were evident about their management (IOE, 2003; HEFCE, 2004).

In essence, the 1988-1992 period paved the way for the formal distinction between FE and HE as HE was offered in some FECs. This may be the starting point for the establishment of separate funding strategies and awarding bodies for the two types of institutes. Some FEC's offered higher level courses such as Access courses Higher Nationals. As Douglas comments, the provision of HE in FE created a hybrid relationship which was described as a 'matter out of place' and not a property of either (1996). This again sanctioned the divide in FE and HE as FE provision was largely aimed at industry-related qualifications whereas HE awarded degrees independently from business or industry in most fields other than medicine and law for example. However, part of the legislation introduced in 1992 gave FECs the power to award their own degrees but due to the previous omni-presence of the awarding bodies (accountability to the examination boards in terms of verification standards and classroom practises shaped by the learning outcomes devised by the examination bodies), FECs were awarded less autonomy than HE and were thus arguably more responsive again to local pressure and answerable to local demand. *The Inquiry into the Lifelong Learning* (IFLL) states "If colleges are also to be allowed greater autonomy, then there are implications for universities' monopoly on degrees..." (IFLL, 2009, p.46).

2.1.2.2 2001 – 2009

The abolition of the FEFC saw the introduction of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) which, along with other duties, oversaw the PCET and FE institutes. A new Foundation Degree was rolled out and was designed to be the main vocational qualification for FE/HE while encouraging a relationship between FECs, HEI's and employers. The rationale for the course also was the recruitment of non-traditional students using FE models, It introduced a new route into HE for students according to the White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' (DfES, 2003). The expansion in new types of qualifications increased HE participation towards 50% of those aged 18-30 (DfES, 2003), a flagship New Labour policy. The Leitch Review, commissioned by the then Labour Government to address the UK's skill mix (DfES, 2016) stated that "a provision should be based on the new types of programme of specific, job-related skills such as Foundation Degrees."

(DfES, 2006, p.67), which potentially created growth opportunities for HE delivery within FECs. This is an important consideration in this study as it evidences yet another change in the profile of FECs and a move to a more academic provision and evidence suggests that the Foundation degrees should have elements of employment skills embedded in them (HEFCE,2003, LSDA, 2003). Another reform which changed the shape and provision within FE was the introduction of the Raising the Participation Act (RPA). The Education and Skills Act 2008 increased the minimum age for leaving education from 16 to 18 and the reform was rolled out in 2015. The Act required all 16 and 17 year olds who left education without achieving a certain level of qualification to participate in accredited training. For employers, it contained a new obligation to allow 16 and 17 year old employees the equivalent of one day a week off to undertake training. This resulted in increasing numbers of young adults enrolling in FE.

2.1.2.3 2010 Policies Coalition Government

The funding reforms introduced under the CG consisted of two main elements;

- Program provision cost – based on area, retention, achievement and high provision costs
- Additional learner support – based on challenging intakes and prior attainments

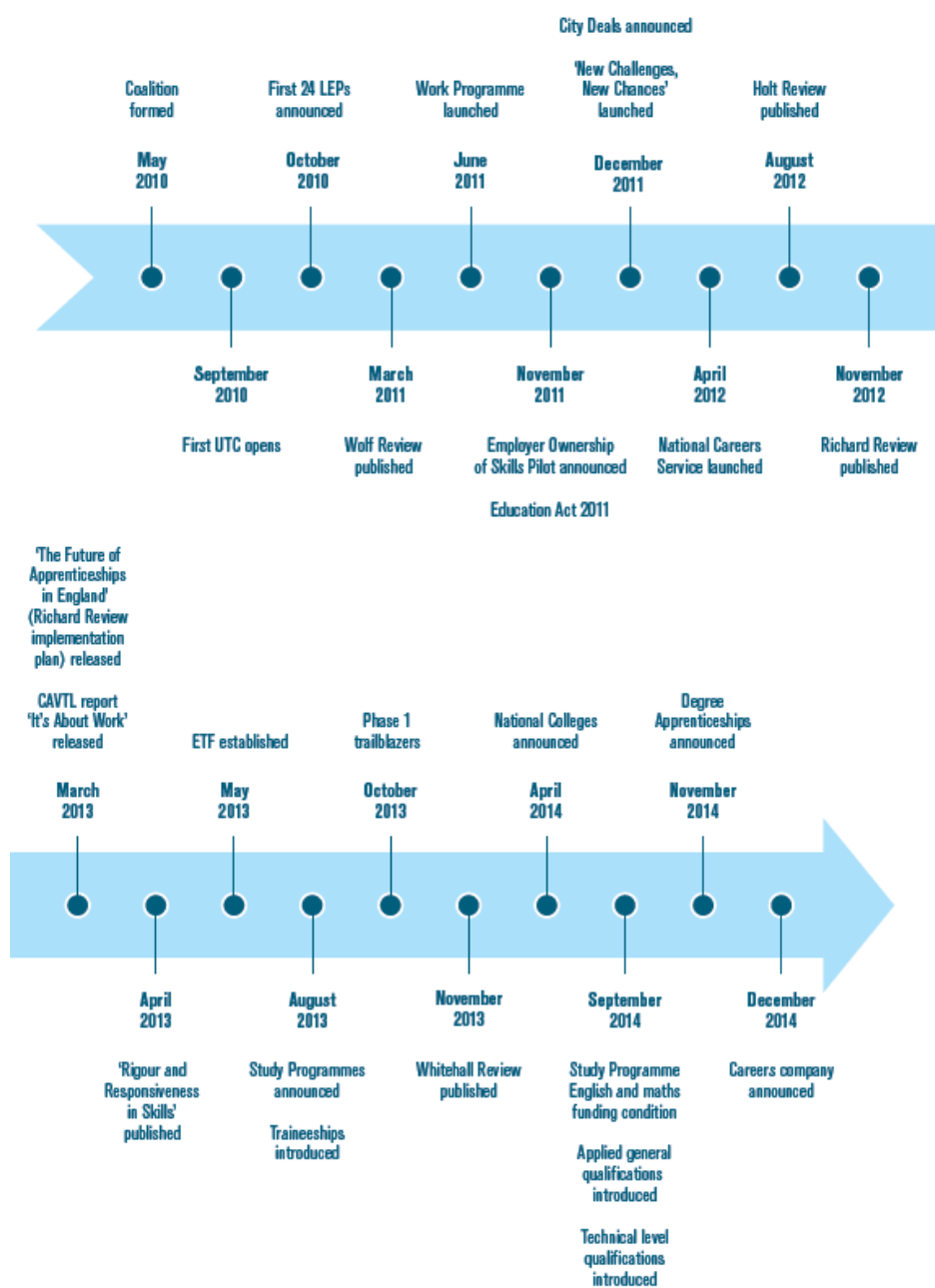
Funding for FECs was made on Standard Learner Numbers (SLN) as opposed to actual student numbers. One SLN equated to 450 Guided Learning Hours (GLH) which was at the time, the definition of a full-time student. This later changed in a 2013/14 reform whereby funding followed the student and was set at £4,000 for all 16-19 year old students (EPE, 2019)

In May 2010 the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and the LEA assumed responsibility for training of young people (16-19 year olds) and the 19+ provision came under the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), an executive agency under Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Prior to this the sector sat firmly with the Skills Council from 2001 until 2010 and the sector was subject to acts such as Train to Gain and the 19-25 entitlement. The Train to Gain initiative was ostensibly set up to help employers get training delivered in the workplace to meet their needs and was funded publicly. Under the new remit reforms such as The Work Program were introduced, designed to encourage long-term unemployed back in to the workplace or welfare-to-work program. These schemes were alternatives to staying on in education before the leaving age was increased to 18. The program was designed to support those on Jobseekers Allowance or employment Support Allowance for the transition to employment (C&G, 2019). Providers (FECs) were given incentives to engage in hard to reach students and further incentives based on the length of time they remained in employment Work Program (2012). Providers would offer support and skills training.

An evaluation of the program in 2013 established challenges in the delivery of the program; up-front costs for providers not meeting long term payment by results, 'participation experience' (WP115, 2013). The paper claimed that those most likely to gain sustainable employment were young females with recent work experience, none of which felt that the scheme assisted them in obtaining employment and not representative of all young unemployed. (ibid). The scheme was not piloted largely due to the speed of its inception and there were no assessment statistics on the impact of the employment outcomes. By the time pilots were created to capture evidence of success, in 2015 the Government decided to replace the scheme with the Work and Health Program.

Key policy changes between 2010 and 2015 are detailed in Figure 1

Skills Timeline 2010-2015



Source: Skills Commission. Guide to the skills system, 2015

In the 2010 paper *Skills for sustainable growth*, the CG laid out their strategy for skills development for the UK in which they claim as their first point that “underpinning every aspect of this purpose is the improvement of skills” (2010, p.4). Much of the report in terms of skills delivery was focussed on Apprenticeship programs, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and the change to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the paper laid out that Sector Skills Councils would act for businesses in terms of National Occupational Standards (NOS). These were a collection of agreements by UK businesses on skills and training but were not

universally supported (Wolf 2002). A Growth and Innovation fund was introduced with the purpose of supporting employers in raising skills, moving the impetus of training to the employer from the education provider. Funding is outlined and the Skills for Sustainable Growth paper and it states that a first full level 2 or level 3 qualification would be funded for young people and for 19-24 year olds, but this funding was later removed for the latter. The paper goes on to endorse the Leitch approach of developing “world class skills” (p.13) but abolished targets set in Leitch’s report. The model of a centralised control for skills development was introduced, planting responsibility firmly with the local areas, allowing the FECs the flexibility to “respond to local needs and the demands for quality of learners and employers” (BIS, 2010 p.12). Overall, the paper lays the development and delivery of the skills the nation needs under the remit of their Apprenticeship system and there is little discussion about the level 3 provision outside of that framework (BIS 2010).

2.2 FE POLICY CHANGE IN CONTEXT

One cannot understand the justifications for the policy reforms without examining previous models under previous governments and any measures of success or impacts. We cannot examine VET by excluding the role of the FECs.

The traditional classification of FE colleges is steeped in historical industrial relations, local focus along with a strong emphasis on skilling the workforce which can be seen to have history back to the Industrial Revolution (Gleeson and Mardle, 1980). The origins of FE can be traced back to the 18th Century; prior to the Industrial Revolution the main providers of education were Public Schools and Universities for the elite, while an array of local providers and the church attempted ensure some working-class children were literate (Hyland, 1999). Training for employees was considered the responsibility of the employers (Field, 1996). The division between vocational and academic provision seems to be born in this period and Pring et al suggest that this divide is evident ‘in every single reform’ since (2009, p.3). During the 19th century Mechanics Institutes were introduced which provided learning for adults outside of the workplace (Macfarlane, 1993); however, as there were entry requirements based on prior learning, only the middle class were eligible, thus creating barriers for working class participation. (Green and Lucas, 1999). Young and Spours (1998) claim this significant ‘stratification of learning’ reflected class structure in society. The Great Exhibition of 1851 and increased competition from overseas manufacturers, helped lead to a perception that vocational education needed developing; the Technical Education Act of 1889 instigated the diversion of public funds for this technical education (Lucas, 2004).

Technical and polytechnic colleges were then formed as a response to local economic need, teaching particular trades and came under the remit of the Craft Guilds. However, this industry related provision created a divide between practical training and technical knowledge (Young & Spours, 1998). The formation of the City and Guilds of London institute in 1877 also provided vocational learners with accreditation on their courses in some trades (Franklin & Reeves, 1996). This creation of vocational education and qualification system remained separate to traditional academic awards, and largely reflected national concerns translated into local need.

The Technical Instruction Act of 1889 resulted in funding for technical education as a result of increased foreign competition witnessed in the Great Exhibition in 1851 (Hyland & Merrill, 2003). New technical and polytechnic colleges were formed for the provision of education and skills directly linked to employment and trade. At this time, as Hyland points out, these were not introduced to replace work-based practical experience and learning as this was the role of specific craft guilds (Hyland, 1996).

In 1877 the City & Guilds of London Institute was formed which provided accreditation for certain trades and crafts vocational training which was an early foundation of VET. The Education Act of 1902 provided a framework for national education which was in place until the 1988 Education Act (Hyland, 1999). During the two world wars the government retained an interest in VET and the post-war years saw this interested involvement due to recession and the necessity to rebuild the country from the destruction of war. This interest at a time of high unemployment and a weak economy was a pattern of intervening attempts to address these that is still present today. Until the early 1920's, apprenticeship schemes were most common in VET; however, after the introduction of Technical Certificates in 1921, adults were able to skill themselves as well as young adults, but numbers grew steadily over the next few decades.

The skills and services provided by FECs reflect local labour needs and market demands. In the UK there have been changes to the extent to which authority governs VET and whether autonomy is granted at local or national level. FE origins lie in providing training and skills to young people and adults after they have left school, particularly occupationally related. FEC's have been shaped and manipulated by a long and often complex series of government reforms which were attempts to address education, skills and youth unemployment (Frankel & Reeves, 1996).

VET provision continued to have a locally focused orientation under the Education Act in 1944, which saw FECs come under LEA's (Fieldhouse, 1996). This led to an expansion of courses and some authors such as Lucas (2004) suggest that it was this act that defined VET and FEs that we know today which encompassed workplace learning, technical education and adult provision

(Dalby, 2015). New colleges were being built during the 1950s and 1960s but varied from region to region in terms of numbers and was uneven in distribution. Lucas (1998).

Adult education grew in the first half of the 20th century and Lucas observed 'best practise is best learned in the workplace' (Lucas, 2004, p.12). Apprenticeships were the provision for work based learning and later evening classes in colleges for adult learners. This saw a rise in vocational or technical related education although the daytime provision was still minimal. In 1944 the Education Act gave LEA's responsibility for schools and FE and this saw the growth of VET, with day release schemes and daytime VET. (ibid). This, Lucas claims, saw the definition we know today of Further Education.

In the UK 1955 Education Act, all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were given the role of provision for FE but this provision varied greatly between the 100 or so Local Authorities in the UK. (McClure, 2000). Most FECs developed strong working relationships with local employers and industries through the provision of VET for apprentices and craft workers. In response to the UK's economic decline, with more control of FE there was a series of legislation which was designed to ensure that VET met the needs of the economy. A target chasing culture emerged and national initiatives were adopted within FEs (Simmons, 2009). Agencies such as LEA's were identified as 'inherently inefficient' under the Thatcher office although while other industries were privatised under this Conservative Government, Education and Health remained in the public sector, but quasi-markets enforced schools and colleges to assume a more private enterprise status (Simmons, 2014), resonating the neo-liberal model of a marketised provision.

While VET in FE was still predominantly concerned with the preparation of young adults for the workplace, it was identified that the provision could be more vocational as stated in the Russell Report 1973, and also provide more adult education. The specificity of the trade skills and training being offered within VET was addressed during the 1970's and high unemployment levels saw new developments in VET. Rises in oil prices and the collapse of traditional industries were followed by recession and high unemployment and because of this Edward Heath developed the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) which provided funding for courses and schemes for unemployed 16-18year olds and adults

The 1990s saw reforms in VET that marketised FE and students became consumers, services became businesses (Lucas, 2004). This mapping of marketisation from the private sector to the public sector created tensions in VET, the flexibility that existed prior to incorporation in 1992 was in direct contrast to the managerial marketised response. New levels of regulation, inspection and accountability were introduced which still exist today (Lucas, 2004). It was around

this time that the Business and Technical Education Council was established (BTEC) and the evolution of pre-vocational courses (Lea et al, 2003).

There has been a succession of initiatives to address FE provision (City and Guilds, 2014, p.9): The Youth Training Scheme (YTS), Train to Gain, Adult Basic skills and Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The impacts of these failed initiatives are discussed by various authors (Who) but more recently, under the Coalition then the Conservative Government. The focus has shifted to marketisation (DFE/BIS, 2013; Crown,2016) and a return to apprenticeships (Lucas & Hanson, 2015). As Wolf identified in her 2011 report, these initiatives 'churned out' young people with qualifications of little value(Wolf, 2011).

Until 2013 young adults could leave school at age 16 and in 2015 rose to age 18. The growing number of young adults staying in education beyond compulsory schooling grows each year. With this growth came an increase of adult provision and a loosening of ties between FECs and industry. Fes diversified in their offerings and became centres for opportunities for extending education (Gleeson & Mardle, 1980).

2.2.1 Summary

This discussion on the political agenda in the UK demonstrated that changes to policy were derived for economic reasons. As Lupton et al identify in a working paper, changes to policy were more concerned with employment statistics than learning (Lupton, Unwin and Thomson, 2015). In this respect, the CG's approach differed from the previous Governments whose focus was centred on growth (of qualifications) and the expansion of HE so a shift in approach ensued. The position of FECs and their ability to adapt to rapidly changing political and educational landscapes are considered through different governments to identify recurring themes, and through history since the formation of VET since the 18th century. The academic / vocational divide was maintained by CG despite its attempts to strengthen VET and improve skills training. New Labour's approach in Education consisted of a wider range of vocational qualifications and personalised learning routes were introduced into schools and WP to HE leaving the middle ground and skills development with little attention. The CG addressed this by abolishing The Diploma and moving funding to a per pupil basis. The Wolf Report of 2011 endorsed the abolishment of The Diploma while also recommending the removal of funding for a number of other vocational courses

2.3 VET IN POLICY AND PROVISION

‘Vocational qualifications in the UK do not directly ‘qualify’ people to work in a particular occupation’

(CEDEFOP Report, 2011).

The credibility of vocational qualifications has been debated historically. The comparison to the general academic A level has been at the centre of much research, with ‘parity of esteem’ a well coined phrase used when discussing the two routes, referring to the vocational qualifications’ lower status. Authors such as Aynsley and Crossouard state that this in part is because of “the incessant changes that have arisen in attempts to improve the vocational qualifications status” (2010, p. 131). Vocational courses are often perceived as a “poor comparison” often due, in part, to the changing content, process and context (Acquah and Huddleston, 2014 p.4). Another view supporting this lower status view includes the notion that employment opportunities that are technical rather than professional garner a lower income, thus are of lower worth. When vocational qualifications are taken more seriously by businesses, and this is reflected in a higher salary, or embracing non degree apprenticeships, the esteem will be improved (ibid). The CG outlined their commitment to raising the status of VET (DBI, 2012, p.6) and acknowledged that the value placed on VET was low and further contested that the association between VET and lower attaining young adults reflects the views of VET nationally. Stanton and Fletcher acknowledge that FECs intake differs in terms of social class and ethnicity which contributes to lower opinion of vocational provision (Stanton and Fletcher, 2006). As the learner profile was so diverse, a range of abilities is expected which is reflected in the ranges of achievement.

This dynamic nature of vocational courses, pulled in various directions and influenced by many different stakeholders is seen as a ‘means of progression to both employment and higher levels of education’ according to Bathmaker (2013, p.87). Huddlestone and Unwin however contest this and suggest that VET should shape itself to the acquisition of a set of narrowly defined job-related skills or competencies (2002). Bloomer suggests that VET should be based on a wider idea of vocationalism and preparation for work and proposes that the move to a softer skills transfer to a “knowledge creator” and “knowledge retriever” would allow for learners to work autonomously, with little instruction and with confidence (Bloomer, 2001, p.241). James et al however argue that this desire to create a Knowledge-based economy has led to an obsession with qualifications and training to a narrow focus (James et al, 2013).

Many different reforms have taken place in VET since the 1980s and despite these changes in policy and approach, according to Bloomer there has been a clear and visible attempt to move

the VET towards “preparing for ‘life’, for ‘citizenship’ for ‘multi-skilled work’ and for ‘collaborative work relationships’” (Bloomer, 2001, p.431). Rigour and Responsiveness were concepts deployed by the CG in their 2013 paper ‘*A programme for rigour and responsiveness in vocational education*’. These concepts they believed were pivotal for vocational education. The paper suggested that these had been eroded over time and were taught in isolation from the world of work (BIS, 2013). The reforms and framework changes from NQF to QCF were as a consequence of the NQF model being inaccessible for employers and learners in terms of complexity and volume and did not ‘reflect the needs of their industry’ (ibid). To address this the CG claimed that they had ensured the vocational qualifications were fit for purpose and led by employers. The CG’s report *Getting the Job Done: The Government’s Reform Plan for Vocational Qualifications in England* (2014) included a vision that vocational and academic routes would work in synergy, learners choosing one route would not preclude the other. This may seem to address the progression for the students but did not appear to address the skills needs of the employers and when UKCES was abolished in 2015, the responsibility for skills developments saw a move from employers and industry to the Dept of Education (CIPD, 2017).

A consequence of the reforms under the CG was that for 19+ learners who already possessed a level 2 or level 3 qualification, there was no funding to study for another qualification, they would have to pay full cost. The NQF replacement courses did not include GLH for functional skills or tutorials and enrichment funding was dramatically reduced from 114 hours per student per year to 30 hours per year (Unison 2012). These hours were used for pastoral time and activities to support learning: “pastoral support will be one of the key roles of the personal tutor and will also include one-to-one supervisions requiring tutor to establish a supportive and trusting relationship with their students” (Avis, Fisher and Thompson 2010, p.124). These hours also allowed for essential key skills delivery for many, which industry required as an alternative to GCSEs.

Addressing issues relating to VET, in 2011 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) published *New Challenges, New Chances: Further Education and Skills System Reform Plan: Building a World Class Skills System*. The paper confirmed the establishment of an independent commission on Adult Education and Vocational Pedagogy. The stated purpose of the Commission was to “ensure there is a clear sector-owned policy to support outstanding teaching and learning in FE, including making full use of the potential of technology” and to:

- bring together industry, teaching training colleges, professional associations and practitioners in the FE sector.

- explore how the best colleges and providers work with employers; and
- set out the standard expected of a good learning opportunity for an adult and an apprentice and define a range of effective pedagogical approaches (p.16).

Facing high youth unemployment, the CG made VET as much of a priority as it was to the previous government. The then Secretary of State Michael Gove offered a single vision of VET and focussed on the role of the employer within VET. In reducing state benefits and with welfare cuts (£22 billion less on social security between 2010 to 2015, loss of legal aid, Disability Living Allowance scrapped, Welfare Benefits cap), the CG were seen to embody a neoliberal stance, with the devolution of power or control from the state to local communities. (Hall, 2012; Wiggan, 2012). This approach however was fraught with difficulties under austerity (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2012). Local government suffered with demands for services and an aging population requiring more support from the state. This then resulted in a distributed consequence to the cuts, different sectors of society being affected by these cuts and local governments can be seen to act as buffers between funding cuts to services and the government. A shift towards an individual's choice rather than state responsibility for social problems was evident (Wright, 2012). The CG responded to economic difficulties by cutting public spending, outsourcing public services and paying by results (Dean & Neild, 2013). The position of FEC's in terms of community responsiveness and functional provision of courses and qualifications can be seen as a direct consequence of these funding cuts. This information helps this study in terms of determining the priority of VET for the CG and taking into consideration other external factors that shaped policy. If VET does not lead to the expected outcomes because the dependency is on labour market forces and wage / progression structures, then any amounts of VET reforms or policy changes will have little impact on the real barriers to successful employment or progress according to Keep (2012).

2.3.1 Vocational education within Further Education

A typical FE may now provide a range of academic courses, vocational courses, work-based training, Apprenticeship partnerships and adult education including Access courses and HE. Although all of these may be based in one organisation, they are fragmented in terms of the qualification frameworks, governing body, finance streams and exist together without a coherent policy to unify them (Young, 2011). Despite this FECs still retain a strong association with their

vocational legacy (Frankel & Reeves, 1996). Even with the diversity of course offerings and constant changes that FECs experience, there remains a student focus by teaching staff according to Coffield et al (2007).

Young proposed that the vocational curriculum encompassed access to that field's knowledge and acquiring job specific skills and knowledge (Young, 2008). The departmental structures within FECs with their devolved responsibilities and emphasis on teams (Leader, 2004) encourages "diverse or disparate communities of teachers focussed around specific academic or vocational interests" (Robson, 2006, p.107). Young has attempted to define vocational education and specifically content and knowledge and endeavoured to demonstrate that policy makers have failed to distinguish vocational knowledge from academic knowledge (1998, 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012). Young identified that the access to vocational knowledge was non context based and the academic more relatable to certain work genres, this he called 'dual re-contextualisation' (2008). Young further went on to identify the importance of combining both of these types of learning and that this was critical to the success of a future vocational curriculum (2011). The notion of two types of learning was made up of 'conceptual and contextual' learning. The former is defined by access to discipline-based knowledge and the latter by access to those skills associated with that particular occupation (2008). Edward et al's approach is that vocational qualifications are useful, specialised knowledge and skills and are chosen because of their relevance to the intended vocational field (Edwards et al, 1997). 'Powerful Knowledge' is a concept identified by Young, delivering learning that was testable and evidence based, organised into knowledge domains (2009). Groups able to acquire the knowledge which takes them beyond their experiences, and which would be unlikely to have access to at home or in the community (2010, p.6).

The Wolf Report (2011) failed to define vocational education, but some believe, as Young, that it is the combination of mental and manual skills (2011). Bloomer (2001) identified years ago that vocational education had moved away from equipping learners with specific skills for jobs to a 'softening of subject demarcations' allowing learners to work confidently and creatively (2001, P.428). Ainley (2013) comments that the 'transparency' of vocational qualifications worsens the skills deficiency of the courses by measuring the outcomes, these will have been designed by breaking down elements of the course to be more achievable. He identifies that learners are then taught to the test and claims that subject knowledge and understanding were 'things of the past' (p.53). He substantiates this statement with observations on over-assessment, year on year

routines (materials, teachings and assessments), rote practising of what to put on the coursework (p.3).

Research specifically relating to vocational assessment practises within FECs is scarce (Ecclestone, 2007, James and Biesta, 2007). This study aims to add to research in this area and to understand the FE sectors in terms of its level 3 provision.

2.3.2 Further Education Colleges' role

FE in England refers to any study taken after the age of 16 that is not part of higher education (DfE, 2021). The FE market consists of millions of learners from a diverse range of backgrounds. Currently FE is funded by the Government however a distinction can be made on the funding for under 19 learners and those over 19. Funding tends to be routed via the qualification system. FE provision is in the form of apprenticeships, A levels, vocational courses or recreational learning (in some cases) (BIS, 2016).

FE was cast as the 'Cinderella' of the education sector originally in 1935 by the Board of Education President, Oliver Stanley, although the metaphor is more commonly linked to Kenneth Baker under Thatcher's office who stated 'Further Education is not just the bit in between Schools and Higher Education. It is not just the Cinderella of the Education service...' (Baker, 1989, p.1). The implication is that FE was poorly funded, unimportant, and overlooked (Foster, 2005). There have been many efforts to improve this perception, in 2010 Education Minister John Hayes claimed that 'FE and skills are no longer the Cinderella they once were described' (FE week, 2014). More recently the metaphor again received attention in The Augar Report of 2019, where Augar states his ambition 'to rebuild Further Education, for too long the Cinderella sector, and see technical and vocational education as a means of addressing the country's skills gap' (Augar, 2019).

The author goes further and claims that the UK FE provision is not considered stable with constant funding cuts, in the last decade the FE sector had the biggest cuts across the education sector. Augar went on to recommend more funding for FE and exhorted the Government to take FE seriously. Theresa May in 2019 admits that FE or VET are seen as second-best options for learners and claims that many governments have failed to address this (May, 2019). She went on further to claim "With MP's, civil servants and yes, even journalists overwhelmingly coming from university backgrounds, it's no surprise that attention drifted away from other post 18 options' she claimed that attention was firmly focussed on HE. She followed this with comments about how the Augar report was received and the following debate which concentrated wholly on

effects for University students. Recommendations in the Augar report in terms of funding for FECs, now 2 years old, have still yet to be implemented. (Guardian, 2021). FE provision is widely ranging and because of this has historically been labelled the 'everything else' of the education sector (Panchamia, 2012).

The Cinderella metaphor can be considered as implying the sector was not only deficit in absolute funding terms, but in terms of comparison to other sectors of education. Agreeing that the metaphor is not helpful, Coffield suggests that using metaphors such as 'Cinderella sector', 'middle child' and 'gap filler' contribute to a toxic view of FE (Coffield, 2014). In defence of the sector, Birkinshaw in a review of the status of FE stated that 'proper tertiary education is the most successful way of providing the best post-16 education and training for a community, a region and a nation' Birkinshaw, (2016, p.8).

The FEC profile changed in the 1980s and 1990s, largely due to dramatic falls in youth employment, and Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) grew significantly. FECs offered levels of social inclusion that sixth form colleges did not and offered an array of low-level vocational courses largely for those unable to participate in academic studies (Hodgson & Spours, 2017).

FECs were continually steered by national policy levers and funded both privately and publicly by a centralized funding council (Coffield et al, 2008). One of FEC's strengths is their ability to respond to policy levers and changes. FECs are known to be constantly targeted for spending cuts and having to reinvent their role with further reforms, FEC's struggle with both their identity in the educational landscape and their ability to respond to their local communities. Exley suggests the idea of FEC's being built on 'shifting sands' – their ability adapt to constant changes, funding and policy, reduced funding recently, the qualifications stigma of being a weaker qualification (Exley, 2018), indeed Gleeson et al identified 'the ever-shifting political sands of VET and FE reform' (Gleeson et al 2015, p.29).

In all this metaphor, debate, and development it is possible to see a continuation of the FE and academic divide first observed in the 18th Century. It is important to acknowledge and explore the roots of this discourse, to help understand how the CG were able to mobilise and build on it with credibility. This is not to say that FECs do not have an important role within educational and social structures.

2.3.3 Perceived strengths of FECs and their contribution

FECs have had a pivotal role to play in Widening Participation (WP). HEIs have recruited students from FE with a wider educational and social background. This placed FECs firmly back onto the agenda for policy reforms. Some adult learners will gain a place at HE through successful completion of Access courses taken in FECs, a popular choice for those over 19 not meeting the entry requirements for their chosen university course. Traditionally learners progress into HE from A Level courses at FE or sixth form and those on vocational courses such as Construction or Engineering progressed from FE into industry or apprenticeships. The government at the time (Conservatives in 1986) created an extra route into HE via an Access course to accommodate learners from non-traditional and diverse backgrounds (Hyland and Merrill, 2003) and those that did not meet the entry requirements. In 1987 the government contended that the entry requirements for HE required broadening. The paper *Higher Education: meeting the challenge* supported the idea that entry should not be defined as the two traditional routes, but that further non-traditional routes should be created for students with “a wider range of academic and practical experience.....many of whom will not have the traditional qualifications for entry...” (DES,1987,p.9).

FECs have no upper age limit for students and offer both academic and vocational pathways, with many offering GCSE and levels 1 and 2. Many now offer HE courses – undergraduate courses which can be topped up for the final year in HE. There are various Post 16 educational options, although these are funded differently and valued differently. For instance, the academic A level route is delivered in what many believe as ‘academic institutes’ such as schools and sixth forms, whereas FECs have the reputations of being ‘providers of the last resort’ (Bailey and Unwin, 2014). This reinforces the divide between academic and practical or vocational knowledge. FE is respected for its ability to provide a second chance to learners and provide alternative opportunities for attaining qualifications. However once FECs came under the remit of Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) some have argued that there was a move from providing learners with the best experience and trade skills transfer to chasing the achievement and retention targets set out in order to secure funding (Burnell, 2011). The framework that Ofsted utilised to assess performance for FECs incorporated achievement data and from 2014, performance data and destination data, funding was in part based on these target data.

2.3.4 Centralisation and oversight in the late 20th Century

Ofsted is a government Dept that reports to Parliament and is responsible for inspecting schools, colleges and training providers as well as departments fostering, adoption and care. Prior to its conception in 1992, Local Education Authority inspections were carried out in FECs by local education inspectors, but this varied in type and location. Occasional inspections were undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI). In 1991, the Conservatives introduced the Education (Schools) Act which actioned the Ofsted inspection of all state funded schools and the publication of results. The incorporation of colleges removed FE from local control and established a national FE system and inspections by Ofsted which involved:

- A four year cycle of inspection visits
- month fixed notice for inspection
- A five point numerical grading scale
- Associate Inspectors from the sector employed
- Transparency of the inspection framework
- System of annual self-assessment.

In 2007, Ofsted merged with Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and inspections of post-16 government funded institutes included FECs with 19+ learners. Judgements were published on FECs performance and in 2015 when a revised single framework was introduced, the grading system was dropped from five points to four and in 2012 the grade descriptor changed from 'satisfactory' to 'requires improvement' and introduced a timetable for improvements. Notice of inspections has now mostly disappeared and no-notice inspections are common (AOC, 2015). A range of other bodies inspect FECs from awarding bodies to financial auditors and FECs must comply with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

Inspections included measures for assessing quality however the focus is said to have 'moved away from supporting improvement and become more narrowly focussed on accountability' (AOC, 2015, p.4).

With the newer funding systems concerned with retention and achievement of students, there was pressure on the tutors to ensure that the learners achieved and finished (Hyland and Merrill 2003). Burke further finds that tutors' ideas of how they deliver and facilitate the learning is compromised and can be lost in the target chasing culture. Being beholden to learning outcomes and assessment criteria undermines the natural flow that can occur in teaching and make the lessons and content too prescriptive. Through interaction with students, differentiation can take place within the classroom and teachers are very well practiced in creating differentiation for their learners. Experience allows FE tutors to maintain FE standards for achievement and retention but also create positive learning environments which are inclusive for all their learners.

A 2014 Ofsted report noted a pattern of FECs relying too much on low quality on-the-job training for learners and insufficient involvement of employers in planning and contributing to learning. While the on-the-job training is not the responsibility of the tutors, it is of the FECs and largely only took place on work placement schemes and Apprenticeships. Ofsted identified that FECs were a highly competitive sector that was data-driven and overly focused on qualification aim success. The pressure to succeed, often to retain funding is cascaded down into the classroom and saw tutors under increasing pressure to get all the students through (achieve), at times at the cost of ideas of quality teaching.

Much research has taken place on the political transformations and outcomes for education, but to date, VET and skills delivery can be seen as undefined as there remains little research or insight into how perceived skills can be embedded into the curriculum and delivered in the classroom or how pedagogy is affected by policy change in terms of skills design. In order to understand the exact format of the technology of skills formation within VET, an examination of the returns for those skills needs to be acquired and measured. Authors such as Heckman (2003), Cunha and Heckman (2009) and Carneiro (2003) endorse the argument that economic returns to most VET are low.

Hutchings (2015) researched the concept of 'exam factories' in which he examined the notion that teachers suffered significant stress over accountability. Earlier research comments on how tutors were pressured to meet targets therefore sacrificed their own personal beliefs and values (Sennett, 1998). A DfE research report of 2017 identifies that 'misaligned incentives' exist within FE and 'incentives are particularly linked with the Awarding Organisation (AO) role in terms of content development and assessment methods' (DfE, 2017, p.13). The autonomy of practise for teachers is increasingly reduced under the target chasing culture and outcome led pedagogic style thrust upon them. According to the tutors interviewed, the narrow focus on outcomes and achievement rather diluted the opportunities for practical skills development.

While there has been much research into managerial and policy change that took place in the 90's and onwards, there has been a dearth of research into the curriculum changes and the perspective of the lecturer.

Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) argue that:

There has been a steady growth in academic research interest in the FE sector, and from it an increasing flow of publications, but in terms of what we know about FE teachers they are perhaps only marginally beyond the 'shadowy figures' stage. (p.967)

A similar point is made by James and Biesta (2007) who argue that:

What constitutes professionalism in FE is an elusive concept. Although professional work in FE has been subjected to a plethora of initiatives in recent years, little is known about its practitioners, their dispositions and how they define their sense of professionalism in the changing context of their work. (p.126)

May and Perry observe that “the bounded nature of professional knowledge production is variable according to discipline, institutions and macro factors that attribute value to particular activities” (2011,p.192). However, FE tutors are pressured to adhere to macro level factors such as the outcomes of achievements and retention which dictate their pedagogy, the delivery is also shaped by the Learning Outcomes (LOs) for each unit (funding is based on successful retention and achievement numbers ergo for QA and verification all learning outcomes must be met). In contrast Case (2008) proposes that the models of teaching are not applicable to the pedagogical style, but that teaching is “a matter of making judgements rather than following the rules” (Hammersley, 1997, p.147). In contrast, Lysaght and O’Leary (2013) propose that the beliefs of the tutors can be highly resistant to change, largely because they are unchallenged yet Pajares opposes this view and suggests that “the beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgements, which in turn, affect their behaviour in the classroom” (1992, p.307). Teaching staff’s accountability for results coupled with changing syllabus content and assessment methods could be seen as a more realistic determiner for the pedagogical style. Practitioners may consider a policy’s intentions, through various levels of translation, then it becomes a theme directing day to day practice leaving little room for actions, own practice or influence.

Increasingly FECs are seeing a more diverse group of learners, moving away from the traditional ‘one size fits all’ way of thinking. As teachers / lecturers we have to recognise, develop and design learning that encompasses the range of learning abilities and attitudes for all students. Identifying appropriate and successful teaching strategies is a core skill when developing materials and curriculum. Integrating academic and vocational studies can be problematic. Skills development, the delivery and methods are explicit, yet students often fail to grasp or accept the value of a more academic approach or input. The increased diversity of employment type and skills required and therefore the destinations of these learners mean a wider range of literature and research is required and consideration as to whether the learners were ‘passive agents’ in the process of progression or transition.

2.3.5 The marginalisation of FE teachers under centralisation

“professionalism reacts to the dictates of society and political will” (Appleyard and Appleyard, 2014, p.29).

This study is in part concerned with the views and experiences of the FE teaching staff so the impact of reform needs contextualising in terms of staff experience and standing. This section considers pedagogical influences both internal (such as target setting and compliance) and external (getting the students through to progress to the next stage) as pressures needed to be considered in order to gain an insight into how teaching takes place in the classroom (at the chalkface) within FE.

With the prioritisation of the needs of employers, the growth of new industries, raising skills in the workplace and preparing young people for work, the role of teachers and trainers in boosting the national skills and expertise for new industries became crucial in policy statements (IFL, 2010). Different demands are made on FE teachers to those on school teachers; industry experience is a requirement in recruitment for VET, and FECs have traditionally employed staff who have a background in the industry area they teach in as opposed to their teaching skill (Maxwell, 2014). Orr and Simmons suggest that in fact FE practitioners or tutors have a dual identity and see themselves firstly in terms of their vocational identity (plumber, hairdresser, IT specialist) and secondly as a tutor (Orr and Simmons, 2010). The need to keep abreast of industry developments via CPD, and to meet demanding external inspection and meet targets creates unique working environments conditions and pressures for FE professionals.

Young has attempted to define vocational education and specifically content and knowledge and endeavoured to demonstrate that policy makers have failed to distinguish vocational knowledge from academic knowledge (1998, 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012). Young identified that the access to vocational knowledge was non context based and the academic more relatable to certain work genres, this he called “dual recontextualization” (2008, p.170). Young further went on to identify the importance of combining both of these types of learning and that this was critical to the success of a future vocational curriculum (2011). The notion of two types of learning was made up of ‘conceptual and contextual’ learning. The former is defined by access to discipline based knowledge and the latter by access to those skills associated with that particular occupation (2008).

‘Powerful Knowledge’ is a concept identified by Young, delivering learning that was testable and evidence based, organised into knowledge domains (2009). Groups able to acquire the knowledge which takes them beyond their experiences and which would be unlikely to have access to at home or in the community (2010, p.6).

The Wolf Report (2011) failed to define vocational education, some believe as Young, that it is the combination of mental and manual skills (2010). Bloomer (2001) identified years ago that vocational education had moved away from equipping learners with specific skills for jobs to a 'softening of subject demarcations' allowing learners to work confidently.

2.3.6 Summary

This section has examined the nature of FEC development and discourses surrounding VET from a policy perspective. It has demonstrated the ongoing 'parity of esteem' between academic and vocational courses. There is significant evidence to suggest that VET is not seen as prestigious as academic qualifications and this section explored a body of theory to suggest that VET courses essentially hold a lower value. The section also highlights fundamental differences in what constitutes skills and discusses how skills are delivered in the classroom along with how pedagogy has been affected by policy. These changes of skill delivery plus the reforms in FE and impacts of those reforms on tutors and students are identified and implications discussed.

Unstable curricula caused by constant changes and reforms have left pedagogy and practise that are inherently assessment driven and target based for funding. This culture propagates conformity and compliance by the tutors whose practices change to satisfying the needs of the FE as opposed to the student.

The historical nature of FE and its proven adaptability to constant reforms is in part why the governments idealise it as central to skills and competitiveness within the market. Policy reforms are performative, the effects at the chalk face are of less concern to the government than the capital gains that are made through policy changes. The value of such changes fade quickly and further interventions are often required (Smith & O'Leary 2015).

2.4 NEOLIBERALISM

This research did not set out to frame VET reform in FE within specifically neoliberal-informed policies of the Coalition Government. However, examining the impact of educational reforms on curriculum, tutors, students and employers' experiences - perhaps inevitably - reveals identifiable neoliberal elements not only of policy, but of particular kinds of views of the learners in terms of aspirations; progression to HE and belief in career trajectories and opportunities. While the changes observed in this study are not wholly attributable to neoliberalism, it is possible to see a

relationship in elements of findings; this is particularly in assessment practises in VET and self-regulation, and in aspirational ideas shared or creating friction between learners, tutors and employers. I also explore tensions arising from policy and curriculum changes in terms of market orientation in policy and as manifested at the classroom and employment levels and outcomes.

2.4.1 What is Neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism is the idea that the solutions to most economic and social problems lie in the application of an unfettered free market and competition, coupled with a philosophy that emphasises individuals, and individual responsibility over the collective. Neoliberalism within education is, in essence, a concept influencing the design of curriculum and government schools and education, which has been dominant since the 1980s. The central role of markets is crucial along with minimal state intervention. Within education, in particular FE, neoliberalism can be seen to inform the re-imagining of education from an economic point of view (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

The philosophy behind the neoliberal ideology includes the demise of the collective and the promotion of the self-interest, the establishment of a competitive spirit between individuals and institutions. In Education, this competitive spirit is in the form of students, parents, academics and teachers vying to outdo one another which would therefore produce a higher skilled workforce – knowledge to yield economic gains (Maisuria, 2014)

2.4.2 Politics and Neoliberalism

A central tenet of neoliberalism is the enablement of social mobility through equipping the individual with the skills necessary to overcome any disadvantage to birth or circumstance (Brown,2015). As Cameron stated in his Speech of Opportunity in June 2015, improving education was a solution to ending child poverty, assisting those who need it to get into work and support their families, the party's key aim of 'one nation'. The Conservative Government further claimed that the position of the Conservative party was to reform the system to 'extend educational excellence', coupled with amended curriculums and a rise in standards, Cameron argued that his party were adding value and emphasis on 'subject of the future'.

However, skills acquisition is only part of the story: While neoliberalism and the Coalition Government's emphasis on greater social mobility were central to the Government's rhetoric, and indeed outlined in David Cameron's 'Aspiration Nation' speech, Cameron's message to young adults and students was clear that unless they embrace 'higher aspirations' they are unlikely to

move from low income or poverty status. This shift of responsibility therefore appears to move from politics and on to young people. (Spohrer, 2018).

VET in particular, is a sector in which less advantaged young people are more likely to find themselves and is thus ripe for neoliberalist reform. Slater and Klein suggest that the way out of the economic crisis is through VET and the 'ladder of opportunity to escape the spectre of uselessness by getting an education and a special skill' (Sennet, 2006, p.84). Brown extends this line of neoliberal thinking and suggests that the students are consumers and purchasers of goods creating competition to provide these goods (education) and that tutors are agents whose role is to equip these learners with the knowledge and tools to compete in the employment market (Brown, 2015). Davies writes that this management of markets promotes national competitiveness (Davies, 2014). Torres argues that neoliberalism has 'utterly failed as a model of economic development' (Torres, 2011, p.193) and Cahil adds that neoliberalism is at national and global level, institutional level and the level of social class and that policy makers will have only known this framework for evaluating policy (Cahil 2011). This study seeks to understand policy reforms at an institutional level and the neoliberal influence of policy reforms.

Neoliberal ideology suggests that the best way to organise human interaction is a market context ergo for anything to have a place in the market, it must have a price. If this price, this monetary value is not obvious, a proxy instead is used and this proxy or price is regarded as the sole indicator of its value (Brown and Carasso, 2013). The value can then have 'market derived forms of measurement and evaluation' (Davies, 2014, p 21-22). Naidoo goes further and suggests that market mechanisms are deeply entrenched in the running and governance of education providers and that these mechanisms are exploited for political goals (Naidoo 2008). While public sector reform was a focus of Thatcher's administration in 1979, it was not until the late 1980s that reforms began to affect public services and the Conservative Government started to focus on education. The 1988 Education Reform Act saw a reorganisation of education.

Although widespread and entrenched, neoliberal reform is not without its critics: A common theme with the antagonists is that instead of raising standards, performance-based education was at the expense of less quantifiable measures in the long term (Gleesons and Husbands, 2003). Further, a view argued by Gilborn is that the promotion of the individual is compromised by importance on 'high-stake tests' (Gilborn, 2006, p6).

2.4.3 Neoliberalism & Education

A clause in the 2011 Education Act allowed private companies to run Further Education colleges for profit. At the time, this was encouraged to extend to schools. Gove, and his successor Morgan, both endorsed a 'market-oriented approach to education'. In the 2011 Act agencies that controlled education including FE were abolished: General Teaching Council (GTC), Development Agency for Schools (GDA) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA). Their replacement was a transfer of responsibility to the Secretary of State and the Department of Education (DfE) who established a framework of businesses and agencies to offer managerial and educational services for a fee (Philips, 2016).

There is a need to consider whether the 'market' is best placed to run services (in education), this would suggest that market forces are of higher value than traditional forms of funding and responsiveness and delivery of public services. This approach is tightly associated with the neo-liberal approach that the UK has seen since The Tories under Thatcher's government. While an increase in funding for HE is notable under the predecessors New Labour, there is still an influence evident between the two parties and certainly in Blair's rule, a commitment to neoliberal thinking.

Welfare cuts could be viewed as the Government's means to exert pressures in a negative form as opposed to positive persuasion by choice and aspiration. VET can then be considered as determined by consumer choice allowing consumers to prioritise and optimise their personal financial potential and also contribute to the economy (Lauder et al 2011; Bell & Stephenson, 2006) This premise is now deeply entrenched in dominant educational discourse.

Verger (2014) writes that educational policy is shaped by market forces, globalisation and competitiveness and Friedman endorses the view that policies are neoliberally legitimised by their ideological perspective; total market superiority over the state, private over public provision of services and individualism over collectivism (Friedman, 1997). This approach then assumes that the well-being of the individual is linked to freedoms, that markets are neutral and accessible as well as desirable and places success at the foot of the individual. However, this ideology does not consider inequalities that are entrenched in our educational systems (Ball, 2012). Responding to the demands of a global market, reforms underpinned the relationship between education, training and economic success. New Labour promoted the notion of education, particularly FE, to be considered to have economic competitiveness shaped by dominant theories such as skill and the 'knowledge economy'. (Simmons, 2010). The relationship between education and economic success and the importance of the knowledge economy can be seen to be justification of marketisation of FE despite FE positionality being at the bottom or lower level of the class-

based systems in VET (Illsley, 2016). The reforms under the CG showed similarity to those of previous administrations since 1979 with a focus of standards being a prominent theme throughout the reforms.

When learners invest in and marketise themselves by outsourcing their skills and knowledge in competition with others; with the concept of the market as being the sole driver for raising standards as measured by test results is dominant. FECs are policed by an inspection system and a results and test- driven culture prevails. Neoliberalism supports a range of techniques such as modernisation, marketisation, enhancement and the powers of the consumer (Rose, 1993). Neoliberalism has however a contradictory set of practices or approaches which can be seen to be based on: marketisation, society, commodities, profit, the retreat of government services and privatisation and support of individualism through choice, however these individual choices can be curtailed by the choices by reforms (MacDonald, 2014).

Neoliberalism and the transformation of education has been theorised by researchers for years. The notion of contributing human capital for economic growth and the subjectification of young adults as consumers coupled with productivity is not a recent concept (Savage, 2011). Neoliberal influence in education has resulted from many interventions by different governments, each developing reforms that have overarching similarities, often to align education with market practices. In the 2011 white paper *Students at the Heart of the System*, the focus on individualism and consumerism was marked. PCET played a key part in the production of the consumer citizenship (Boden & Nedeva, 2010). This approach is considered to be flawed in its premise that it has developed a new image of society and of the individuals place in that society (Lipman, 2011). Because of this perspective there are alternative views on the role and function of VET with an interpretation held by many that VET is for job preparation and skills and outcomes are measured by league tables, standards set by policy & examination boards and accountability.

Peters writes that it is unwise to think of the 'knowledge economy' as a political doctrine, but as a powerful concept in its own right (Peters, 2010 p.68). While the term knowledge based economy appeared in the 1990's, it has different meanings, the assumption that the construct is based on intellect and not physical labour for the basis of production is a view put forward by some authors (Fumagali, 2011, Tsogas, 2012). Peters and Reverley suggest that the intellect of the knowledge worker is the most important resource and individuals hold the means for production inside them and thus education is required for shaping this development for economic growth (Peters and Reverley, 2012).

Under the coalition government education was both a social and economic policy priority. Wright suggests that through the Thatcher years and under the coalition government the connection between economic policy and education policy became much more pronounced (Wright, 2012). Opposed to this view Talbot argues that “whilst [neoliberalism] exists in ‘talk’ it is rarely translated into decisions and actions that would come even remotely to the vision of a neoliberal state that its critics claim is being created” (Talbot, 2016). This study seeks to understand neoliberal practises at classroom level via pedagogy and curriculum design.

2.4.4 Further Education and Neoliberalism

The economic value of education is central to the Neoliberalism ideology, identified as the “learning = earning” concept identified by Lauder (1996), good for the nation and the individual. Economic theory indicates that consumer empowerment relies on competition between buyers and sellers, providers and users (Marginson, 2013). ‘Output related funding’ is a concept described by Panchamia (2013), this new FE culture of not just maintaining high levels of student recruitment, but also maximising student retention and achievement.

FE historically was a community of learners, traditionally vocational but academic and vocational in the last few decades was the norm. Funding under LEA was historically attached to the course and not to the learner resulting in a lack of focus on achievement and retention. In the 1988 ERA, LEAs provided funding based on recruitment, retainment and achievement and funding was allocated differently to different subject areas (McClure, 2000). The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 removed all FE colleges from LEA controls and reduced significantly the role that LEAs played in FECs. This move was in part to address what the then Government saw as lack of responsiveness to industry and not meeting the needs of their local communities. This ‘incorporation’ and changes in funding was central to the removal of local services and a move towards community responsiveness (Simmons, 2010) also to centrally controlled finance and management. FECs then competed with each other in a marketplace.

The CG aimed to create a growth of alternative providers, such as FECs offering HE courses and increased the tuition fees for these courses in order to attract a range of learners. This diversity of provision was an attempt to introduce a fairer market – different providers meeting the needs of different sectors of society. However, there were tensions with higher drop-out rates, overpayment of support for ineligible students, poor teaching and inappropriate recruitment according to a House of Commons Select Committee report of Public Accounts in 2015. The report further detailed that the alternative providers fell outside of the existing legislative

frameworks for quality and thus was not accountable for their quality of provision (H.C, 2015, p.4).

There are criticisms of education of not skilling the workforce effectively for competing in a knowledge economy. The OECD state that success in schools, colleges and Universities remains one of the main predictors of 'long-term socio-economic inclusion' (OECD, 2012, p.9) and Silver goes further to suggest that the education system has 'a demonstrable negative knock-on effect of social cohesion' (Silver, 2006). The World Economic Forum (WEF) suggests that until the skills system is overhauled there is not a basis for a fair grounding for social mobility and career progression (WEF, 2019). UK prosperity was seen as essential and the UK economy would decline without skills.

The Neoliberalist position on knowledge economy underpins that it is down to the individual to invest in their own development (and skills) on an on-going basis. However, the dominant vocational nature of FE courses that have been featured in the study suggests that this is a narrow lens of competency-based VET and further looked to assess the preparation of learners for the workplace or other progression.

FE colleges functioning as businesses and in competition with each other, contribute to the economic productivity. A change to a more bureaucratic regime and processes can be seen to be an outcome of this neoliberal stance.

Much research has been done into neoliberalism and the shape of HE (Ball, 2015; Gill, 2016; Redden, 2015) but there is less evidence of research in neoliberalism and FE. Despite FE playing an important part in increasing numbers in VET, it predominates among the lower social class group as sixth forms, sixth form colleges and Universities absorb the majority of the higher social class populations. Authors such as Simmons suggest that FE now contains large numbers of unskilled, employed and other disadvantaged students (Simmons, 2010).

2.4.5 Neoliberalism and Pedagogy

Reforms under CG led to changes in teaching practices, institutional and professional efforts and results driven (Courtney, 2016; Hall et al, 2011; McGinty, 2015) The concept of teachers interpreting the syllabus and being innovative and creative with the delivery of content and remaining autonomous diminished (Reeves, 1995) with tighter deadlines, narrower content and target chasing culture impeaching on this autonomy and delivery.

While there is little research on neoliberalism and FE, there are related studies. Marketisation and its effects on education practice was the subject of work by Collini (2013). A case study by

Gillborn and Youdell in 2000 examined pressures on two secondary schools on achievement and how this constrained teaching practice. While there is a lack of research on neoliberal practices in FE, the framework is evident in assessment practises which define a tutors 'success'. This judgement of teachers under the marketised regime has altered the dynamics of teaching practise. The narrow parameters for teachers are present via the curriculum design and outcomes and also the pressures from internal regulation within their institute. Ofsted also has some control over the outcomes of teaching and learning practise. According to Pratt, outstanding teaching falls under an inspection system which is driven by student assessment outcomes (Pratt, 2014). This suggests that assessment outcomes are used as a proxy for the standard of education both within the institute and within the market.

Our views and understandings of education are constantly changed as parties and reforms move to change our views on society and institutions (Apple, 2016). There is a view held that the more marketisation that can be introduced into education, the more that the educational institutes, teachers and management can be encouraged to compete and thus improve (Apple 2016). However, authors such as Lipman, Lubienski & Lubienski suggest that far from creating healthy competition, this neoliberal model increases inequality.

Students who make choices on courses not based on their interests or hobbies but based on future opportunities for university or employment and earning potential is a sign of Neoliberalism. Self-determination and self-promotion underpinned by reality TV, self-help books and classes are considered as neoliberal as they promote the self and participate in the logic of self (Nguyen, 2016). Are we then saying that Neoliberalism is shaping the education of these FE students? Are we saying that their choices would not exist without neoliberalism or that neoliberalism just modified the pathways and options?

Despite the low esteem placed on VET, some learners still believe that their course will open doors for them in skilled employment in a promising market, however, it is more likely they would have to take a more pragmatic approach in whatever local employment opportunities arise in their region. These opportunities may fall below their expectations and they may have to navigate through the economic crisis and high youth unemployment. Educational reform in the coalition period represents, in part at least, a neoliberal state approach. Individuals discourses within public agencies and services a transfer of responsibility. Madanipour states "neoliberal responsabilisation involves the offloading of responsibility from the formal institutions of the state to individuals, communities and localities in the name of self-reliance and resilience" (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015, p.95). This research argues that these shifts in responsibility from the

state to local agencies were part of austerity reforms and a characteristic of the Coalition Government. Neoliberalism is widely used to explain changes in structure to the governments, individuals and the market and is understood to be the driver behind some of the changes to VET post-2010 that are the focus of this research.

2.4.6 Summary

I have identified that neoliberalism is one of the shaping economic and political forces for VET policy reform in the following ways: In changes in education policy and curriculum that seek to incentivise individuals' choices and behaviours, which in turn help markets, and in framing aspiration in terms of individual advancement on a playing field of meritocracy. I have explored arguments that question the legitimacy of neoliberalism in VET and raised questions about the suitability of academic qualifications for measuring work-based skills and providing learners with externally-valued qualifications. I have drawn attention to how growing numbers entering the employment market with a degree has led to changing expectations in the employment market in ways that create tension for VET and FECs. Finally, I highlight ways in which the purpose of education within FE appears to be moving to one with standards and outputs as measurables and less emphasis on tutor autonomy and pupil needs (Ball, 2006).

2.5 DIVISIONS OF EDUCATION

While this thesis is not focussed on the division between academic and vocational education, or on the ongoing issues related to education for the working class, it is important to include these dimensions as they inform and give context to the reforms and thinking at the time of the study under the CG. According to the Government paper '*State of the Nation 2019-2020*' FE learners are twice as likely to be from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to sixth forms (DFE,2020). Funding for these learners continues to be reduced and FEs receive less funding than schools, creating a further gap. The report goes on to identify that people who experience low pay are more likely to be from working class backgrounds (p11). Reay suggests that this class inequality is evidenced in education, and that educational policies and practises legitimise unequal access to education (Reay, 2017).

Despite increasing numbers of applications from working class learners into HE (UCAS,2014) there was still a notable gap between the disadvantaged groups and the most advantaged groups. The WP agenda targeted these learners to raise 'awareness, attainment and aspirations' of those

disadvantaged learners (HEFC, 2012). This included lower socio-economic groups, ethnic groups and disabled learners but Greebank suggests that this had little effect on white working-class learners (Greenbank, 2006). Figures from DfE report that white males from low-income families are the least likely to apply for University (DfE, 2020). These figures suggest that there is still a misalignment of vocational versus academic routes into HE.

Young identifies that the line of division between vocational and academic education emerged many years ago (Young, 2011) and suggests this divide is ingrained in the education system and has never been thoroughly addressed. Pring states that this divide has been present in every single reform (Pring et al, 2009) and it could be considered that this divide is not just one of educational establishment but of a belief system too. The Crowther report (1959) suggests a more positive view highlighting that FE was important for economic growth. Coffield suggests that no one in Government actually cares about FE (Coffield, 2005) and that FE is rooted in class divisions and invisible in some sectors. This view is highlighted by King and Crewe who identify a 'cultural disconnect' when discussing politicians and their 'values, attitudes and whole ways of life that are not remotely like their own' (King and Crewe, 2013, p.244). Most MP's do not attend FE, however the current Secretary of State did and so do his children (Lord Bethel, *ibid*). Coffield writes that Baroness Wilcox went on to add "at its worst the education system merely replicates and perpetuates the class inequality that already exists, pushing advantage to the already wealthy and locking disadvantaged pupils into poverty" (Gov,2020). Vince Cable recalled that in the early days of the CG, civil servants wanted to axe FE completely as a cost saving measure arguing that 'nobody will really notice' (Wheeler, 2014). Yet despite this, underachievement of working-class learners remained a focus for the CG and preceding governments.

2.5.1 Social class and VET according to Young

In the 1970's Young's work highlights his concerns about the non-neutrality of curriculums, outlining that forms of education reflected the interests of the dominant classes often at the expense of the working class and suggested that for these lower classes, acquisition of knowledge was difficult. However, more recently Young takes a different stance and revised his thinking. In 1998 he states:

Critical curriculum studies display how subordinate groups are discriminated against, However, without a theory of knowledge, it has no basis for suggesting what a system that discriminated less against subordinate groups might look like. Nor can it argue convincingly that doing away with or even modifying the characteristic features of the

current systems – its subjects, its pedagogic hierarchies, its external examinations and its textbooks – would make discrimination and inequality less rather than more likely (Young, 2008, p.9).

Young recognises that for teachers, pedagogy is problematic in that the curriculum does not cater for all abilities and classes and that those learners of lower class often have barriers to knowledge acquisition.

Underpinning a large part of Young's theories is the belief of two types of knowledge: powerful knowledge and knowledges of the powerful. Young highlights that powerful knowledge is specialised knowledge that is situated in different knowledge domains and not necessarily curriculum knowledge. This knowledge is in contrast to common sense or everyday knowledge (White, 2018). Young has attempted to define vocational education and specifically content and knowledge and endeavoured to demonstrate that policy makers have failed to distinguish vocational knowledge from academic knowledge (1998, 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012). Young identified that the access to vocational knowledge was non context based and the academic more relatable to certain work genres, this he called "dual recontextualisation" (Young, 2008, p.170). Young further went on to identify the importance of combining both of these types of learning and that this was critical to the success of a future vocational curriculum (Young, 2011). The notion of two types of learning was made up of 'conceptual and contextual': the former defined by access to discipline-based knowledge and the latter by access to those skills associated with that particular occupation (Young, 2008).

'Powerful Knowledge' is a concept identified by Young (2009). He writes that knowledge of the powerful refers to who defines what counts as knowledge and who has access to it. This also refers to what knowledge can do – new ways of looking at the world, sometimes now called specialised knowledge. Implicit is this concept that the idea that knowledge and learning can transform both an individual's understanding of the world and their place within it, through the development of specific skills and understanding. It is this specialism that Young sees at risk from more generalising reforms. He sees FE as in need of teachers with specialist knowledge of different kinds. One type of specialist taught knowledge is context-dependent – to solve a particular problem, the other is context-independent knowledge or theoretical knowledge – for providing generalisations, basis for judgements. Young further suggests that changes made to provision should not be made at the expense of the specialist knowledge of teachers. As I argue below, (see Chapter 7) tutors see CG reforms as weakening of such specialist knowledge and a threat to their roles.

In this study I identify elements that can be attributed to Young's concerns: the curriculum being more generalised and the removal or demotion of skills provision, as identified in the Chapter 3 discussing skills, Chapter 5 - curriculum analysis, and Chapter 6 - options for students and findings. Identified is the struggle of the tutors with target led curriculum and less autonomy and ability to be creative within the curriculum. If Young is correct in his thoughts, there are pedagogical prices to pay for a more hybridised education and weakening of subject boundaries. He suggests that teachers struggle with a changing content structure – this can be affirmed in the views and experiences of the tutors interviewed.

Young is concerned that knowledge has been displaced from its place at the heart of education (2003). In his book *Brining the knowledge back in* (2007) Young asks how vocational knowledge can be distinguished from academic knowledge. He suggests that the 'acquisition of knowledge' should be the key feature in education with groups able to acquire the knowledge which takes them beyond their experiences and which would be unlikely to have access to at home or in the community (2010, p.6).

In his paper in 2003 Young writes in opposition to the culture of targets, outcomes and WP at any cost for a more central role in curriculum and development. He also discussed that knowledge should be as essential to any curriculum as assessment, evaluation and guidance. The Wolf Report (2011) failed to define vocational education, but some believe, as does Young (2010), that it is the combination of mental and manual skills (2010). Bloomer (2001) identified years ago that vocational education had moved away from equipping learners with specific skills for jobs to a 'softening of subject demarcations' allowing learners to work confidently. Young's approach was that working-class children were being offered a lighter curriculum or knowledge content whilst the affluent received more powerful knowledge. Young, in an article for the Guardian, writes "We've always used vocational courses as a way of coping with low achievers and that seems to me to be a loser from the beginning" (Young, 2018). The author proposed that powerful knowledge should be available to all and was arguing for access to knowledge for the working-class students, the same stance he took in his 1970's writing. Young however did argue that a curriculum should not be founded on practical or tacit knowledge alone and "It is important to be cautious about replacing a curriculum based on specialist research and pedagogic communities with one based on the immediate practical concerns of employers or general criteria for employability such as key skills" (Young, 2008, p.98). Young goes on to argue that education should "enable all students to acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience" (Young, 2014a, p.10). According to theorists such as Clarke & Winch VET is about

skills and not knowledge and the curriculum changed to what skills are needed to get the job done, knowledge is demoted and related to those skills (Clarke & Winch, 2006). This school of thought suggests that vocational students have access to the knowledge they cannot get at work or at home or in their social group (Wheelahan, 2015). An argument to this is that VET endorses social inequality excluding students from theoretical knowledge they may need. Clarke & Winch claim a move for more vocational knowledge and less academic or theoretical knowledge is evident (Clarke & Winch, 2006). The OECD states that the object of knowledge in VET has become more common (OECD, 2015) and VET at the time of the CG was viewed as a mechanism to support economic growth by providing a skilled workforce and social inclusion. However, as Wheelahan claims, VET promoted social exclusion as it excluded the access to powerful knowledge or theoretical knowledge they might need in their occupational life (Wheelahan, 2015). Some theorists argue that not all subjects are equal in worth (White, 1973; Hirst, 1965) but that some subjects enrich the understanding of the way of life. This is in direct contrast to Government initiatives which place technology, engineering and maths at the basis for economic growth

2.5.2 Social class and gender in VET

Class and gender are central in cultures of VET. A vocational and academic hierarchical divide is well documented and recorded (Winch & Hyland, 2007; Atkins et al, 2011). There have been initiatives to reconcile this gap and improve the perceived value of VET. For example, New Labour claimed they had achieved this through an alignment of vocational qualifications within the qualification frameworks and progression statistics (Foster, 2009). Colley et al (2003) see the class hierarchies influencing the structure of all ways of life in the UK as reproduced in VET: they find the curriculum is class specific and largely accessed by those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A report by the Social Market Foundation (SMF) identifies geographical divide too with students from the North being more likely to be accepted in HE than those in the South (SMF, 2018). The report finds that those entering HE from a vocational route were far more likely to access lower tariff universities. The Director of the SMF observes that “Most of the people that run the country didn’t do BTECs and they don’t have the sort of background where BTEC matters most, this result is institutional snobbery against vocational qualifications and the people who have them” (SMF, 2018). These gendered and classed patterns are reflected in findings of this project (see Chapters 8 & 9 below)

The CG focused on the gender gap in education as opposed to the class gap (McNeil, 2010). Ignoring structures that reproduce economic inequalities they endorsed equal opportunities and highlighted young women as the bearers of creation for new wealth (McNeil, 2012, p.362). This contrasts strongly with the persistent gender disadvantage that characterises the sector and is reflected in reforms and the findings of this study.

Niemeyer & Colley find that stated that ‘gender injustice remains a central issue in VET and the labour market; and as the social, political and economic landscape changes rapidly in today’s world, it is inevitable that gender inequalities are produced and reproduced in new and different ways’ (2015, p.1).

Inequality across a spectrum of intersecting factors within FE is thus a consistent theme in the UK, including ethnicity, location or gender and class (Atkins 2010). VET is largely accessed by the young learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Class and gendered structures form part of the decision-making process for school leavers on their destination. Wright (2005) finds that the decision-making process of learners can include class, gender, ethnicity, education and labour market, while Atkins (2010) goes on to suggest that vocational courses are very much orientated to classed and gendered audiences.

The neoliberal young woman is expected to be upwardly mobile; she who is not successful as ‘other’ (Francombe-Webb and Silk, 2015), as young women are encouraged to take responsibility for their own success regardless of their backgrounds or privileges.

The realities for young women are documented by Skeggs (1997) who shows how aspiration for young women is schooled in ways organised around class as well as gender, and how this plays out in vocational options. A report published in 2020 by the Lords Social Mobility Committee claimed that ‘Vocational education especially disadvantages young women’. The report identifies that as at 2016, 65% of students on care related subjects were women compared to only 2.5% in construction. This supports the concept that females’ earnings will be less than males due to sector pay differences. The gender issue relates to not only the gender of the students that take the courses but also the occupations the courses relate to. Colley et al suggest that it is both class and gender that inform the young learners (Colley et al, 2003). Examples of this in this study are Childcare and Hair & Beauty being entirely female and Construction and Engineering being male. Reay writes that this ‘gendered habitus’ is visible in learners’ choices in what they see as stereotypical gendered divisions (Reay, 1998, p 61). Colley et al, and Clarke go further and suggest that girls on care and childcare courses demonstrated the same characteristics which are shaped by female gendered stereotypes (Colley et al, 2003, p.71; Clarke 2002, p.62/67). Other authors

such as Fuller and Unwin identify that apprenticeship schemes were also split heavily on gender stereotypes (2003, p.11).

All of these cases imply that job opportunities are shaped by gendered educational choices. Roles that have traditionally been seen as 'women's work' such as childcare, Hair & Beauty are unlikely to attract male students, and result in lower status, lower-paid occupations. The non-representation of gender on a pathway or course may in itself be a barrier for students and may prevent them from preferred choices or make it difficult for the few that do (Reisel & Teigen, 2014b, p4). There is little empirical evidence published which evidences the link between type of skills, females (or males) expectations and market segregation. A concept known as the 'vocational specificity' refers to the type of vocational skills learned and their relationship to those in the associated employment market and specifically, how the available vocational courses are linked to occupational requirements (Verdier, 2013). While the comparative gender differences on the courses in this study can inform us about the impacts on choice for the learners and how these segregations are continued into employment fields, the study does not identify how this gender divide has evolved or whether it is likely to change.

Bates questioned why working-class girls continued to enter working class stereotyped jobs (Bates, 2006) and Skeggs suggests that this class-based acceptance is historical and enforced by the types of opportunities open to them (Skeggs 1997, p 57). Bates and Collery state that gender and class play an important role in young people's choices and preparation for employment through VET (Bates, 1993; Collery 2006). Atkins suggests that childcare and engineering which are both heavily gendered and that these courses adhere to form a major part of the identities of the genders.

However, Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis argue that working class girls / women 'do not have the same resource or capital to abide by individualistic and neo-liberal imperative of choice, effort and success' (Gerodetti & McNaught-Davies, 2017.p.2). The authors further suggest that there is a disproportionate austerity impact on women. Le Doeuff is sceptical about the perception that gender equality is improving, using vocational evidence to support her argument. She states that females are 'concentrated in underpaid, devalued sectors of the workplace which need minimal qualification' (Le Doeuff, 1993). Le Doeuff goes further and suggests that while there are some improvements in gendered education and work, there are still many discouraging signs. While Le Doeuff's work is mainly in Philosophy, similarities can be drawn in terms of her classification of gendered education and work and the structure and progression opportunities within the FEC. The authors work also includes studies of sexism in everyday behaviours and social practices.

Deutscher writes that Le Doeuff has a political wariness in terms of quotas of token women on selection boards, committees etc believing that women's interests are devalued. (Deutscher, 2010, p40).

2.5.3 Summary

The neoliberal market and demand side emphasis can be seen on teaching and management to meet standards assessed by Ofsted. Expectations have been raised by curriculum and assessment measures which often make them out of reach for many working-class students. The CG's notion of Big Society encompassed the idea that the choice should reside with the individual making mobility achievable. Despite the CG stressing the importance of raising skills for economic growth and social inclusion, large cuts were made to funding for VET.

While a vocational qualification itself is not indicative of WP, vocational students are much more likely to come from lower class social backgrounds and low HE participation (Al Meselmani et al, 2018). VET students are more likely to enrol at lower tariff universities and more likely to drop out (32%) and achieve a lower degree classification (46%) than those entering with A levels (Social Mobility Commission, 2016).

The section explores ways in which learners' choices in VET have hidden drivers such as gender, social class and social pressure which act in the background. I have not sought to provide an exhaustive overview of explain gender segregation in VET but have identified some gender preferences in terms of subject – for example Construction and Hair & Beauty (see 2.5.2 below) These differences in vocational educational choices are not inclusive in all literature exploring the under-representation of females in STEM. The nature of VET means that more traditional skills which are occupation driven exist – examples in this study include Hair & Beauty, Childcare, Construction and Engineering - but figures in gender entry are not always considered as 'STEM' data. I have also considered ways in which higher wage returns in male-dominated VET subjects may account for their greater central intervention in terms of curriculum design and targets.

The framework that Ofsted utilised to assess performance for FECs incorporated achievement data and from 2014, performance data and destination data, funding was in part based on these target data. Hyland and Merrill further comment that with the newer funding systems concerned with retention and achievement of students, there was huge pressure on the tutors to ensure that the learners achieved and finished (Hyland and Merrill, 2003). Burke further comments that tutors' ideas of how they deliver and facilitate the learning is compromised can be lost in the

target chasing culture. Being beholden to learning outcomes and assessment criteria undermines the natural flow that can occur in teaching and make the lessons and content too prescriptive. Through interaction with students, differentiation can take place within the classroom and teachers are very well practiced in creating differentiation for their learners. Experience allows FE tutors to maintain FE standards for achievement and retention but also create positive learning environments which are inclusive for all their learners.

2.6 QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

2.6.1 Introduction

This study focuses on qualifications and their format in terms of outcomes for progression. It is therefore necessary to spend time looking at the frameworks that shaped the delivery model and the characteristics of the courses examined both prior to and during the CG years. These examples serve to illustrate the complexities within VET and highlight how changes were made at ground level without a notable perception of how the outcomes would impact the learners or pedagogical style. The frameworks and course structures were key in driving the changes to the models of delivery. This section of the chapter takes an overview of frameworks for level 3 VET courses. And they are arranged in date order, it was courses in this study which were under the QCF that had funding removed by the CG and the framework was replaced by RQF. Much of the curriculum analysis in chapter 5 is concerned with QCF and RQF.

2.6.2 The frameworks

Frameworks are designed to bring simplicity to the structure of qualifications and some to facilitate access to certain student groups (OECD, 2005). The qualifications they cover are all designed to evidence recognition of learning. Courses or qualifications are classified against a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. According to Coles & Werquin, qualifications are one of the most tangible outcomes of VET for people and enterprises' (2006, p.439) and the authors go on to state that the ways in which qualifications are organised exert "power and influence over VET" (p. 439).

Whilst giving an overview of the qualification frameworks that were in place during 2010-2015, It is important to include the newer framework Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). This was introduced despite coming into effect after the period this study focuses on. The inclusion of all the frameworks highlights how quickly systems changed for FE and sometimes within short

spaces of time. Between 2010 and 2015 the vocational education qualifications framework changed four times.

2.6.2.1 NQF

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was developed in the mid 90's in response to the development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the late 80's (Young 2003). The framework encompassed a range of vocational and academic qualifications from level 1 up to level 8 (with level one being GCSE grades D-G and level 8 being a PhD). The framework does not evidence the standard to which the qualification was met. The diversity of qualifications that were under this framework made it difficult to understand or apply one overarching framework, as some of the qualifications were context based and others not.

The BTEC was seen by some to represent a hybrid qualification – covers many syllabus areas, respected by employers and popular with students and parents (Davey and Fuller, 2010). The NQF describes qualifications at nine levels and was designed to give a clearer understanding of qualifications and their content and levels to employers and stakeholders.

2.6.2.2 NVQ

The National Vocational Qualifications are UK recognised awards that assess the ability of a learner to complete a certain job to a required standard, or competence. Ranging from levels 1 to 8 student work is assessed through portfolios of evidence and observed sessions by an assessor usually in the workplace. In 2011 NVQs were removed from the QCF framework to the NQF.

2.6.2.3 QCF

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) was launched in 2008, designed on a credit-based system which allows for progression and interchangeability of the units or credits. By 2011 most vocational pathways were converted to become QCF accredited. Initially the framework was designed to allow for Apprenticeships to fit and other Government funded programs.

The QCF contained three qualification titles:

- Awards 1-12 credits
- Certificates 13-36 credits
- Diplomas 37 credits or more

Each qualification contained the following information:

- The level of the qualification
- The size of the Qualification (Award, Certificate or Diploma)

- Details indicating the content of the qualification.

According to Tait (2009) the QCF was part of a national strategy to raise education and skills levels by improving and adding to the existing framework NQF. He went on further to state that the advantages, as interpreted by him as:

- A more clear and transparent national qualifications framework
- Improved recognition and status for vocational learning / qualifications
- Greater flexibility, motivation and encouragement for learners through unit and credit based learning
- More relevant qualifications for employment employers and learners
- Development of non-traditional progression routes into HE based on achievement of agreed units, credits and qualifications
- Articulation / integration with HE qualifications and credit systems, and
- Use of web based technology to enhance recording of achievement and information, advice and guidance systems. (p.1)

Davey and Fuller (2010) however argue that this new framework highlighted the weakness of 'skills' or vocational education in England (p.24) claiming that the division between academic and vocational education had not been embraced in the frameworks design and further that unlike the academic counterparts, vocational education was unstable due to constant policy change born from social, economic and political drivers. In 2014 the framework was reviewed and it was found to have too much focus on structure and not enough on validity thus the transition to the RQF.

2.6.2.4 RQF

The Regulated Qualifications Framework was introduced at the end of the CG rule in 2015. Overseen by Ofqual and regulated, the framework was devised to make the process simpler. The value structure worked on a system of levels and indexes – the higher the level or qualification, the more complex and challenging the content and required skills and knowledge. The framework has 8 levels and has no deadline for completion of work unlike the previous two frameworks. The framework introduced the system of Total Qualification Time (TQT) which in essence is the amount of time a learner takes to complete the qualification which also included the GLH which was a previous measure for teaching and funding. The RQF maps directly to Higher Education Qualifications as well as European Qualifications.

An external influence on assessment practise is the overarching framework. FECs endeavour to accommodate all the external explicit and implicit influences placed on them. Awarding Body

quality assurance verification processes had to be adhered to and visible. What the frameworks did not address was the ambiguity and subjectivity of the criteria referenced assessment provided by the awarding bodies.

2.7 PROGRESSING AND TRANSITIONING

Progress can be a complex term to define and within FECs it can take many forms. Progress might refer to how a learner is performing on a particular unit, year or course, it may be their destination, aims or status and it may be academic progress in terms of how academic knowledge is developed or the acquisition of industry / vocational skills. It may also be a measure for how well a learner is performing in a lesson. Progress is included in policy documentation and in turn used to drive institutes performance in achievement and quality. At a micro level it used to assess achievement on a course and level of achievement on assessments.

The final section in this chapter examines the progression opportunities for these level 3 learners and the alternatives to taking a VET course at 16-18 in FE. Aside from an analysis of the level 3 vocational courses and pathways on offer during 2010 – 2015, it is important to understand other factors which may have influenced the learner's participation on a level 3 course and also progression options post FE. The chapter closes with a look at changes to structure and qualification since 2015 which are not included within boundaries of this study but are important to consider as the future of the BTEC qualifications are under scrutiny: while new, more official technical qualifications address the skills deficit they leave the BTEC in a precarious position, potentially neither vocational nor academic.

According to Reay, David and Ball (2005) 16-18 year olds on vocational pathways in FE are largely male, from lower socio-economic backgrounds, thus learners who hold level 3 vocational qualifications not progressing into HE are working class young men predominantly. Authors Hatt, Baxter and Tate (2007) suggest in their research into widening participation, that "distance to be travelled" was greatest for vocational learners where 'their particular information needs are not well met' and their progression opportunities are also "more limited and less secure" (2007.p.303). Barr states that WP resulted in HE being for the mass and not the elite (Barr, 2014) and Barone et al suggest that disadvantages students have a more biased interpretation of HE (Baron et al 2017). Further, in a report in 2018, FENews identified that parents who have not attended HE have doubts about debt and living costs (Shaw, 2019). In an attempt to address

some of the fears, a green paper in 2016 suggested that WP should be introduced at schools in order to help attainment and understating (DfE, 2016). A significant consideration is the learner's choice or perceived degree of control over career destiny. These choices may be hindered by influences of local labour market and structural influences such as class, ethnicity and gender. While a learner may feel that they are in control over their occupational success and that their educational success was based on the amount of effort they put in, it might be viewed from much research that learners, particularly from certain social groups, only have limited chances of success. This discrepancy between individual micro viewpoints and a larger social or economic perspective may affect the research into the learners' progression. Consequently, as well as the aims of this research, the researcher needs to have a methodological aim to take into account the diversity of individual structures and differences. Changes in society can affect learners' ability to progress: changing employment patterns, any extended education post compulsory, the aging population and often changing educational policies. Local 'austerity' in terms of spending from the local authority can have an impact on progression. In 2011 the Education Act stipulated that the careers service moved from LA to schools and the service was focussed on NEETS and vulnerable learners in an attempt to, in part, address the issues to progression. The CG responded to economic difficulties by cutting public spending, outsourcing public services and paying by results (Dean & Neild, 2013) which could be seen as the opposite to addressing barriers to progression.

Widening Participation is an important consideration when discussing progression options for post 18 learners due to its influence in some of the qualification frameworks and reforms (Thompson, 2019). WP is centred on enabling non-traditional learners gaining access to HE. These could be classified as learners from under-represented groups such as working class, ethnic minority groups, disabled, learners and (historically) women (Taylor and House, 2010 p.46), but this group also includes learners from vocational courses. Mature students were also included as they had a break from learning as opposed to the traditional learner who enters HE straight from school 6th form or FE.

New Labour used the concept of education as human capital while implementing the WP policy and this notion was used to lever the policy into place "everyone must have the opportunity to innovate and gain reward" (DfEE, 1998, p.10). WP is aimed to give access to all of the under-represented groups whatever their background or history. This, in theory, assisted the Government in achieving its goals in terms of competitiveness in the global market.

Part of the mission of The Diploma was that learners were to develop a range of capabilities in order to satisfy stakeholders; it was a 'middle track' qualification (Hodgson and Spours, 2010). These middle attainers were researched by Hodgson and Spours both under new Labour and the Coalition government and the researchers found that while these mid band learners enjoyed a greater choice and practical learning by vocational courses at Key stage 4 KS4 (GCSE level), they often opted for the 'safer' option of more traditional academic courses for the next stage. The authors went on to argue that the CG 'had its sights firmly set on the top 30 percent' although there was some focus on the bottom group, Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs). The CG were focussed on NEETS and the 30% of high attainers, but like New Labour before them, lacked any positive focus on the middle attainers (Hodgeson & Spours, 2010). This "alarming rise in the levels of young people who are detached from both the labour market and education and training system" (Maguire, 2015, p.121) is an ever growing concern according to educational researchers (Allan, 2014a; Jones 2013; Newborn and Shinner, 2005). Hodgson and Spours further state that the vocational achievements within FE failed to arm the students with "sufficient educational arsenal for progression" (Hodgson and Spours, 2014, p.471). This suggests that there remained a gap where students who were not achieving academically could be left in a position whereby they had few progression opportunities.

The authors claim that the government failed to address the needs of the 'neglected middle'. They maintained that policies such as the English Baccalaureate and the reduction in vocational qualifications would exacerbate the situation and the middle attainers group would increase. The authors went on to recommend four 'urgent practical measures to address this issue;

- Build progression skills into KS4 curriculum, with more emphasis on English and maths until 19,
- Rebuild collaboration between 14-19 providers, HE and others
- Make missed academic / vocational routes more available post 16 and raise their status
- Dramatically expand apprenticeships

(2014,p.21).

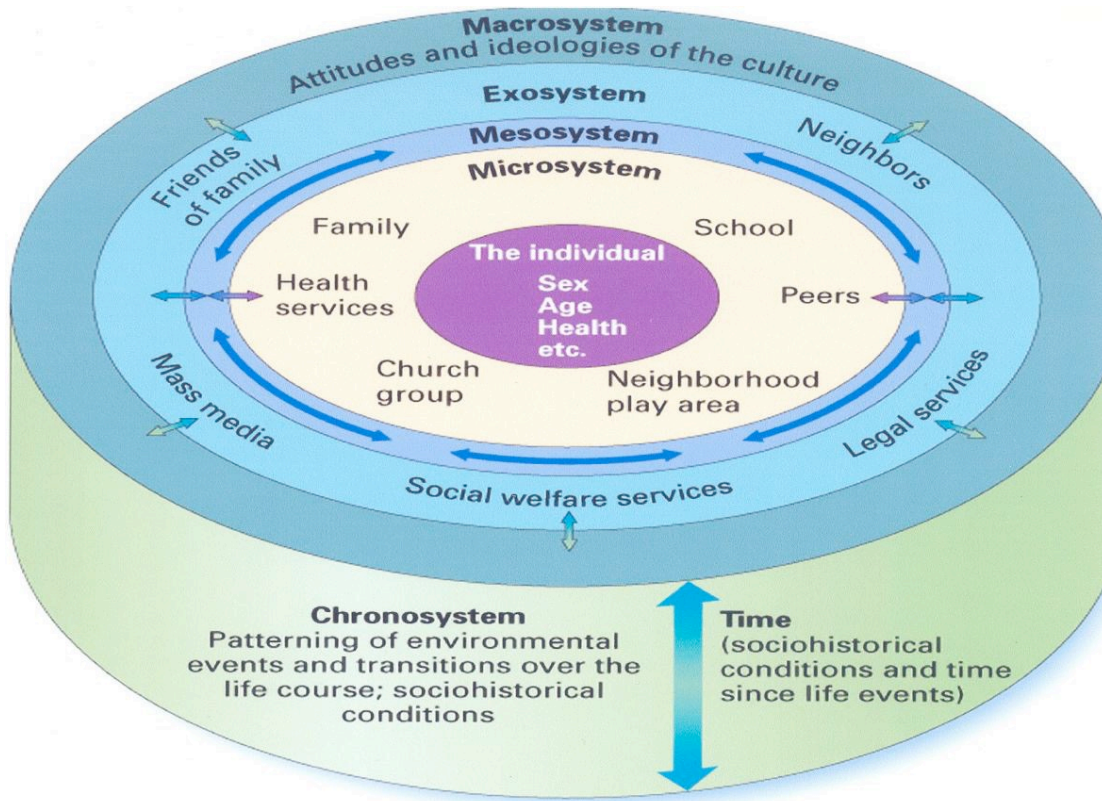
These middle attainers may well have different experiences and views than those in the higher percentile of top achievers but represent a significant number of the level 3 learners. This group of learners are the focus of this study.

The transition process is important in discussions for these learners seeking employment. The National Foundation for Education and Research (NFER) has identified the transition from education to employment as a major challenge faced by young people. Other researchers however such as Jeffs and Smith (1998) and Barry (2005) support the theory that widening the

concept of participation can encompass the intricacy of individual experience. Basit (2012) argues that gender, class and ethnicity are powerful factors that govern the transitions from youth to adulthood, identifying a number of such factors in progression and advising caution on the generalisation of transition. Shildrick and McDonald (2007) further argue against narrowing down the models of transition and stereotyping. Instead, they argue research should focus on aspects of young people's lives such as leisure, health and sexuality alongside the traditional factors.

A system model that includes the influences that affect youth's transitions to adulthood and understand these, helps researchers understand the process more. Factors such as family, school, neighbourhood, social structures surrounding them and internal factors such as attitudes, motivation and self-esteem can be visually represented. A well-known model, the ecological model was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), was later refined as the bio-ecological theory of human development (2001). This model indicates the drivers of human development as the interactions that occur between individuals and their surroundings (their biological being and their ecology). The Author discusses the importance of 'proximal processes' which refer to the active role an individual plays in their own development and their engagement with the objects within their environments; people, objects and their bi-directional influences.

Figure 2 : visual representation of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of human development (2001)



Hodgeson and Spours (2013) offer a multi-level ecological based on Bronfenbrenner’s theories, identifying methods to facilitate young people’s transition from education to working life. They argue that a new type of analysis is required based on the changing and growing number of factors such as the growing crisis of opportunities for work facing these young learners. Participation, Progression and Transition (PPT) was their concept. The authors identified a number of factors internationally and nationally such as economic downturn, changing educational policy and the impact on practices from providers at lower levels within the curriculum to support 14+ learners. A consideration of the external factors and systems surrounding learners must be included when examining progression and destinations. The influences may have little to do with pedagogy practises and perceived skills development.

2.8 THE FUTURE

2.8.1 T Levels

In 2017 a framework was devised under the Technical and Further Education Act highlighting a new technical education option to sit alongside the academic A level route for PCET. The new qualification comprises of 15 routes and further subdivided. Primarily aimed at 16yr olds and with a ‘transition year’ for those not ready to start a T level course but who will complete by the time they are 19 years old. Equivalent to 3 A levels the two-year course will consist of:

- A technical qualification
- An industry placement
- Maths, English & digital skills requirements
- Occupation specific requirements / qualifications
- Further pastoral. Enrichment provision

Some routes, construction, digital, education and childcare will roll out for the first time in 2020 to a selection of providers and then in 2021 rolled out nationally.

In the Post-16 skills plan 2016 the Government recognised that technical skills and their provision were still weak in the UK. In the paper they discuss “rather than the current crowded landscape of overlapping qualifications” (BIS, 2016, p.8) and insist that the new T-Levels will address this lack of skills.

2.8.2 The future of the BTEC

Unlike The Diploma introduced by New Labour and GNVQs by the Conservatives in late 1990’s, the BTEC continued to grow and amass thousands of students. One in five learners enter HE on a BTEC, some combine their BTEC pathway with an A level and the qualification attracts learners from different socio/ economic backgrounds and ethnic groups.

Pearson’s website states that the RQF BTEC which were still funded (as of 2019) still had an important place alongside the T levels and academic pathways. They do however state “ It is unclear how T levels will affect Applied Generals and Technical qualifications at level 3” (Pearsons,2019). A conflicting report claimed that “Government consults on plans to withdraw funding from BTECs” (schoolweek, 2019; FENews, 2019). The report also refers to BTECs as ‘legacy’ and questions their place in the new curriculum offerings. There is fear however that thousands of students who do not get the entry grades for either the T levels or A levels will be left without options, but given the rhetoric on skills, where will the BTECs fit in? We know that the BTEC played a positive role in widening participation over the past decade but there still remains doubt over the success of BTEC students once they are on their undergraduate programs, having the highest non completion rates. The choice between the T levels and the A levels is now being referred to as a ‘binary choice’ in which case where does the BTEC sit.

2.9 SUMMARY

This chapter completes the literature review that underpins my approach and addresses the research objectives. The chapter contextualises the reforms and how FECs responded to those changes. The paucity of research in VET and delivery and shape of skills underpins the rationale for conducting the research. This chapter has shown that VET reforms have been one of the focusses from different governments for decades. The FE sector has been subject to multiple curriculum and funding changes and this chapter has included some of the policies that have had to be acted on and how these reforms impacted at the chalkface.

The chapter presented a review on the literature and highlighted that focus on skills and vocational education has been important to many governments and it is clear that different agencies hold different views on what constitutes skills and vocational education. Old and new perspectives were included and aimed to form the basis of the research. The final section of the chapter critically examined the level 3 vocational provision which is essential as the study focus is concerned with learner destinations.

The assessment practises have a detrimental effect on pedagogical practise which has been highlighted during 2010 to 2015 and has resulted in assessment as learning. Criterion compliance with an emphasis on summative assessments are used to measure a student's success, both in terms of success and progress but also in terms of funding. The assessment practices are examined in detail in chapter five in an analysis of curriculum material. The chapter will examine assessment verbs and methods for all units on all of the five pathways studied for the period before the CG reforms and those formats that replaced them under the CG.

3 SKILLS

3.1 Introduction

When investigating the strengths and weaknesses of 16-19 year old vocational pathways and skills delivery under the CG, a consideration of the meaning of the term 'skills' is essential. This chapter reviews the literature and approaches to the skills debate and will highlight that it is clear that the many different agencies refer to different ideas or models when they refer to skills. The diversity of meaning can also be linked to the varying interpretations of VET and trying to define what constitutes a skill is challenging but fundamental to determining if skills delivery took place on the pathways of courses within the FEC under the CG.

An aspect of the research is to establish what the interpretation of skills was by the three different stakeholder groups: students, teachers and employers and identify if there was any notable difference in approach towards skills delivery on the level 3 vocational courses under the CG to those preceding them and if so, how that may affect learner progression.

Once the definitions of skills have been identified, chapter six moves on to examine learner destinations and progression pathways within the timeframe of the research. When considered with the type of vocational course in terms of motivation and suitability for related employment opportunities, patterns may emerge. Other important progression factors are then introduced such as policy changes to unemployment benefits, Raising of the Participation Age and discontinued funding for 19+ learners as these affect the progression of learners in terms of PCET options.

3.2 Skills

There has been considerable focus on skills over the past two or three decades. The diverse classifications and labels of skills differ from one author or body to another. Continual re-shaping of vocational education and the provision of skills further exacerbates the understanding of the term skills. Wolf (2011) addresses skills and the skills gap in her report and uses the label "employability skills", when discussing how VET must address the skills gap (p.12). Payne (2010) suggests that as far back as the 1950s, skills were associated more with 'hard' abilities such as operating manufacturing equipment. Winch & Hyland (2007) in line with this definition suggest that the distinction between academic and vocational education was profoundly distinct in former years. Ainley (1993) and Keep and Mayhew (1999) classified skills as those associated with

craft workers and technologies but Payne (2000) suggests that any attempt to identify a set of transferable skills meant that the term became broadened and thus indistinguishable. Lum (2015) suggests that employers have been partly responsible for narrowing down the concept of skills qualifications. Employer expectations and shifts in government policies have seen changes in approaches to thinking and acceptance of the transferable skills debate (De la Harpe and Radloff, 2000). While these references are a decade or more old, current thinking reflects a similar mindset.

Many researchers and organisations over the years have sought to define soft skills more precisely, the Department of Education who attribute these soft skills as 'character'; 'a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct' Taylor, (2017, p.4). "Character is increasingly recognised as being a required soft skill in employment along with personal resilience and emotional wellbeing" (APPG, 2012, p28). City and Guilds state that 21st century competencies would probably be described as "transferable skills rather than performance character skills" (City & Guilds, 2016, p.4). In 2015, CBI and Pearson undertook research by surveys on education and skills of around 300 employers and reported that the three main factors employers look for when recruiting were attitudes to work / character, general aptitude for work and basic numeracy and literacy over academic results (CBI/Pearson, 2014-2015).

The definition of skills is controversial and certainly when applying it to the 16-19 year olds educational courses. The term can be applied to a plethora of activities and there is much debate over what constitutes transferable skills, core skills, trade skills or soft skills. A transferable skill can be seen as one that is learnt in the classroom and applied in employment. Recognition of this transfer also allows us to distinct between transferable and other types of skills – the Department of Education, and Skills (DfES) define them as "those skills that are central to the occupational competence in all sectors and at all levels" (DfES, 1997 p.38). Lewis (1997) states that "as work is an important part of our life, we should find a place for it in schools and colleges" (p.484). Payne discusses a 'skills universe' in which a range of personal characteristics, behaviours and attitudes are included and also a "veritable galaxy" of 'soft, 'generic', 'transferable', 'social', and 'intractable' skills" are included (Payne, 2000, p354). The 'soft' skills include communication, team-work, problem-solving, and are in contrast to the 'technical' skills but have also become the focus of research and policy reforms (Grugulis and Vincent, 2009). Payne (2000) commented that attempts to identify a particular set of transferable 'skills' across VET for all resulted in the term becoming so broad that it became indistinguishable from one subject to another. Tomlinson's

(2004) characterisation of 'skill' favoured a more occupational leaning while Brockman et al (2008) suggested a more holistic concept was applied to the term.

The two distinct approaches to skills definition within VET remain as adopting a competence-based approach whereby the job is defined first and the skills determined to be able to do that job. And then the other approach which is to consider a job role or a career and decide what skills would be required for that broad occupation. The first can be considered the UK approach and the latter the German model – the UK model learning through work and the German model is preparation for work. While there are arguments for both systems which are not considered in this study, it can be agreed that adopting a competence-based approach to skills may focus on a very specific skill set for one role but are not broad enough to transfer to another role thus pigeon holing them into one career. This could be considered the very nature of the City & Guilds qualifications that the CG removed funding from. Buchanan (2006) claims that this approach has led to a "binary concept" (p.15) and he, like others agrees that a system which combined the approaches in VET would equip learners with a large range of transferable skills that could be used in multiple occupations.

3.2.1 Knowledge and skills

For many years we have seen skills competing against academia as opposed to complimenting it (Drummond et al, 1998). Bennet (1993) comments that we have seen a 'disenfranchise' of skills of those technical expert skills related to their specific subject area. Authors such as Bathmaker (2013) and Winch et al (2007) claim that knowledge is commonly associated with general education whereas skills are attached to the vocational provision thereby making a distinct divide between the two. This then meant that attempts to 'up skill' students have existed in the VET sector and attempts to redress the skills gap can be seen in the BIS (2014) paper in which it attempts to address the youth unemployment via vocational policy and practise, as Payne states 'the need to ensure the employability of young entrants into the labour market' (Young, 2010, p.354).

Earlier views according to Bridges (1993) that academic environments often do not recognise or value skills and label them as 'soft' options are seen as outdated and recently the HEFCE claim that around 20% of undergraduate degrees have strong vocational elements and around 40% of integrated Masters courses have vocational elements (Russell Group, 2018). Examples of these are traditionally dentistry, medicine and veterinary science but also degrees whereby the courses

have to be professionally accredited such as Law, Engineering and Accountancy. The HEFCE makes a clear statement that courses are both academic and vocational.

The distinction between theory and practise can be seen in the vocational examination board course specifications and unit outlines. The specifications divide competences and activities or performance criteria separately from what they term 'underpinning knowledge' – see chapter 5. Nursing is a good example of the dichotomy of theory and practise and there are arguments for how much provision should take place in the lecture theatre and how much on the ward (Lum, 2015) but nursing in particular has a theory-practise format and this gap is seen to be "an issue of concern for many years" (in Lum 2015 Hewson and Wildman, 1996, p.754).

3.2.2 Employability and skills

The skills as included in the vocational courses funded by the CG are clear on the inclusion of skills to promote employability, which they commonly refer to as employability skills and are listed in the unit outlines for each of the course pathways discussed in this research (see chapter 5). In the description's skills such as 'teamwork' and 'communication skills' are listed in the BTEC pathways. Payne suggests (1999) that the concept of skills has become "unbearably light" and further suggests that it has expanded to include "soft, generic, transferable, social and interactional skills" (p.345) which he considers indistinguishable from personal attributes and attitudes. Savage et al (2013) writes that today's understanding of skills is very different from the hard technical skills there once were in VET learning and suggests that more social conceptualisations of what shape skills are have been developed. Employability skills are often termed 'soft skills', differentiated from 'hard or core skills' which are the specific skills or qualifications to relate to a particular job or role. Heckman and Kautz (2012) claim that these soft skills can predict success later in life and in part are responsible for that success (p.2). Soft skills are generally classified as personal skills, goals, motivation, attitudes and approaches to work.

Different disciplines within education and employment will have different visions and understanding of skills. The demand for skills, employers demand for skilled workers and the demand for skills formation opportunities all are concepts that need defining, and associated policy defining. When policy makers attempt to address skills, they may have a differing interpretation from other parties; employers, employees, education institutes and other government parties. Such policies may then not address all the needs involved.

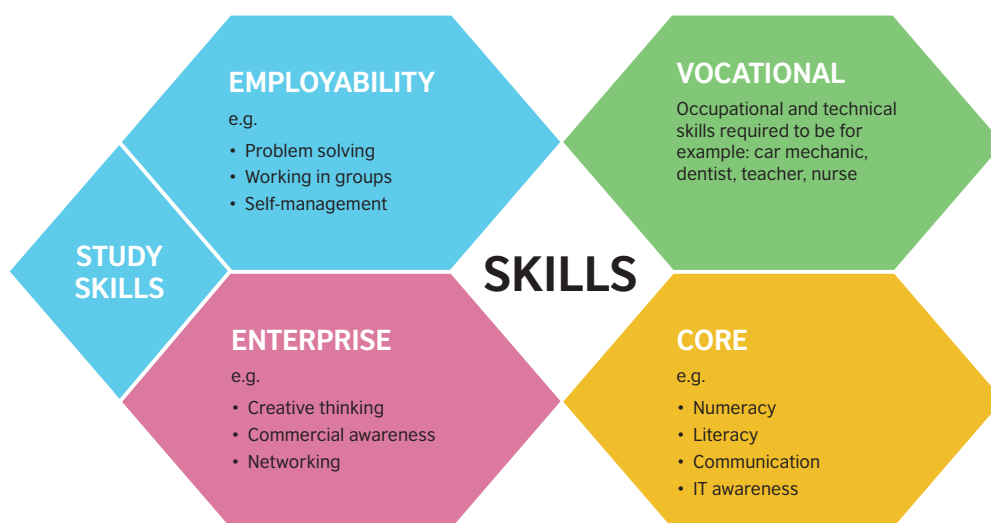
3.2.3 Contextualising skills

The notion that skills can be acquired and therefore students can be hierarchically positioned against each other is problematic. Communication skills are often cited as a desirable or essential skill in employment but authors Wheelahan and Moodie (2017) suggest that this is a conceptual issue.

The essence of skills has been captured in the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) definition of employability “a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and to be successful in their chosen occupation(s) to the benefits of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”. (Yorke and Knight, 2006. p 3).

The interpretations of skills vary but each model of skills can be seen to be related. Each of the skills in figure 3 are delivered in Post Education Training Councils (PETC) and VET establishments. The government wants to equip the young with appropriate skills and qualifications to be able to contribute to the economy. Soft skills are often perceived as those required for everyday life, such as communication, attitude, and positivity.

Figure 3 CBI Skills model



(CBI, 2014)

Skills are still at the centre of political debate and focus and measured on a national scale (Savage et al (2013). The author goes on to note that this skills definition was a determiner for social mobility for both groups and individuals (ibid). Skills that were considered as ‘high skills’ placed workers at the top. Of the skills hierarchy and those with the manual skills or industrial skills were considered ‘low skill’ labourers and were situated at the bottom of the social framework (Savage et al, 2013). The skills required for upward mobility were predominantly identified as social skills

and personal characteristics such as “being well turned out, well spoken, well-mannered, of good appearance and having character” (Goldthorpe, 2003.p.16).

The government places much importance on ‘skills need’ but rarely elaborates on the term ‘skills’ or ‘competence’. There is much literature on ‘core skills’ such as numeracy, literacy and ICT indicating that there is a universal agreement of these skills and their importance. In a report published by BIS entitled ‘Skills for Sustainable Growth’ the authors suggest that there is a particular weakness in technical skills required to respond to technological change (BIS,2010b) which brings a further terminology to the forefront.

An aim of this chapter is to explore the concept of ‘skills’ and what it means to different bodies. Terms such as competences, practical skills, transferable skills, employability skills and skills are often used interchangeably. Hughes and Mager (2000) suggest that this lack of clear skills definition is partly responsible for a lack of focus on skills agendas, and stated that it can be classified as “knowledge’, ‘attributes’, ‘attitude” (p.4). Payne (2000) describe the perception of skills as:

ubiquitous, the term being applied to such diverse phenomena as reading, writing, problem solving, learning teamwork, salesmanship, marketing, presentation, perseverance, motivation, enthusiasm, attitude, corporate commitment, customer orientation and stress management (p. 362).

Felstead, Gallie and Green (2002) suggest that the lack of agreement on what skills actually refer to causes inconsistency and state “there is surprisingly little agreement on what skills actually refer to”(p.20).

Identifying the perception of skills from the different stakeholders is essential as the term is used interchangeably by all parties. Core skills are often viewed as a generic term for describing the ability to use a particular tool for the job. Hillage and Pollard (1998) define the term ‘employability skills’ as “having the capability to gain, maintain and obtain new employment if necessary” (p.1). Lees, (2002) and Knight and Yorke (2003) add that the definition is the demonstration of acquired skills relevant to gaining employment and carrying out the job effectively. The researchers also point out that learners cannot assume that they are employable just because they have passed a course successfully. Pring asserts that the skills set an employer looks for is wider than those represented on their qualification – such as attributes and attitudes therefore weakening the value of the qualification (Pring et al, 2009). Some researchers such as Tomlinson (2004), Yeomans (2002) suggest that the acquisition of ‘soft’ skills cannot be gained from a work experience placement or outside of employment thus adding further confusion to the definition.

3.2.4 Skills for Employability

The concept of 'employability' is intertwined with 'employability skills' in much research. Viewing employability as a form of learning as opposed to a list of attributes is described by Hinchcliffe and Jolly (2011) who argue that employability is a "four stranded concept of identity that compromises value, intellect, social engagement and performance" (p.1) in opposition to the more traditional model. The emphasis here is that employability is not just skills or academic achievement. Definitions of employability have shifted from demand-led skills set to a more holistic view of graduates' attributes that include 'softer' transferable skills and "person centered qualities, developed in conjunction with subject specific knowledge, skills and competences" (Cole and Tibby, 2013, p.9),

Lucas and Hanson (2015) differentiate employability practises from transferable skills. The former they claim "encompasses taxonomies such as; self-belief, self-control, perseverance, resilience, curiosity, empathy, creativity, and craftsmanship and transferable skills as; communication, time-management, self-management, problem- solving, team working and giving and receiving feedback" (Lucas and Hanson 2015, p.6). These can be seen to link them to "habits of mind 'and 'character'"(p.6). These skills are a move to a notion of personal development rather than an autonomous ability to perform a task. Self-belief is identified by the authors as an employability skill, listed by Youth employment UK as a top five transferable skill (YE UK, 2017) but it is not included at all in literature from the CBI. It is then of no wonder that the true definition of skills is interpreted commonly.

Employability is a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2004, p.8)

In order to establish what skills are essential for an employee to have, the employer must have a process for identifying the skills for any role. Central policy makers such as the Department of Education (DfE) and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Skills Funding Agency (SFA) aim to prepare the workforce with the skills required to meet the demands of new technologies and workplace practices. Employers need a workforce that has the relevant skills to match their needs both immediately and long term. A report by ESS (2015) outlines that only a third of vacancies in the UK had "hard to fill" vacancies (p.36) and these were due to lack of skills, qualifications or experience among applicants in 2015. In a CBI/ Pearsons (2016) skills survey it is stated that the demand for skills was rising and that "69% of businesses were not confident that

they could fill demand for high skilled vacancies” (p.6). According to Government statistics in 2015 when the CG were replaced by the Conservatives, 209,000 skills shortage vacancies were identified (UKCES, 2015) and a more recent Edge report claims that there is a shortage of 266,000 shortages in skills vacancies (EDGE, 2018,p1). This imbalance between the skills that the current work force have against those required for industry may be, in part, attributed to the lack of definition and ambiguity over what those skills are. Skills for employability are inevitably referred to as soft skills but we can see from the evidence in this chapter that in terms of various types of industry, skills can mean a different set of attributes and there is further ambiguity over soft skills and core skills. Yorke (2003) and colleagues argue that the concept of skills being classified as core or key skills was too narrow and that the concept of employability is a collection of wider capacities or achievements (p.3). This viewpoint is opposed by views from authors such as Archer and Davison (2008) who write those soft skills were defined as communication skills and team working while hard skills were a good degree of IT skills, literacy and numeracy (p.8) These views conflict with common views held by others included in this research.

SMEs will largely look to the immediate future when assessing their skills need for production / profit rather than looking at the long term as the policy makers do, Jamieson et al state (2012), claiming that 44% of their survey sample stated their business had grown due to organic growth / internal expansion or reputation (p.38).CIPD (2015) enforce this viewpoint claiming that “for those who remain inside an attenuated core workforce, training may be becoming much more focused on immediate corporate needs and objectives” (p.31) This conflicts with views such as Leitch’s who argues that “Vocational skills must be demand-led rather than centrally planned” (2006, p.4). It may be considered that employers expect the state to provide skills training so that the new employees are work ready, however it could be argued that specific skills which employers need should be provided by employer training. Wilson (2012) however argues that “skills are typically related to the current state of orders, business organisation and production technologies” (p.33). MacDonald (2011) however states that unemployment “is a product of the low skills and aspirations of the young unemployed...which can be sorted by up-skilling” (p.434). This thinking might be narrow-sighted as the CG reduced the opportunities for up-skilling by significantly cutting funding from courses. The consequences of the wide reforms were that a substantial number of young people faced unemployment or underemployment through welfare-to-work programs and benefit cuts. Policies on improving skills and motivation did not match the narrow conceptions of employability. There is further misunderstanding of the structure of unemployment, understanding from unemployment as a structural condition

explained by the lack of employment to an individual problem caused by a lack of employability (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005 ;Peck and Theodore, 2000).

3.3 Summary

The research into the definitions of skills suggest that there is no one clear definition and that the adjectives are used interchangeably between different agencies. There has been a move towards softer or employability skills by business and education incorporating skills or traits which can be considered as timekeeping, communication, team work etc. This change may indicate that mental work was valued over manual work. The evidence suggests that employees are expected to bring a plethora of attributes and attitudes to enable the transition into work and that even though there is not one meaning for skills, the terms interpretation has broadened.

The list like skills acquisition suggests that skills learning then has a beginning and an end. The list of desired skills or traits appears linear or sequential. From the BTEC language used in their material in acquiring skills, the student skills level has been tested, skills are then gained once the course is completed. Level of grade equates to how skilled the student is. This does not seem to fit in with the more holistic skills set identified in this chapter.

The CG was accused of creating VET policy that overly relied on “superficial, skills-based approaches” (Coffield, 2012; Bates,2012, p.95). Employers desired a wide range of skills and attributes which cannot be gained by qualifications alone, which in part weakens the relationship between the employers and the formal qualification. (Pring et al, 2009). The term and definition of skills is still ambiguous, the vocational qualifications under the CG were limited in terms of their funding and both these factors can be linked to a failure to address the skills that the economy and industry need. We can understand that our educational system was adapted to suit the needs of progression and WP in a neoliberal approach, but some believe that this was driving the education pathway away from one which suited their needs (Reay, 2006; Gilbert, 2018; Rose, 2010). Attempts by the CG to address the difference in status between academic and vocational education failed as funding for ‘upskilling’ was reduced and the skills gap widened (Edge, 2018).

4 METHODS

This chapter sets out the theoretical philosophical perspective and methods used to conduct the research, offering a rationale behind the approaches chosen including strengths and limitations. It considers factors in designing the methodological framework within the education research model. Within this I outline my positionality within the research, the case study approach, the research location, sampling considerations, and interview techniques. I delineate methods used to collect and analyse data, and offer a consideration of issues relating to ethics, validity, and reliability. I show how my approach to the main research developed from my pilot study in terms of design.

The chapter is presented in two parts, the first will describe the research paradigm and the interpretivist approach, and the second part discusses the methodologies used in the study and the justification of those methods.

4.1 Research outline

This study employs a mixed-method approach to investigating the consequences of the Coalition Government's reforms to post-16 vocational education for students, institutions and employers. The method was designed to enable both an evaluation in quantitative terms of VET reforms, and also to gain insights via qualitative data into the processes involved in implementing those reforms, from the perspective of staff and students. In order to understand the issues and dynamics of impacts on the stakeholders, an examination of curriculum assessment material, study of employment patterns and experience and views on pedagogical practice, skills transfer, and consequences of reforms was undertaken. Such an approach enables the researcher to garner a range of comparative data to provide in-depth insights (Creswell, 2018, p.116). The method was designed to meet the following research aims:

- Gain understanding via critical examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the policy changes in Level 3 Vocational provision by the Coalition Government 2010-2015 and in particular how those impacted in terms of skills delivery in the classroom.
- Generate insights into outcomes in terms of both changes in gainful related employment and learner progress both before and during the policy changes
- Develop understanding of how these curriculum changes affected the employability of learners, and

- Gain insight into employers' expectations and perceptions of the changes to qualifications, and into learner experiences

While the reforms identified in the literature review were implemented across FEC's and sixth forms across the UK, this research focused on one Further Education College (FEC) in the North East and on the level 3 vocational provision within that institution.

4.2 Positionality

Defining my own positionality as a researcher within this study is important as is acknowledging that taking the researcher out of a study is impossible (Wellington et al, 2005). Framing my positionality may help the reader have more insight into the perspective from which the study is written. My perspective and positionality have been shaped by working class issues, opportunities, gender patterns and political stance. The views I have developed through my career and adult life and cultural trajectories shaped my habitus and therefore my positionality. As the researcher, when I initially started my research, even further back, when the policy changes came into effect, I was very opposed to the changes. This opposition formed a very strong bias in my mind and I approached my research with my mind already made up about what I wanted the outcome to be but on researching further, going back into political history in terms of educational reform, identifying a timeline of policy changes, looking at economic slumps and growth and taking into consideration the social changes and aspirations of young learners, I found my bias ebbing away and my mind being opened up to new arguments and viewpoints. While I have an 'insider perspective' working within the field both pre and post the changes, in a white middle class FEC and a large older FEC in a very poor large city in the North, I felt that my experience was a good starting point. From the first year of my research, I ensured that I maintained a degree of objectivity in all selection processes and creation of data gathering, whether it was questionnaires or interviews.

At the start of my research my belief could have been categorised as 'positivist' – I sought the 'truth' and approached the research with a mind to eliminate the effect of preconceived ideas, views and values held by others. Bourdieu states that a 'first automatic' inclination as a researcher is to try to escape 'any suspicion of prejudice' by attempting to 'negate ourselves as 'biased' or 'informed subjects' (1988, p.6). And indeed, initially this was my view. Over time however, I became sceptical about the belief that I could adopt a completely objective approach to my

research, indeed that it was possible at all. My view then became interpretive, which was accepting of many different realities or truths (Pring 2000; Cohen et al 2000). I adopted the viewpoint that many different interpretations can co-exist on the same concept, and that my construction of what I believe to be true was one of many. In adopting this belief, from reading other research, familiarising myself with authorities on the subject area such as Bathmaker, Coffield, Young and Ainley and Allen and rejecting my previously held belief that my viewpoint was absolute and therefore the one held by many, I was able to consider other perspectives much more openly and considerably. This openness allowed me to understand the policy makers' meaning or viewpoint.

In this study complete objectivity was not possible in that I was in the environment of the study and not outside or separate from it viewing objectively. As I am the only collector of data, I need to recognise what my beliefs can have on interpretation and presentation of this data. Interaction with students, tutors and employers will have an inflection of my beliefs and background.

4.2.1 Insider Researcher

Positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the other people or the situation in a study. It is not only about how you see yourself but also how others see you (Marsh et al, 2018). The outsider researcher's position can be considered as the degree of your connection to the group you are studying (Breen, 2007).

I was an insider within the context of my study in that I had been a tutor within that FEC for many years, a colleague, an employee and a fellow professional and the issues that I faced as a researcher inside the domain were varied and complex across the different data sites within my study. My insider teaching experience allowed me empathy towards the frustrations and restrictions to pedagogical practise as experienced and reported by participants. There was a risk that as an insider, I may know too much thus fail to 'look enough' and that I may make assumptions. My critical analysis of practices at my workplace resonates with Clegg's notions of insider researchers and the closeness of their subject (Clegg, 2001). My tutor status within the FE allowed me access to participants, tutors as work colleagues and current students and gave me an understanding of the socio-economic background of the FE plus having access or privileged entrance into the world group I am studying including access to the views and vulnerabilities of participants. Using informed consent allowed me access to the tutor and

student participants and FE documentation and Ryan and Hood suggest this is a predeterminer to open the communications door (2004). My insider status as a tutor meant that I identified with the policy reforms as my professional position required that I engaged with curriculum changes and design. This provided me with a reference point on how policy and practice were enacted in complex ways.

I was not an insider per se with regard to other courses (Construction, Engineering, Childcare and Hair and Beauty) within the FE but being an experienced tutor gave me insight to the knowledge, language and culture of the other pathways. I could recognise the power relationships that existed within the FE. Tutors could discuss their experiences to an insider who may be more understanding and knowledgeable than an outsider.

With the employers I was an outsider, and I had no connections to them, but I found that I was able to move between being an insider and an outside with ease. I also found the responses from employers less detailed and less fore coming than that from students and tutors; a stranger asking questions without having a trust relationship established plus the nature of the questions on policy reform made some employer participants uncomfortable as this was outside of their knowledge base.

Despite my privileged position the tutors had ethical considerations in terms of how much information they might be able to divulge and whether their role as Managers could be compromised by their personal thoughts or views. My physical presence did not necessarily mean that I was fully an insider into syllabus and habits in divisions other than my own (IT).

There is an ethical issue with regard to insider research in the workplace in that information might be coerced, either through the recruitment stage or the interviews (Burke & Kirton, 2006). After consultation with my supervisor, it was decided that recording the interviews would highlight any coercion attempts and either make an interview invalid (thus redo the interview) or exclude an interview.

There is a risk that as the participants knew me, they may have assumed I knew or understood some issue, so they may not have expanded or shared as much (Hewlett-Taylor, 2002). Using careful language with the learners and at times humour, allowed me to develop relationships with them and break any anxieties they may have had (Hockey, 1993). The potential for students especially to answer with what they thought I would want to hear was a risk so consideration

was given to this. Questions were re-asked using a slightly different framing for clarity from the students. There is also a risk that as an insider while I was committed, legitimate, and trusted by participants I may have my own prejudice, (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002) and act as a fault finder rather than truth finder, be too embedded in culture or insufficiently critical. Outsider researchers can be considered more critical but inexperienced in criticality, a stranger to the culture, viewed with suspicion, and need to culture impression management to gain trust from participant (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015)

Positionality matters because of bias subjectivity and reflexivity matters to help a researcher become more authentic. (Cohen et al, 2011). The integrity of the study is enhanced making it more valuable thus being reflexive was key – as an insider to the student and tutor participants but outside to the employers (Crossley, Arthur and McNess, 2016). However, consideration was given to this dual role and my role within the FE setting which might blur my vision (Le Gallais, 2008). Reflexivity is essential to consider with an insider / outside researcher, ensuring that I was aware of both positions (insider to interviews with tutors and students plus curriculum knowledge and outsider to employer participants). Supervisory meetings throughout the 7 years of my study ensured that my perspective and position were questioned regularly.

Reflexivity is a means of addressing bias (Smyth & Holian, 2008). I approached that data in the following ways to promote critical reflexivity in my work: Transcripts of the interviews were typed up by myself then replayed. This process was to check for accuracy and use annotations for pauses, inflections etc following Paul ten Have's approach (2007). Digitally produced transcripts were made available to participants for those who wanted them, this was to verify their accuracy, correct any errors or misunderstandings and allow for any clarifications (Kusow, 2003). None were altered by any of those participants. The validity of the research can be promoted by using low inference descriptions as I did in my research, as suggested by Burke-Johnson (1997). Leaving time between the interviews and transcribing the scripts also helped ensure low inference and I used a research diary to allow me to make notes and reflect on the shaping of responses to my research questions, a my reading and my interactions with participants; in keeping and reading this diary I remained alert to possible positionality bias.

Dual positionality (Mercer, 2006) allowed me to integrate myself as an insider but also externally as an outsider. I was considered as attached and trusted as a legitimate researcher but simultaneously as an outsider I assessed critical awareness and comparative perspectives to the

employment cultures and policy contexts. I was accepting of the fluidity of my researcher stance and Le Gallies suggests this should be embraced 'for the richness of insights it offers' (2008, p.153).

4.3 Research Questions

My focus is VET policy and reforms under the Coalition Government 2010-2015. My justification and motivation were influenced by factors within my teaching practice, specifically the reduction and in some cases, removal, of trade or 'core' skills transfer on the vocational courses to a more generic and general content vocational qualification model. I looked to demonstrate the pivotal changes in delivery of vocational diplomas, and how those qualification changes and models and indeed learning experiences related to the learners' opportunities for successful related employment.

My research questions therefore are:

1. What do the views and experiences of key stakeholders tell us about the impact of the reforms?
2. Is there evidence to suggest that any changes in employment outcomes can be attributed to the introduction of the reforms.
3. What shape did skills take under the reforms in terms of course delivery

4.4 Design framework

The research was exploratory since I aimed to understand an area which is under-researched. The intention was to collect data to be content analysed, thus methodology used for this research element was qualitative, semi-structured interviews with staff, employers and students, and quantitative methods using primary and secondary data using an interpretative approach.

Qualitative research methods as described by Sarantakos (1998) are those "aiming towards exploration of social relations and describing reality as experienced by the responders" (p.6). The exploratory strategy seeks to assess how helpful this research could be in the collection of pertinent data in terms of the implications for future research. The FEC is situated on the outskirts of a small city with a population of 198,051 in 2011. (Gov.uk, 2011). The FEC caters for 13,000 students and has a mix of vocational, academic, apprenticeships and HE students. The college is part of the Russell Group, has a tradition of widening participation and is Ofsted rated Outstanding (2013). The sample size was 15 members of staff across five divisions, 15 employer representatives, three from each discipline, with a national company, a small to medium

enterprise (10-50 employees) (SME) and a small company (1-10 employees) represented in each genre and 45 students, 9 from each discipline but divided into years they studied (pre, during and post CG).

This research focuses on a range of vocational level three courses, within one Further Education College (FEC) in the North. The research was empirical since the author aimed to understand an area in curriculum change which has little known about it. The intent was to collect primary data for analysis thus methodology used in this research was both Quantitative, by means of collection of this primary data, and Qualitative, in terms of questionnaires to former students and interviews with staff, current students and employers. (Saunders et al. 2007; Collis and Hussey, 2003).

An analysis of curriculum documentation from each examination board for all five disciplines was performed in order to assess the learning outcomes for each unit and the assessment methods. A comparison was undertaken to establish if the curriculum model changed in the course framework rolled out under the CG in comparison to the courses that had their funding removed by the CG. Interview data from tutors and employers contributed to my understanding of any changes with regard to curriculum and pedagogy.

Primary data in this instance consisted of:

- Interviews with learners and teaching staff experiences of the vocational course
- Interviews with employers to seek their understanding and impact of reform changes under CG
- Questionnaires on the perceived changes in qualification within the timeframe

Secondary data in the form of:

- Curriculum and framework design documentation
- Learner progression data from the FEC
- Educational Policy change documentation
- Unemployment data – regional & national

As with all research participant case studies, a diversity of opinions and experiences were gleaned from the participants. Sample sizes were large enough to ensure that all experiences or data were uncovered but not so large that the data became repetitive and effectively of little use and saturation was reached. Glaser & Strauss suggest that saturation occurs when the collection of new data does not shed any new light on the research of the area or event under investigation.

The exploratory strategy of this research sought to assess how helpful it would be in terms of the implications for future research. While the focus is of one FEC in the North only, the level of

understanding or the depth of the findings could be considered more valid than a broader approach which includes less detail, for example more FEC's but less vocational pathways. The issue of reliability and validity is discussed later. Undertaking research into the vocational education policy changes under Coalition Government gives the opportunity to examine the transition period post New Labour to the recent election of the Conservatives in 2014. This may then be a useful focus for future reflective research.

The mixed methods have included researching documents produced by the examination board, all module unit outlines for each vocational course were scrutinised and detail refined to the assessment verbs for each unit. This documentary research was undertaken in order to test my suggestion that the replacement courses funded by the C&G assessment methods differed from those courses methods they replaced. This viewpoint preceded my research and was not borne out of it therefore it was not grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

4.5 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In seeking to understand and illuminate particular learners' experiences in a context of educational developments under a specific government, this research is broadly characterised as interpretivist in that it seeks to understand and interpret lived experience and social phenomena (Fossey et al. 2002), and critical in its aim to link these social phenomena to broader socio-historical events and structures, revealing systems of power and underpinning ideologies (Lohd 1996)

My enquiry is concerned with the ideas and discourse surrounding the delivery and impact of (the then) recently designed BTEC Diplomas, how they were projected to FECs, how they were marketed to employers and how the structural curriculum changes affected the learners and tutors. The research questions were in part about finding out the effects of educational policy on curriculum change and the delivery of practical skills, and the complex ways these changes manifested in the classroom and in the lives of the participants. My approach combines historical documentation and individual narratives. McCulloch claims that in 'methodological pluralism' there is plenty of scope for using documentary analysis and life histories or experiences (McCulloch, 2004, p.8) Denzin and Lincoln suggest that this mixed method approach allows for the identification of the relationship between factors in different realities giving an overall better understanding to the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

My study is positioned within the boundaries of an interpretative paradigm. A paradigm, according to Guber and Lincoln "represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature

of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts". (1994.p.107). Putman (1983) writes that interpretivism looks to discover meaning, this by understanding the concept in its depth, richness and complexity.

This approach however is contested: A lack of generalisability of findings of this type of research in its narrow field of a particular phenomenon is seen as problematic (Williams 2000) However, as Lincoln (1995) argues, the goal of interpretivist approaches is authenticity and credibility through depth of reflection and researcher awareness of standpoint and perspective, as opposed to accuracy and the ability to extrapolate data for comparison. I address this via acknowledgement of my own perspective as researcher participant and through careful delineation of the contextual conditions for the production of knowledge

In qualitative approaches the researcher generally becomes engaged in the world being studied in order to understand the actors' meaning and how they interpret and construct their experiences and world around them (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002). Stepping into the world of the participants required an understanding of their interpretations of their lives and their understanding of the conditions in which they lived.

Patterns from the quantitative data were identified which were then given context by the participants (social actors) existing within that world. The views of these actors are not independent of their reality, they exist within the context and also within multiple structures and organisations. The employment opportunities within the local area and the students' realistic perspectives on employability can be seen as actors existing within their world. A subtle realism approach was adopted which as Hammersley states assumes that there are real world objects apart from the human knower and that we can only know reality from our own perspective of it. (Hammersley, 1992). The researchers own views on the construct of skills delivery prior to the reforms and after then reforms, others forms of skills delivery and understanding of those skills created By separating the reality from our own knowledge of it, this paradigm allows the researcher to create an objective reality in which they can compare their claims and the extent of their truthfulness, sometimes referred to as the credibility. However, it is recognised that the researchers own values are inherent in all aspects of the research process and objectivity is strived for through rigorous research methods and in this study, combination of qualitative and qualitative methods.

The way we think the world is (ontology) influences what we think can be known about it (epistemology); how we think it can be investigated (methodology and research techniques); the

kind of theories we think can be constructed about it; and stances we are prepared to take. (Fleetwood, 2005.p197).

Knowledge of the social world is largely subject to our interpretation, thus there can be many interpretations of the same world or event. As humans, ways in which we construct truths and perceptions vary. This means that perceived truths then are subjectively true and can only be accessed or understood within the understanding of that individual or groups perspective, and this must be understood within an individuals or group position and place int wider socio-economic and cultural structures such as social background and gender, as well as their personal experience

4.5.1 Interpretivist epistemology

My study therefore focuses on the participants and their interpretation of the issues being studied. The assumption that knowledge is created by the individual or the political construction of policy underpin my epistemological stance.

Public policy documentation is used to inform the study but also the narratives of the individuals lives, this contrast in forms of data allowed for scope to understand the relationships between the policy intent and the lives and consequences that those changes affected. Fitzgerald writes that the inclusion of documents and also life histories both form the interpretive approach (Fitzgerald, 2007).

The aim of interpretative research is to give a perspective of any phenomenon explored using descriptions and illustrations (Myers, 1999). Geertz (1973) comments that this approach equates to a 'thick description' and is required to understand all perspectives and interpreted meanings. Epistemologically – interpretive most relevant due to the generation of qualitative data in the research and the context derived from it. Gaining an insight into and understanding into a specific world by accessing the actors or participants and considering their interpretations allows for a view of their social world (Bryman, 2008). We can see this in the repeating themes from interviewee's responses. Students approaches to learning and progression expectations, tutors frustration with constant changes in Policy affecting their teaching practice and environment and employers in terms of lack of knowledge of reforms and changing qualifications.

4.5.2 Ontological position

My interpretation of 'truth' within the interpretivist stance is that meaning is established through the engagement of realities in our world (Crotty, 1998). Knowledge then can be constructed and shaped by our lived experiences, interactions and interpretations (Blaikie, 2000; Crotty, 1998;

Denzin and Lincoln 2011) and this knowledge is subjective and originates from our interpretations and cultural and social environment. Crotty and Blaikie claim that this knowledge is constructed mutually and privately leading to an understanding both by the individual and the many. (Blaikie,2000 and Crotty, 1998). This understanding goes some way in explaining the subject and educational policy trends that existed in the sector by considering the participants' experiences and backgrounds. In the study the tutors' interviews and research into policy, curriculum, qualifications and accountability documentation allowed for an understanding of the of the teaching world of the tutors and an insight into how the changes affected pedagogy, curriculum and working patterns for them. The data I generated was acquired through the interaction and interpretation between the researcher and those being researched (Cohen et al, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I therefore saw my position as a researcher 'standing within the research process rather than above it, before or outside of it' (Charmaz, 2006, p.180).

Underpinning the methodological approach and research strategy were the ontological and epistemological assumptions I held which informed my research strategy.

The qualitative data was collected in its context, within the FEC and within the employers' environment. Life histories of participants are used in this research to link policy documentation evidence with individual experiences in order to further understand the consequences of policy effects and the outcomes for the learners.

4.5.3 Education research model

Before commencing on my research, I needed to consider which approach would be most appropriate and agree with Walker's (1985) statement:

...a key decision in any research project involves the selection of methods...and once made is not easily reversed though it may be enhanced by later additions of supplementary methods. (p.46).

Hammersley (1996) believes that the selection between qualitative and quantitative approaches 'requires judgment according to the situation and purpose, rather than based on a commitment to one or another competing philosophical view of the world' (p.164). While I agree with this statement, I believe that in educational research, context and heuristic factors need to be considered thus making qualitative methods the most suitable for my research in the interview and questionnaire scenario and quantitative for the document analysis aspects. Using a Case Study approach allows me a greater flexibility that is not readily offered by other qualitative

approaches as identified by Denzin & Lincoln (2011b). Further, Creswell (2013b) writes “this approach explores a real-life, contemporary bound system (case) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes” (p.97). This is important as my research involved capturing insight from different stakeholders allowing for multiple perspectives on particular policy reforms and curriculum models. Analysis of primary and secondary data from a specific period of time allows me to generate a deep understanding.

Having reviewed the literature and critically analysed the vocational routes that learners went through, I then turned my attention to the learners themselves, the tutors, the employers and the political landscape. I examined the instances of success and progression for these learners, whether employment in their related field was easier for them to find and attain (than learners on current vocational level 3 courses) due to the transfer of (or evidence of) recognised skills on their course at FE, or whether other external factors were more influential. The reforms introduced by the Coalition Government changed the profiles of vocational pathways to a more generalised universal model allowing for progression to HE. One of the criticisms I investigated is that the loss of related ‘core’ or ‘trade’ skills transfer within the Level 3 vocational courses, meant a decline in the gainful employment in related work. Initially it can be argued that downturns in employment at a national and local level may be responsible for lack of employment prospects, but this study aimed to be more specific in terms of requirements and desirable skills for any related vacancy. For the purpose of the study, I chose a cohort of students both within the time of New Labour to Coalition transition (pre 2010) on courses which were then abolished but of the same type and the predecessors to the courses that replaced them under CG, and those students who studied on the replacement level 3 vocational courses from 2010-2015. The former would be students studying on City & Guilds Diplomas, industry specialist qualifications and GNVQs under the previous NQF framework. The latter BTEC came under the new QCF framework and is the course profile the students under the CG studied. The years for pre-coalition changes are 2008-2010, thus both students and lecturers were interviewed who participated on their vocational course format or profile before they were removed from funding. The CG years included are 2010-2015, which were the focus of this study, however the previous dates are important for comparative data. The students fell under a variety of profiles in terms of age, backgrounds and social class. In order to initiate contact I used a variety of platforms to contact former students such as student union pages on University websites, both local and national (for local area students who have moved away for University) and the use of social media sites.

The research looked to establish if the Coalition Government policy changes did or did not improve vocational education in terms of successful skills transfer. The study aimed to examine whether any tensions between employers and FE providers existed as a direct result of the perceived lack of vocational skills content and change of qualification. Identifying if the employers had any understanding of policy change or qualification change was key to this section of my research, along with identifying which sector of employers were reliant on the skills and qualification type for essential criteria for employment.

Gathering views of learners' experiences and perceptions of their vocational course looked to explore whether the change of course model and removal of hands-on skills transfer had any effect in securing related employment. The nature or extent of skills delivered within the curriculum will also be investigated.

The youth labour market as defined by Ashton et al (1993) was defined in terms of the needs of the local employers, but my research hoped to identify that this market was changed by the demands of (often) conflicting education policies which did not prove to serve the interests of both the learner/ employee and the employer in the targeted genres. I hoped to demonstrate whether there was a general lack of awareness of the changes of the content or structure of qualifications required for employment. The Target group of courses chosen either have historical roots with industry and relative essential qualifications / skills may have no established relationship other than requiring candidates for employment to hold the necessary qualification / skills. I placed an emphasis in my interviews on the skills set which were 'essential' to the replacements which were 'helpful'.

I examined:

- What value did employers place on vocational education?
- Did the changes in qualification structure and type shift employers' demands towards a different type of employee?
- To what extent did Employers recruit different types of employees post changes?
- Did the traditional routes of entry for employers then become closed to them?
- What initiatives were the employers aware of to bridge gaps in the skills attainment?
- What opportunities existed for the employees with the newer BTEC qualification?

The research will be undertaken in five sectors of Industry:

- IT / Computing
- Construction
- Engineering

- Health & Social Care
- Hair & Beauty

For each industry area, so that a more general view can be represented, I intend to interview a management or HR representative in these three categories, this will equate to 15 interviews.

- National business – large corporate company
- SME (or medium size business) perhaps with one or a couple of branches
- Small business – one or maybe two branches, owner managed.

4.6 SELECTING THE METHOD

4.6.1 Multi-method approach.

The empirical findings are detailed in alignment with the research questions.

This study combines an examination of historical documentation, perceptions of learners, employers and tutors and an examination of relevant curriculum documentation and other external data such as employment trends and progression to HE opportunities. This chapter seeks to identify and discuss common characteristics amongst the three interview groups: tutors, students and employers by identifying themes in the qualitative data.

Using multiple methods is important for determining the shape and success of skills transfer and related employment success, how the knowledge was imparted and the perceptions of the learners and employers. Successful research in this case can be considered a multi-pronged approach, a look at historical documentation in terms of employment, the views and employment outcomes from the learners and the perspective of the employers. This multi method approach allowed for me to converge the findings and consider interpretations in order to address my research questions.

Historical research was covered in Chapter 1 – literature review which included research of that time and gives an overview of how vocational education revolved prior to and during the Coalition Government. The underpinning philosophy is considered and allowed for the interpretation of insights. Curriculum assessment material was examined in Chapter 5 in order to identify how the course models were being delivered and assessed, particularly in terms of skills delivery and practice.

4.6.2 Case Studies

Given the nature of this research, in its attempt to build around an already existing pool of knowledge about Vocational Education and Training (VET) under different Governments and during different manifestations, I identify with Eysenick's (1976) notion of case study approaches, 'not in the hope of proving anything but rather in hope of learning something' (p.9). My research hopes not to test a hypothesis but to offer some insight on a currently specific under-researched area. By collecting a range and depth of data the aim was not to test some theory but to consider the views and experiences of a range of people.

Understanding the processes of change both within the chosen institution and outside of it requires immersion. Having the advantage of already working within that FEC and having experienced the changes and their impacts in the given time frame equated to me feeling connected to the research and also having the buy-in of the FEC. My role as a lecturer within the FEC means that I have strong relationships with the staff and some students and knowledge of the courses and their context. This gives me an advantage in terms of networking and also credibility and access. This approach is particularly appropriate for my research as it allows for one particular event or topic to be studied by an individual to some depth over some timescale. Research data will be collected in an organised manner, and the relationship between the variables in the research can be identified and studied. My area of interest is particularly concerned with the interaction between factors that changed the qualification and delivery model and subsequent events in terms of successful uptake in related employment. An advantage of this method is that it allows for a researcher to concentrate on specific events or processes. However, the disadvantages may be that the researcher alone makes all the decisions on the relevance of factors and which material to include in the final report. Generalisation is then a criticism and thus the question of value. Bassey (1985) contends that '...an important criterion for judging the merit of a case is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate' (p.85). Denscombe (1998) concurs with this viewpoint stating that 'the extent to which findings from the case study can be generalised to other examples in the class depends on how far the case study example is similar to others in its type' (p 36-7).

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define a case study as 'a detailed examination of one setting, or one single project, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event' (p.58). Further, Stenhouse (1995) states 'In a case study the relationship between a case, or a collection of cases that may superficially resemble a sample, and any population in which similar meanings or relationships may apply is essentially a matter of judgment'. (p.266) Both authors provide useful insight into the classifications of case studies. It may also be considered that this research may

fall into the authors category of 'life history case form' (Bogdan and Biklen,1998, p61) in that the involvement of interviews and the person collecting a first-person narrative. Woods (1985) however argues that this perspective or approach can be problematic when attempting to develop a theory (p.164). Narrowing down the research and pilot study to one institute alone was a result of narrowing down the field of interest and creating boundaries for the research to investigate which happened organically from the start of the research. Initially the intention was to be 'wide and shallow', using more than one FEC but going into less depth allowing for a wider comparison with less detail, initially I was thinking of using a comparison of four FE institutes, two North and two South but of each set of two, one from an affluent middle-class area and the other a poor, employment weak area. The original focus was towards one genre or discipline across these four FECs, staff interviews and official and grey documentation in order to triangulate. The risk and potential problems of this approach was not only due to constraints of time and distance (the researcher based in the North) but also the four areas, while seemingly economically similar, had too many variants to make such a 'wide and shallow' approach an accurate measure to establish a clear outcome. Instead, a deeper investigation across five disciplines within one FEC was selected providing more rich data allowing for more depth of data. The research aims to identify the relationships between the delivery of skills, the learner experience and the opportunities for related employment in one local context. According to Yin (2003) 'the case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2003 p.13). The research will allow me to grasp a more holistic understanding of the variables and interaction (Creswell, 1998; Eisenhardt, 1989).

The variety of courses that my research involved such as documents, recollections, statistics fit well in this approach as it is, as Yin states, able 'to deal with a full variety of evidence' (Yin, 2003, p8) and its 'methodology is eclectic' (Adleman et al, 1980 p.49), with the ability to shed light on a general problem (Merriam, 1998). Merriman also goes on to explain that a descriptive case study in education presents a detailed account of the phenomenon while an interpretive case study contains rich, thick description where the data is used to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions formed prior to the data being gathered. She goes on to state:

The level of abstraction and conceptualisation in interpretive case studies may range from suggesting relationships among variables to constructing theory. The model of analysis is inductive. Because of the greater amount of analysis in interpretive case studies, some sources label these case studies analytical. Analytical case studies are differentiated from

straightforward descriptive studies by their complexity, depth and theoretical orientation (p. 39).

Limitations exist in this approach in terms of time, costs, exaggerating or over-simplifying a situation or bias from the researcher in terms of being selective about subject matter this critical awareness of these limitations must be present at all times. My case study approach was selected due to its appropriateness for small-scale research such as mine. The range of mixed methods I am incorporating allowed me flexibility within my data collection.

The case study approach allows, amongst other things, critical events, interventions, policy developments and program-based service reforms to be studied in detail in real-life context (Crowe et al, 2011).

This approach covers both the phenomenon and its context, which in this case was the skills transfer and successful uptake of related employment and the context of the FEC where the skills transfer occurred and the policy changes that dictated the course model and any potential for skills development. Denscombe states that the defining characteristic of the case study is its focus on individual instances rather than on a wide spectrum (Denscombe, 1998). My study using one FEC will gather evidence that could be considered more convincing due to the 'real world' cases of current courses, current staff, current employers and current learners as well as the experiences and stories of previous learners. I would hope that my findings may contribute to future research in 'skills' attainment, VET and progression.

4.6.3 Case study research location

The study is located in the North of England. The area has a mix of urban town / City and rural villages. Around the time of the case study, nationally 5.7% 16-18-year olds were not in education, employment and training (NEET), 15% of learners of this age from lower economic backgrounds did not progress to positive destinations and only 15% progressed to HE. (State of the Nation, 2014).

Key employment sectors in the area include; wholesale and retail, Health and Social work, manufacturing and accommodation and food services (Enterprise Partnership, 2017). Between 85-89% of businesses in the region are small businesses (or micro businesses) with 1-9 employees in the area. (Nomis, 2015).

The participants were all current or former students of the FEC and included a geographic diverse sampling set due to the urban and rural catchment areas for the FEC. Furthermore, the wide sampling allowed for the capture of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. School leavers within

the area have a choice of local sixth form or the FEC. The College offers a wide range of A level programs but also a large and diverse range of vocational pathways attracting students from homes as far as 60 miles away.

Multiple sources of data will be used to obtain differing views about a situation in a single study (Roberts and Taylor, 2002). Similarly, Creswell (2009) states ‘...two primary characteristics of [grounded design] are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize the similarities and the differences of the information’ (p. 13) All former students’ questionnaire data will be collected anonymously via the internet with the researcher having no means of garnering the identity of any participant. The target group is not a vulnerable group and the anonymity allows for rigid parameters.

The validity of this research is seen to slightly increase from the narrowing down of the institutes to sample. The investigation is designed to gather more detail from a narrower field of sources as opposed to the initial proposal which considered four FE’s but less analytical probing. The external validity of this research however may have to be questioned as the results of this study may not be generalised across the whole of the UK due to local economies. Using one FEC setting and examining the local economics in terms of employment and progression however make the context of the research more robust. The content validity is considered high as the questions have been designed to accurately assess what the research wants to find out.

4.6.3.1 Sampling

In order to triangulate responses and cross-reference responses, I decided to interview a range of people, enough to represent each vocational field but also enough to make the data meaningful. One of the target groups for this research was teaching staff who had been in situ and delivering vocational education in some form of level 3 for a number of years prior to 2010 and up to 2015. This included three staff from five different departments at the FEC. A senior tutor in each case was interviewed as one of the three tutors, this due to the fact that mainly the senior tutors were more involved in management consultation on curriculum changes, framework changes and management issues. I also interviewed Employers from all five sectors: Engineering, Construction, IT, Childcare and Health & Beauty. The companies were of different sizes; large national companies such as Jaguar and Tony & Guy, local small to medium enterprises (SME’s) such as Steve Gunn Builders, Blue Sky Nurseries with an employment base of between 10-50 employee’s and small/partnerships which may have a minimum of one or two employees, for example mobile beauty therapists, small engineering company specialising in billet aluminium

products. This allowed me to glean any background knowledge e.g. employers' expectancies, legal requirements for employees, recognised qualifications. The final group was the learners: I had planned to interview 45 learners from each 5 sectors, but due to accessibility in some cases due to distance or working practices I was unable to interview 17 of the group so sent them the questionnaire I had designed via e-mail. All of the students sent a response back. Some learners I met in small groups due to geographical and time considerations. The study included teachers, learners and employers. The departments within the FEC represent a cross-section of syllabus areas within the FEC. A type of quota sampling was used as the research included interviews with Senior Management, Heads of Division and teacher / practitioners. In my pilot study I learned that I needed to be flexible in terms of staff interviews as suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1984) "Qualitative interviewing calls for a flexible research design. The researchers start out with a general idea of which people to interview and how to find them but are willing to change course after the initial interviews' (p. 92).

4.6.3.2 Sample Size

Qualitative sample sizes are generally smaller than quantitative sample sizes. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam suggest that this is because more data does not necessarily equate to more information. One piece of data therefore becomes part of the analysis framework and does not require constant repetition (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003). As the qualitative aspect of my research is looking for meaning not proving some hypothesis, many instances of the same data are just as useful as one instance claim Crouch & McKenzie (2006).

This research needs to be large enough to ensure all viewpoints and experiences are included where necessary but not so large that data becomes repetitive and, in some cases, not required and saturation occurs. Charmaz (2016) suggests that the design or aims of the study are the driving force behind the sample size, if making 'modest claims'. It would be possible to reach saturation sooner than a study across many disciplines (p.114). Sample sizes therefore can be seen to be dictated by the aims of the study but also the skills of the researcher. The skills in interviews can have an effect on the quality of data collected (Morse, 2008) and this then would have a direct or subsequent effect on reaching saturation (Guest et al, 2006). The sample size may become less important than the quality of the data. As the researcher I am also mindful that my sample size would need to satisfy a quality assurance process at the University and indeed supervisor of my study. My proposed interview numbers were;

Staff – Interviews, total = 15

	Senior tutor	Staff	Total
IT / Computing	1	2	3
Construction	1	2	3
Engineering	1	2	3
Hair & Beauty	1	2	3
Health & Social Studies	1	2	3

Table 1 – staff sample size

Employers – Interviews, total = 15

	Before 2010	2010-2015	Post 2015
IT & Computing	1	1	1
Construction	1	1	1
Engineering	1	1	1
Childcare	1	1	1
Hair & Beauty	1	1	1

Table 2 – employers sample size

Students – Interviews, total = 45

	Before 2010	2010-2015	Post 2015
IT & Computing	3	3	3
Construction	3	3	3
Engineering	3	3	3
Childcare	3	3	3
Hair & Beauty	3	3	3

Table 3 – students sample size

These numbers allow for a manageable data set and also allow for diversity in industry sectors, teaching pathways and views of learners through a number of years and formations of vocational courses. There are no clear set numbers for qualitative research sample sizes, only guidelines which vary from one author or researcher to another. Charmaz (2016) suggests that '25 participants are adequate for smaller projects 2006, p.114), further to this Ritchie et al write that sample sizes 'lie under 50' (Ritchie et al, 2003, p.84). However, when researching phenomenology, Creswell (1998, p.64) claims five to twenty five and Morse (1994, p.225) states at least six.

Table 4 shows academic research experts guides on sample sizes, it is clear that there is inconsistency across the experts. Guest and colleagues (2006) suggest that data saturation occurs by the 12th interview with meta-themes becoming identifiable after the 6th interview provided the scope is narrow and the participants homogenous.

No.	Expert(S)	Key Qualifiers
I+	Back (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research scope/type of inquiry
I+	Becker (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research scope, eg: one case is enough to establish something is possible
I+	Denzin (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research scope/type of inquiry
I-100	Passerini (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research scope/phenomenon under investigation
I-260	Brannen (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target audience characteristics, eg: sample of one sufficient if case is unique and not comparable to others • Expertise of participants • Research scope (case study vs complex longitudinal)
4-5	Romney, Weller, & Batchelder (1986)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants having high level of knowledge and expertise in relation to topic of inquiry
6-12	Guest, Bunce & Johnson (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow research scope • Homogenous target audience
6-70	Miller (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project resources • Research scope/nature of inquiry
I2-60	Adler & Adler (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of discernible subgroups in target audience • Project resources
15	Baker & Edwards (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants 'information rich' in relation to topic of inquiry
20-30	Griffin & Hauser (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homogenous target audience/segment • Assumes approximately 90% of needs identified
20-30	Curry, Nembhard & Bradley (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research scope • Participants 'information rich' in relation to topic of inquiry
20-40	Warren (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope of research project • Characteristics of target audiences
30	M. Mason (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the mean sample of a meta-analysis of 560 post graduate research studies

Table 4 – Research experts guides on sample sizes

Hammersely (1994) recommends that a 10–20-hour database would be enough to constitute a solid basis for a research project, endorsing this, Mason (2010) suggests that for 20-30 respondents, 20-40 minutes per interview would suffice.

4.6.3.3 Representativeness of the sample sets

A key decision was to include vocational areas that I felt would be useful for the study. The areas of my initial interest, IT and construction were typically approx. 99% male so I felt it important to include courses that were predominantly female to redress the balance. I selected Hair & Beauty and Childcare. I had also selected Catering as this had an even mix of genders but the staff in catering were wholly reluctant to participate. I tried various means of communication and contact to allay any fears and explain what the study was about, but I faced a 'brick wall'. This was a new phenomenon in my research and could only assume that the process made the staff feel very uneasy thus stone walling. I included Engineering as I was aware the college had strong links with local and national employers, and a history of time served apprenticeships and the discipline had a strong emphasis on skills transfer. I felt this field had strong relevance to my study. I had no prior knowledge of any course content or structure other than IT/Computing prior to the

interviews but was confident of the input and value of the findings within the fields. I then had five major areas for my study. Consideration was needed for the following: Construction, Engineering and Hair & Beauty as they were largely workshop based (traditionally) and thus the approach to learning could have been interpreted or considered differently than those routes that were classroom based such as IT or Childcare. What was considered as a skill in one vocation may be entirely different to views of skills in a different field or learning environment.

One of the aims of the study was to highlight the differences between the old vocational course structure and the new funded QCF vocational courses / Diplomas at level 3. The mixed age range I believe was important to represent the mature learner experience and also to examine whether age had any part to play in securing related employment. The aim is to quantify if the skills developed and learned on the old course structure had a part to play in enabling related employment and how far the employers were aware of such qualification changes.

Other variables are important here, such as prior skills and work experience, work profile and academic qualifications, but the intention of this study was to determine how far the skills element was a factor in the success of obtaining related work. Inclusion of the other factors would make this thesis too broad in terms of consideration of the Widening Participation policy, RPA changes, EMA abolishment and increase in degree costs for learners, however I am aware that the social class of the learners and other external factors such as family influence, health, location may well shape and influence their experiences. In my literature review, I have taken a very wide view of the policy changes within FE and only narrowed this focus down when examining the Diploma provision at the time of policy changes under Coalition. Finally, I focused on not only the learners themselves, but also the facilitators – tutors and management at FE and finally the employers. This I felt enabled me to conduct the core research thoroughly whilst creating a landscape surrounding the key areas of my research.

4.6.3.4 Accessing the sample sets

I had personal experience of the college thus had a good amount of background information about who to contact plus access to curriculum material and current and historic student destination data. I decided my interviews would include the Head of Division for each department / division as they were more likely to have knowledge of accreditation / exam board changes and funding strategies. The following areas were explored for each of the college staff:

- Role of the tutor
- Knowledge of changes on the ground floor under the Coalition Government

- Knowledge of student profile changes
- Pedagogical changes as well as curriculum model changes

These areas would provide a background into understanding their roles, vocational areas plus their experience of the curriculum model changes.

4.6.3.5 Interviews

The interview questions were designed to be suited to qualitative research as they explore the experiences and perceptions plus the understanding of political interventions in FE at level 3 vocational courses. The research design gave me the opportunity to explore the underlying effects of educational policy reforms implemented by the coalition government, which then contribute to the broader aim of the research.

I assumed an Inductive approach to my analysis having already experienced the effects of policy changes in vocational education at level 3. My research then aimed to move away from more specific observations to a general understanding and theories. This approach was important for understanding the shape and success of skills transfer and related employment success, how the knowledge was imparted and the perceptions of the learners, teachers and employers.

Interviewing was my main approach for gathering data, for the groups of staff and employers and also some more recent learners. I conducted interviews on three members of staff within five divisions; IT & Computing, Hair & Beauty, Childcare, Engineering and Construction. This sample is diverse with Engineering and Construction industries having a history with vocationally qualified learners and strong links with FE providers and recognised qualifications. Hair and Beauty and Childcare are predominantly female learner populated, the latter again having a long history with vocational providers and established qualifications. IT & Computing is a relative newcomer in the vocational field, advancing technologies and infrastructures require vocationally trained learners but no formal standard of vocational qualification has been established yet unlike the professional ones, from Cisco and Microsoft. (Guardian, 2014, Resource Partners Ltd, 2016). This viewpoint is further endorsed by a Treasury report which states “The UK also performs poorly on intermediate professional and technical skills and is forecast to fall to 28th out of 33 OECD countries for intermediate skills by 2020” (HM Treasury, 2015 p23).

In the later stages of interviews, the responses became repetitive and predictable and therefore I knew that I had reached the point of saturation.

4.6.3.6 *Semi-structured Interviews for tutors / staff*

The semi-structured interview approach was adopted as using a fixed set of questions giving a limited response was not appropriate. I wanted variation in response so included infrequent open-ended questions. I had control of the interview by referring back to the question prompt sheet and at times re-focusing on the question at hand. While interviewing experienced staff I encouraged unprompted and truthful responses. Simons (2009) writes that it is the unstructured interpersonal interview that encourages openness and allows individuals to tell their stories (p.49). The environment where staff interviews took place for the pilot were informal – empty classrooms or the staff lounge. The questions were designed in a sequential manner but were flexible in their design. Fontana and Fray (1994) write that “it is the establishment of human-to-human relationships with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain” (p.64). My research was more focused on the quality of the answers as opposed to the quantity of them. For instance, it was not enough to learn that the tutors were aware of the implementation of the policy changes to their course, but how those changes impacted, how they translated down into changes in pedagogical style and the effects on the teaching and learning. The flow and topic of the questions allowed for the inclusion of extra useful information and the exclusion of unimportant material, plus examples of how the changes made them feel.

This experience will enable the participants to answer questions that related to course content and delivery models from changing qualification and syllabus structure / models. The shape of these qualifications had to endure some big changes as did the teaching staff and this research seeks to understand if this also had implications on the change of student profile.

It is of great importance to this study that the facilitators / tutors were not new to teaching and had taught vocational courses under many guises for many years, therefore a limit to how many years in post or in teaching was set to a minimum of six years (prior to 2010) in the vocational field. Of added importance is that the tutors were able to define or understand the differences in course structures which were under the NQF framework (Pre-Coalition) to QCF framework (Coalition funding policy changed from 2010).

The pilot study and its use of the semi-structured face to face interviews allowed for a testing of phrasing for eliciting valid responses. I asked the same question twice, in two instances but phrased it differently to discover if a different response could be elicited. I decided on interviews as the respondents would be more likely to engage with the activity in a personal capacity and as I discovered, the interviews were an opportunity to garner more information outside of the

questions pertaining to the topic area that I had not previously thought of. The limitations of course were that any inference that practical skills were now not being delivered in that particular course model, a respondent may personalize the idea and feel that the researcher or the questionnaire was critical of their teaching. Being in an informal interview over coffee in a quiet area allowed the researcher to create a relaxed atmosphere, conducive to eliciting more detail. Borg and Gall (1989, p.247) commented that rushing to create a questionnaire may give staff a negative view of the process and thus procure unreliable responses.

My plan was to conduct interviews with three members of staff from five divisions / disciplines: IT, Hair & Beauty, Childcare and Construction. Results from the Pilot study raised some important issues; the perception of 'skills' and assessment and indeed qualification / course type were clearly gendered. The courses and types of courses with a large female majority appeared to suffer less (if at all) from the policy changes than courses which traditionally recruit mainly males.

4.6.3.7 Questionnaires

One of the main means for collecting data within my research was with semi-structured interview, a qualitative form of social interaction. Fontana and James describe interviews as 'not just neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between (two) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results' (Fontana and James, 2000 p.646). The knowledge gleaned from the interviews is produced by '..a collaboration with an equally active interviewer' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.9).

A questionnaire was designed to elicit the former students' (students who qualified and left college before 2010 when the reforms were introduced) perceptions of the skills they acquired on their vocational course, the education they experienced on their course, and whether any skills learnt were directly transferable to related employment. The questions were a mixture of open and closed, with the majority closed requiring a fixed reply so that responses could be easily coded. It was targeted at 16+ learners who studied on level 3 vocational / BTEC Diplomas and other preceding Level 3 vocational qualifications. The goal was to represent a sample of student attitudes and experiences of the BTEC course(s), to include students on a level 3 Diploma before, during and after the Coalition policy changes to FE. Ultimately the research aimed to explore whether curriculum changes in terms of embedded skills impacted on the students' opportunities for related employment. The Questionnaires were used as a form of data gathering from students where interviews were not possible and also used as the source of questions in interviews. The result was a mix of 28 student interviews and 17 questionnaire returns.

According to Opie and Sikes (2004,) the questionnaire "is the most widely used procedure for obtaining information" (p.95) plus this method had the advantages of contacting distant respondents, a standardised approach, anonymity and the ability to customise the questions to the audience. My intention was to capture IP addresses of learners to avoid incidents of 'flooding' or mass completion of questionnaires by a person or persons. Another measure I put in place is to ask the first name of the tutor on the learners level 3 course, which I could then compare with my knowledge of the staff in the FEC, had there been any doubt, I could clarify using historic college data. This method provided me with enough evidence to suggest a reliable pool of responders and to discount any that appeared to be invalid. Bell (2005, p.14) argues that while questionnaires are useful and appropriate for the 'what, where, when and how', they fail to address the question of 'why'. For this research, a survey / questionnaire was an appropriate tool for reaching former learners and those that had moved away from the location of their FEC.

From a practical perspective, questionnaires are a useful tool, they provide the opportunity to reach a wider audience, used as a data gathering technique alone but were not appropriate enough to address the main questions in my research. As Smith (1986) writes, they 'oversimplify multiple meanings' (p.42). Questionnaires serve as an interface between former learner and the researcher.

The questionnaire phase of the research was aimed at featuring a cross section of students from the FEC who were former students across the five disciplines. The questionnaire broadly was designed to give a statistical overview of the students experiences on their level 3 vocational course. The questionnaire also provided extra stimulus for interviews which were taking place concurrently. The results also provided structural information in terms of progression for the learners.

While questionnaires have been used in previous VET studies, my research hopes to offer a new urban context, an FEC in the North. It is hoped that the study will provide a significant complement to data that already exists from previous research. The questionnaire has been designed to bring out students' viewpoints about their experiences on their course and how that affected, if at all, their related employment uptake or their confidence to apply for related employment.

4.6.3.8 Ethical considerations

The overall nature of the research can be considered neutral in that it is neither sensitive nor includes working with vulnerable participants. It is unlikely to cause embarrassment or any

feelings of being uncomfortable with the material. However, the face-to-face interviews with questions where the tutors are asked for their opinion on the curriculum model they were delivering and how / if skills were embedded since the changes, could possibly be interpreted as a criticism to that tutor in terms of pedagogical style, also it may be considered that there may be a bias or criticism of the employer (the FEC) thus anonymity and the creation of a friendly but professional ambience is vital.

All participation was voluntary. There were very few risks, as identities were protected as much as possible, there were also no benefits for any participant. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) observe that 'confidentiality implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed' (p.72). Assurances were be given to interviewees that they would not be named in the research and that their testament would be treated in the strictest confidence. These two issues were related and were not treated separately. In order to maintain anonymity 'tutors' is used as a general term as is 'senior tutors', so that no individuals can be identified. For the sake of this study, a senior tutor could be considered as a member of staff with significant length of service and this may be a subject leader, team leader, Head of Department or management. This term is used to indicate that the senior tutor has more responsibility and experience. Tutors were contacted via the internal e-mail system at FE and students were notified of the survey via word of mouth, shared posts on Facebook, Twitter and Google Chat. Once a participant had agreed to take part in the survey or questionnaire, a letter or statement of consent was presented. Recipients were able to 'exit' the questionnaire / interview at any point and the face to face interviews with colleagues allowed for the recipient to end the session at any time.

There were no other qualifying characteristics required of any tutor to take part in the research other than years in service, and vocational course experience. Previous educational institutes employment or academic courses experience were not required. While the identities of all tutors was known to the researcher due to professional working relationship, their identities were kept hidden in the research with no means of identifying them. There is a small risk that given the contextual information of the FEC, the identity of the FEC and the tutors might be guessed but this was discussed with the interviewees.

The survey was be entirely anonymous therefore there was no risk of the researcher tracing back a response to a particular respondent. The anonymity parameters were set into the design of the questionnaire having a minimal risk of opportunity for respondent's personal details. Ethical approval was applied for and granted by the University of York. The university adheres to the British Educational Research Association Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research

(2004). This trust assures the provider of the research purpose, scope, use and identification of the information provided. Informed consent is sought and agreed to prior to every survey and interview.

Triangulation was planned in a number of ways. This method improves the reliability or the trustworthiness. I collected data from a number of different sources, senior members of staff, students, official FE progression documentation, interviews with employers from different size organisations within different sectors of industry, official statistics on Unemployment Levels nationally and locally. As recommended by Barry (1999) I approached the data conscientiously and in detail to convince my audience of its trustworthiness.

At this data gathering stage of my research books and journals were being published that covered research in the area of VET and skills policies covering the same time frame, thus there was beginning to be a cross over between this study and other research by others (Fuller (2011); Fuller & Unwin(2011); Upton et al (2015); Orr et al (2013); Atkins et al (2015)).

4.6.3.9 Interview data analysis

Miles and Huberman describe their framework for conceptualising qualitative data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994; Miles et al 2014) and it is this method that I chose in order to immerse myself into the data, creating a familiarity with the responses and themes with the interpretation of these responses.

My analysis was an iterative process, Thornberg and Charmaz (2012) describe this as ‘back and forth between data collection and conceptualisation’ (p41). Robson (2002) suggests that stepping back from the data periodically can give the researcher a better ‘feel’ for what is going on (p.494) and this method Miles and Huberman describe as ‘squint analysis’ (p.190). This research was undertaken as a part time study while working full time therefore I was able to step back from the research due to time constraints and return to it with fresh eyes and an open mind. This seemed to be an effective approach for me.

The qualitative data encompasses the beliefs, views and interpretation of samples of employers, teachers and students. This field of inquiry can be considered a source of grounded theory (Patton, 2002) in that theories ‘arise from my interviews and observations of the out in the real world’ (p.11). While approaches to grounded theory have evolved over time, and this approach may seem suitable for my study, my research is less concerned with establishing a theory and more concerned with providing a situation-specific substantive theory (den Outer et al, 2013, p.1506). My research looks to interpret ‘a reality’ from my own experiences and those of the

responders (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.523). Thus, grounded theory is a useful method of developing knowledge and insights of 'naturalistic data' (Corbin and Holt, 2011, p.114) but less appropriate for my research and a more interpretive approach was adopted.

The analysis method I employed was a thematic analysis approach. Identifying codes and themes was the aim thus this system was appropriate. Discourse analysis on the other hand had a stronger emphasis on underlying meanings and language used whilst identifying themes and this was not required in this study. The relative flexibility of thematic analysis (TA) was a benefit in that it is appropriate for all sizes of data sets and is not dependent on the type of questions asked thus it might be considered of wider range of uses than discourse analysis. There is some confusion over the term TA and can be used interchangeably with 'content analysis' and 'qualitative content analysis' however while these are similar approaches, they are not the same. A criticism of the TA approach is that themes do not 'emerge' from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These authors suggest that the theme is already contained within the language and needs to be revealed and that the researcher is the conduit. In contrast to this idea, I believed TA to be an iterative process which was interactive and that the data revealed patterns, but consideration had to be given to my own positionality and the context of the study. Specifically, I used TA as my questions and participants responses included:

- Individual experiences – particularly the employers and the tutors who were able to discuss a comparison of experiences both before and during the policy changes
- Views and opinions – to understand the world views of participants
- Practises or behaviours – for tutors how their pedagogical processes changed
- Driving choice for decisions – reasons student chose their course – essential when considering class, expectancies, family history and peer pressure

I typed up all the interviews verbatim which while time consuming helped form ideas in terms of themes arising which I found useful. Strauss and Corbin (1990) however suggest that 'only as much as is needed' is the correct way (p.30) but I found it easier to type the entire interview contents as nuances can be easily missed. Raw data matrices were used once initial interview transcripts were typed up. This was done by entering responses to my questions for each group into columns of a table (matrix). The data at this stage remained in its original form – no edits. The data was organised to correspond with which question it was related to. After this initial organisation, I was able to identify initial emerging patterns or viewpoints and identified these using highlighter colours in Microsoft Word. This system was used; comments about exam boards

were highlighted in blue, comments on skills in orange, comments on employment in green, comments on policy adaptation in pink.

The next stage was to start the initial identification of all of the data that was related together – consolidation into an interim matrix. This stage allowed me to identify any emerging patterns and themes, to then allow me to commence coding their categories of meaning of a particular kind (Robson 2002). Huberman (1994) discusses codes and defines them as ‘tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study (p.56). Initial codes that I added at the start of the process were reduced as the analysis went on while I checked the codes in their entirety to ensure the codes fell within the research concepts.

The codes that I developed in this research related to my research questions and they included; skills, assessment, success, course, qualifications, sector. These are all attributes of the collected data and as Miles et al claim ‘a descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarise a word or short phrase - most often a noun – the basic topic of passage of qualitative data’ (p.74). Robson (2002) endorses this stating that any piece of data may in fact have several codes, falling into one or more category, and analysis of the findings revealed many instances where this was the case. In such cases I entered the related data into more than one category.

The interim table consisted of headers for columns which were previously identified codes and the coloured responses, blocks of text related to that code were copied and pasted in. Once this was done, the responses were grouped by response type within the columns. The process of using colours allowed for a visual impact of related data and made the grouping a simpler task. Miles et al (2014) state that this could be considered ‘a process that relies on eyeballing the results and making inferences about the connections’ (p.226).

The practice of parsing the responses to extract the relevant comments allows for the identification of common themes and categories. Corbin and Holt (2011) discuss this method of higher level and lower-level concepts to develop themes, ‘patterns between clusters integrated by statements of relationships’ (p.114).

4.6.3.10 Raw Data matrix analysis

Approximately 2-3 pages were transcribed for each interview giving a volume total of 130 pages. Once they were all transcribed the organisation of data began into Matrix tables in order that reductions and then interpretations could be made. The immersion stage of the analysis took some months as the expanse of time from when the initial interviews began to when I finished the process was quite long, over 36 months. This meant that immersing myself was a process

that happened many times over due to the length of time between transcribing and actual interviews although the last few months prior to analysis were less scattered in terms of interviews thus the immersion process took less time. An advantage to the lapses between visits to data collected by interviews means that I was able to approach each set of transcribed data with fresh eyes and little if any implicit knowledge.

The next stage involved high-level coding of the responses. The nature of these codes were initially from the design of the research questions and their subsequent responses.

4.6.3.11 Colour coding key

On the first stage of the analysis, making sense of the data and high-level coding or grouping of the data commenced. Repeating patterns which were largely created by the formation of the interview questions and subsequent responses. The coding elements from the interviews were:

Employment		Learner profile		Assessment practices	
Employer awareness		Req skills for job		Policy adaptation	
Exam board / qualification					

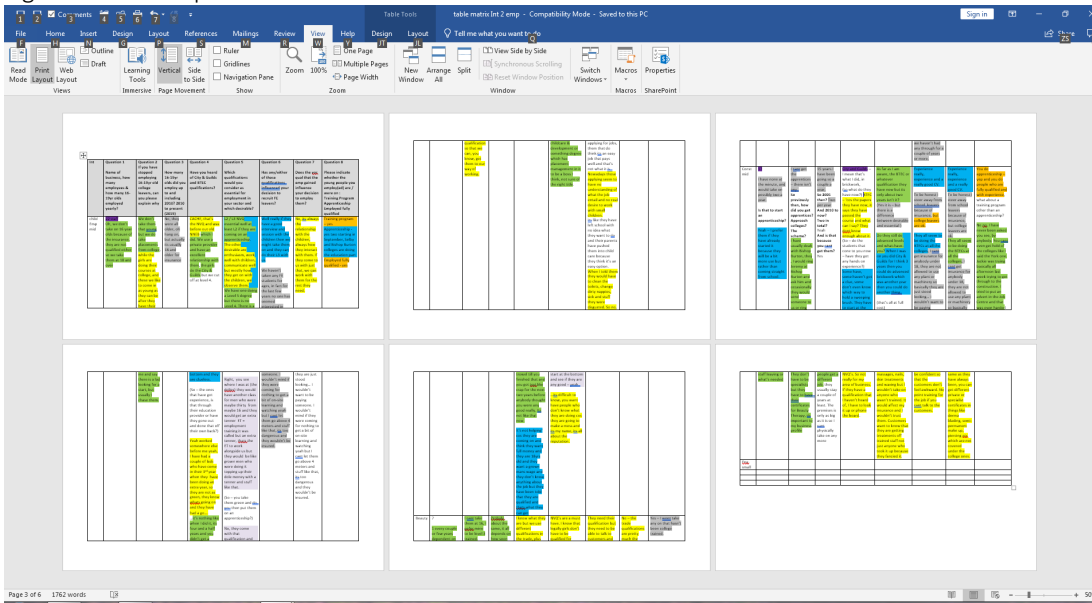
Table 5 Colour coding key

Figure 4 Example from mid-sized employer in child care. (Employer interview colour coded)

Int	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
child Emp mid	Name of business, how many employees & how many 16-19yr olds employed yearly? 22 staff Oh, we don't take on 16 year olds because of the insurance, they are not qualified either so we take them at 18 and over	If you have stopped employing 16-19yr old college leavers, can you please explain why We don't take them that young but we do take placements from college, while the girls are doing their courses at college, and these we like to come in as young as they can be after they have their	How many 16-19yr olds did you employ up to and including 2010? 2010 to present (2015) No, they were all older, oh hang on, but actually its usually 18 and older for insurance	Have you heard of City & Guilds and BTEC qualifications? CACHE, that's the NVQ and was before out old NNEB which I did. We use a private provider and have an excellent relationship with them, the girls do the City & Guilds but we cut off at level 4.	Which qualifications would you consider as essential for employment in your sector and which desirable? L2 / L3 NVQ essential well at least L2 if they are coming on an apprenticeship. The other desirable are enthusiasm, work well with children, communicate well but mostly how they get on with the children, we observe them. We have one doing a level 5 degree but there is no level 4. There is a	Has any/either of those qualifications influenced your decision to recruit FE leavers? Well really if they have a good interview and session with the children then we might take them on and they can do their L3 with us. We haven't taken any FE students for ages, in fact for the last few years no one has seemed interested in	Does the vocational that the emp gained influence your decision to employ them? No, its always the relationship with the children, always how they interact with them. If they come to us with just that, we can work with them for the rest they need.	Please indicate whether the emp gained influence your decision to employ them? Training Program Apprenticeship Employed fully qualified Training program - yes Apprenticeship - yes two starting in September, Selby and Bishop Burton colleges are doing the education part Employed fully qualified - yes

Figure 4 shows excerpts from two employer interviews and illustrates how the data was initially examined and broken down into codes and colours used to identify the themes. Some data belonged in more than one code / theme, for example the following comment belonged in both obtaining valuable skills on your course and did your course directly contribute to your related employment success.

Figure 5 Tutor responses colour coded



The pages were in interview order and for ease of viewing to identify patterns, 9 columns for each of the rows is detailed. The tutors responses indicated in figure 5 above include highlighting of text for learner profile (grey), employer awareness (green), assessment practice (red), employment (yellow) and embedded skills (pink).

Once all the matrix tables had been populated and text highlighted accordingly

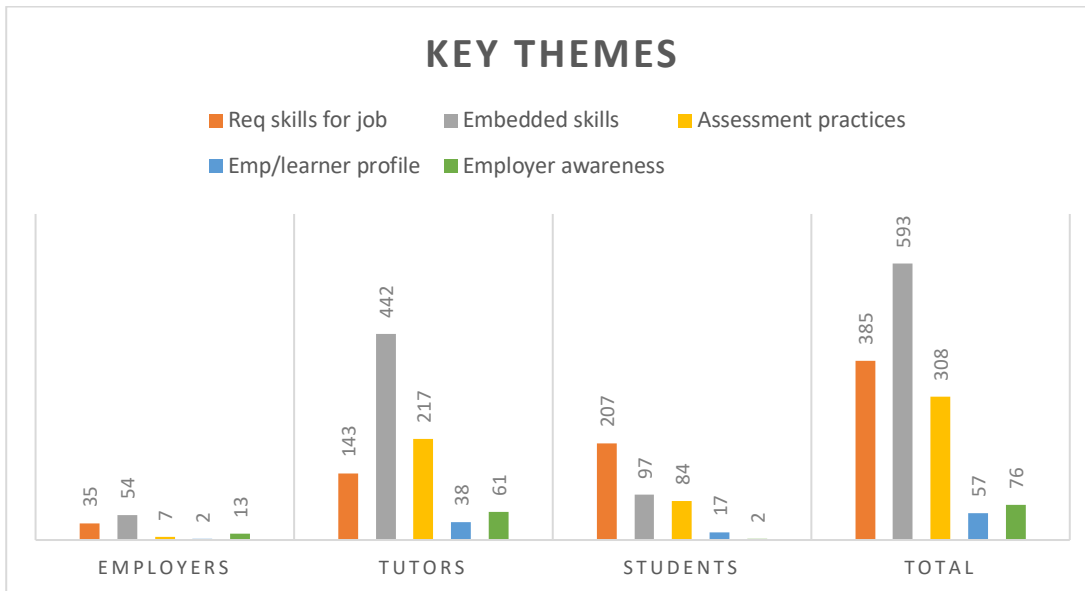
4.6.3.12 Thematic analysis and interim matrix tables

After the initial examination of the transcripts, an intermediate matrix was created which grouped the themes from the highlighted responses as illustrated in table YY. All of the categories or themes were identified as covering the variety of responses in the most inclusive and accurate way and to help with comment distribution.

The responses from all of the interviewees were initially typed up and highlighted in 3 tables. An attempt was made to fuse all of the responses into one large matrix table but as the questions posed to the interviews varied between the three categories of tutors, employers and learners, this was too complex thus 3 separate tables were created – one for each category.

The number of pages per table on the most frequent issues or themes is presented in figure 6. As expected, many of the tutors gave them the most substantial amounts of information across the widest number of categories which included the non-response tutor comments in discussions at the end of the semi-structured interviews.

Figure 6 Identifying the themes



Each column on each of the matrix tables was analysed to look for opposing and supporting comments. Issues raised mostly in the learner profile (blue) column in the tutors matrix table related mostly to the consequence for the delivery but also for the learners themselves from the perspective of the tutors. The responses were broken into single themes or patterns which identified recurring effects and copied from the matrix to the Word document (see Table 6).

Table 6 Employment & Learner profiles coding of interview

Do you recall a marked change in learner profile? / What was the age range prior to the 2010 change in qual? Did you find that you had less 19+ learners on the course due to funding?
We have actually got, or we had a lot of students that were 19. But the way the funding has gone, we have some students who are 19 during the first year of course, because the courses are taught in to one year blocks, they cannot get funding to do
Lost most of the adults, we still have adults but of course I think that's also around as well, is employability of those adults once they have done it, because actually, are you gonna, because some employers will take on, want to take on, depending on your craft, somebody r younger than somebody...and that's around or sometimes around the wage restrictions.
You might work for a smaller employer whose overheads are much higher really and because they are a small business, they can only really afford the minimum wage, they are going to take somebody 16-18 years old as opposed to maybe someone that's 19 or 20
Yes. We didn't lose all 19+ but there was a reduction because we ran some NVQs which became less viable then the Govts kept changing our courses so they produced a course called CCLD children's care and learning and they did a children and workforce diploma and we still do that come in the evening and do that, absolutely full cost, criminally expensive, and we also do the assistant courses which are still popular part time short courses, but the assessment changed so now have to have an assessor who now goes out and visits them
lots of adult learners – that's the biggest change that. One they had to start funding themselves large course fee's then that was it. They come in at 16-18, 16-60 before but primarily as it was it was mostly 16-18.
We used to have loads of adult provision, ummmm, we do two classes now for adults but we used to

We used to have loads of adult provision,, ummmm, , we do two classes now for adults but v
 used to have them every night. Are those full cost? Yeah
 Oh you mean the evening classes? Yeah they were from 19 to 60
 And what about on the L2 plus – 16-19 but we would still take mature students full time duri
 day if they wanted to come during the day.
 And what about afterwards? Is it now just 16-19? Ummmm, yeah we still take adults on ther
 well, but at full cost.

Table 7 -Colour tags for analysis

LA	Lost adults provision
AFC	Adults full cost
EY	Employment of younger adults
EA	Employment of adults

Table 6 shows an excerpt from a matrix table. It contains one column only (related to one or more related interview question) Using the colour tags allowed for a simple process to count up the frequency of mentions relating to any one of the themes. Within the theme of Employment & Learner Profiles which address in part RQs 2 & 3, the employment of young adults tag (n=197) was the most common issue discussed. Losing or changing of the Adult Provision was the second most commented on subject (n=37) and other than (n=3) of employers mentioning that they had stopped employing adults (19+), the comments under this theme all came from the tutors. This was considered a major emerging theme which is considered in the main discussions. This coding system and the squint analysis helped me identify recurring themes easily. Comparing the colour coded blocks allowed me to compare recurring patterns and identify which groups of interviewees they appeared to belong to which again aided in the summarizing of the findings. Using this system, I was able to focus easily and other than the task of transcribing all the interviews and breaking the content down into groups and tables and colour coding the common themes, it was not as Cohen et al consider, a complex process. (Cohen et al, 2011).

This research method enabled me to draw out an in-depth analysis of the experiences and views of the stakeholders and at ground level, reinforce the understanding of the consequences of the policy reform impacts for all three stakeholder groups.

4.6.3.13 Lessons from the Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted before the main study over the period of 6 weeks – see appendix 8. This consisted of interviews with 5 teaching staff and a questionnaire for 10 learners. The

examination of this pilot study documentation shaped the main method study in the following ways:

Firstly in a reflexive process of examining my own research practises, as Mann (2016) highlights the focus on 'self-awareness' that allows for reflexivity (p.16). I recognised my tendency to ask leading questions and to over affirm. Ellis et al (1997) highlights how research develops and shapes findings through reflexivity (p.121). It is important not to do this as it can sway the outcomes. It is especially important in educational settings where young people are used to regarding adults as more powerful than them and therefore may strive to give the answers that they think are required.

When I reflected on the interview questions I therefore ensured that the question design and my presentation was more objective and I held back from approval, I was more neutral in my tone.

Second, themes in the pilot that I hadn't anticipated were that my interviews from the tutors and learners suggested that I needed some contrasting groups and that a much larger sample size was required for dilution. I therefore became more alert to the notion of contrasting views and dilution which also shaped the questions to learners and tutors in the main study and the way I examined curriculum documentation.

4.6.4 Summary

Rich data was collected via semi-structured interviews based on questionnaires. This data was the views and experiences of learners, tutors and employers on the impact of the reforms under the CG at that time. The analysis approach for this part of the study was inductive. This chapter has outlined my approach taken in the study and discussed the thematic analysis of the interview data. I have detailed my role as a researcher and discussed how this affected my approach and potential bias issues in responses.

In the following chapters I analyse Curriculum material, and destination and employment data drawing out key themes relating to my research questions. Chapter 7 details the findings from the interviews which are then summarised and discussed in chapter 8.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have detailed the methodology and methods I employed in this thesis. The use of a qualitative approach is closely aligned and best suited to elicit thick, rich descriptions. Borrowing from grounded theory, the squint analysis used for data analysis was a recursive

process and findings were grouped and formulated as the research continued. The methods used were largely determined as the interviews were undertaken in the pilot study therefore a replication of this approach was used. A total of 37 interviews were completed.

The following chapter focuses on the findings of the interviews. The chapter is structured using the themes as headings; each theme is explained, explored and analysed.

5 CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

Having examined the policies and drivers for change in Vocational Level 3 courses in previous chapters, this chapter investigates salient changes in course format during the move to QCF framework. This study examines in detail the five pathways: IT/Computing, Construction, Engineering, Childcare and Hair & Beauty. Analysis of exam board specifications has been undertaken and is presented in detail in appendix 7, this is presented on a micro-level and each learning outcome and assessment criteria was analysed for every unit on the courses offered prior to 2011 and the QCF courses from this time. This micro examination identified themes on some of the courses but not all and this is important because of the implications for the gender and academic divide which is discussed in the literature review and final chapter. Interpretive by approach, this chapter analyses the core skills transfer elements for each course in order to establish if the course and exam board changes impacted on the practice of assessment and delivery. This research is trying to understand how the format of the vocational qualification changed and how those changes impacted on the learners in terms of progression to related employment. Under the CG and its neoliberal approach to education, educational policy was addressed, and funding was removed from a large number of vocational qualifications. The qualification framework NQF did not allow for progression to HE on a university tariff points basis thus funding was removed from a large number of courses sitting under this framework including many of the C&G Level 3 courses at the FEC, one of which is examined in this study. In order to substantiate any claim on the format of the BTEC, C&G and other examination board level 3 courses identified in this research, an analysis of the courses and exam board material with assessment methods was undertaken. Using a thematic analysis approach, this chapter is concerned with examining all the course assessment models and trying to identify contingency, patterns and contradictions. Important themes emerged that shaped the delivery and assessment across all of the male dominated pathways but not the female populated courses, this is discussed in the conclusion; however, these notions of gender stereotyping are introduced in the literature review and can be seen in the discussion in most of the chapters.

5.1.1 Setting the scene for data presentation

This chapter provides the backdrop for the presentation of curriculum assessment material. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate the assessment practises of the BTECs under the CG and for each of the five pathways, their predecessor courses. The FEC has a history of delivering BTECs and VET and the internal verification (IV) and quality assurance (QA) practices are considered. This chapter will also include a review on (Pearson) Edexcel's quality assurance requirements in order to validate the learner's assignment assessment methods.

5.1.2 BTEC definitions and requirements

The BTEC programs are internally assessed at the FEC as they are in most providers cases. Edexcel (2010) states that all assessments "should be valid, reliable and fit-for-purpose to provide evidence directly related to the specific outcomes" (p.13). In the same document the exam board claims that all assessments should enable students to produce evidence directly related to the specific outcomes (Learning Outcomes). The exam board however is unclear at times over the role and shape of the assessments stating "assessment is carried out in order to make judgements about the learners performance in relation to national standards" (Edexcel, 2010, pg160) however in the same document they also state that assessments may be used as an aid to learning and students should be allowed to improve on their assignments / assessments

Centres may provide learners with interim formative assessment stages and feedback from the assessor should allow the learner the opportunity to improve their performance. At a stated time, the summative assessment of the learners' work needs to take place and this is when formative assessment stops (p.161)

The information is general and can be ambiguous but the FEC, under the guidelines of the BTEC assessment process allowed multiple submissions of the same piece of work with formative feedback each time. This practice is a theme identified through the study and I demonstrate in future chapters its impacts on pedagogical style and quality.

5.1.2.1 *Classifying the Learning Outcomes and assessment verbs*

The BTEC guidelines for the assessment verbs / task descriptors in internally assessed units are in most cases 'explain'. The exam boards definition for explain is:

Explain : Learners’ work shows clear details and gives reasons and/or evidence to support an opinion, view or argument. It could show how conclusions are drawn.

(Pearson,2015,p.162)

Explain : Set out in detail the meaning of something, with reasons. More difficult than describe or list, so it can help to give an example to show what you mean. Start by introducing the topic then give the ‘how’ or ‘why’ (2019)

BTEC Assessment Guide (2013, p.iv)

As highlighted above, the assessment criteria grades are differentiated in terms of increasing performance quality. For example:

- explain (Pass) vs. ‘explain with clarity’ equating to adequacy
- explain (Merit) vs. ‘comprehensively’ equating to effectiveness
- explain (Distinction) equating to excellence

Newton (2018, p.54)

For each assessment on each unit for every qualification identified, the scenario and unit guide was read and the content analysed to establish the nature of the assessment verbs. The assessment verbs stated by BTEC could in some cases be understood to indicate a theoretical activity as opposed to a practical one or vice versa. In these cases an understanding of the unit and Learning Outcomes (LOs) was essential in order to identify how the learner was being assessed. An example of this is in the Construction BTEC

Unit	Unit Name	credit	Assessment verb/method
Unit 3	Mathematics for the build environment	10	10 – use7, explain3, apply, carry out , demonstrate

Table 8 Edexcel assessment methods example

‘Carry out’ may mean to undertake some practical activity but in this instance, it is a theoretical exercise, when in this example it is a distinction criteria and the full criteria reads “independently carry out check on calculations using relevant methods, making appropriate judgements on the outcomes”

(Edexcel, 2010, p361).

5.1.3 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Pearsons Edexcel had a mandatory requirement for all centres to operate an internal verification (IV) system. This system within the FEC was that a senior tutor, as a qualified Internal Verifier, undertook an IV process on all assignments ensuring they were fit for purpose, timely, measurable and fit within the GLH. All assignments were IV'd prior to being released to the students. Once the unit assessments were submitted by the students then marked, a 10% sample from each group was selected for cross-marking purposes which would be done by another teaching member of staff on the team. Often though this process would not include work that had been submitted several times or work that may have been referred. The IV process was designed to add a layer of QA to the process and ensure marking was of a correct standard and that the assessment decisions were fair.

External Verification (EV) also took place by representatives from the exam board and was called Standards Verification Sampling by Edexcel (Edexcel 2010c). This was a postal system whereby samples from groups selected by the exam board were posted to an externally appointed assessor. Not all units or all pathways were selected for sampling. If the exam board was satisfied with the work, it indicated that the standards were acceptable.

5.2 Assessing skills & models of delivery

This chapter examines the tension between skills (or practical competences) and theoretical assessment types – these are summarised in appendix 7. The key to my data analysis was to apply my knowledge of each course model and its delivery styles to help extract and identify data which would support the understanding of skills and pedagogical models. The data documents were in the form of exam board course specifications and unit specifications plus the FEC unit & course guides. Creswell identifies that the research methods consist of how the researcher collects, analyses and interprets the data (Creswell, 2009). My research began with what was already known about a topic and what remains to be learned (Creswell, 2009), thus utilising material that already existed supported my approach. I examined each unit of each course and identified structure, content and methods for each and tabulated the data. This was a lengthy process but being familiar with the delivery models of different level 3 Diplomas meant that I was able to extract the data reasonably easily. I had the benefit of being part of an informal network – the tutors, the exam boards, the FEC, current and former learners thus access to data

or answers to any queries was not too problematic or time consuming. I was able to access documents and reports plus tutors and learners that may have been either difficult or prove not possible to external researchers.

5.3 Summary

There are emerging patterns from the documentation analysis in appendix 7 as shown in the graph below.

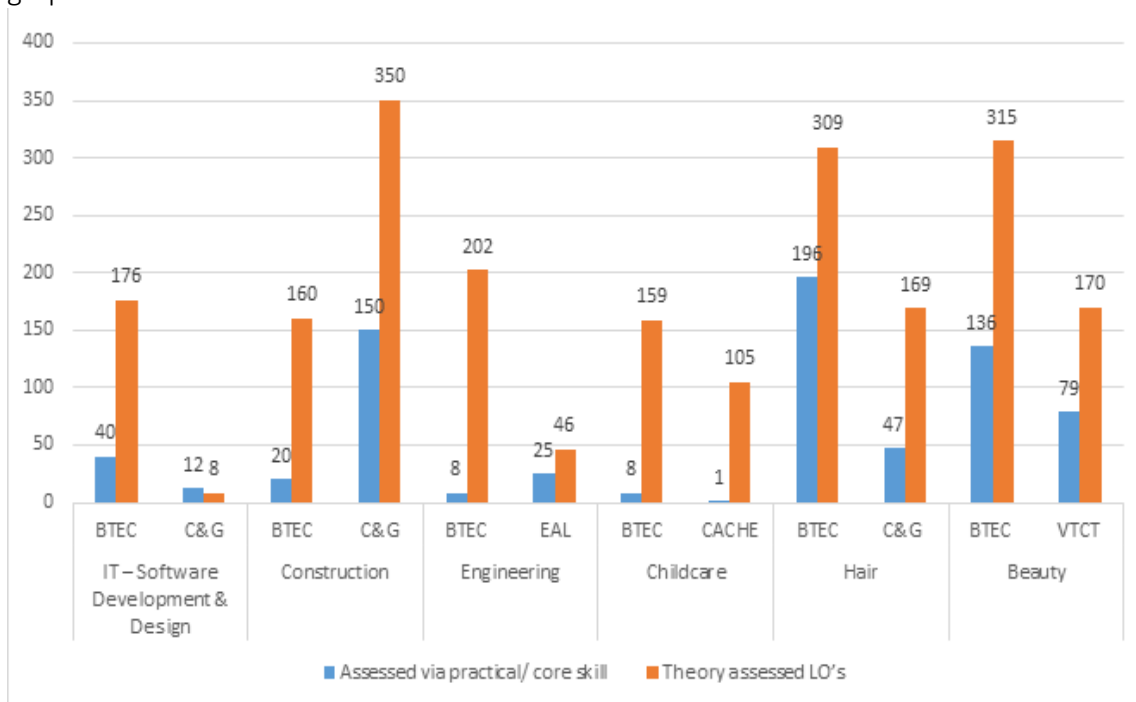


Figure 7 FEC VET leaver destinations 2016

The Y axis represents number of learning outcomes and the X axis represents theory versus practical assessed units on the five pathways.

The data in figure 23 demonstrates the emerging patterns from the analysis of all curriculum material. There is a clear almost even spread of the increased BTEC theoretical assessment types across the pathways in all apart from hair and beauty (H&B). In H&B there appears to be a spike in the BTEC theory assessments at nearly double to those in the other pathways. There is no evidence to suggest why this happened other than the move to making the H&B vocational courses more general in content allowing for wider progression options for the students. We would then expect to see more rounded business skills being incorporated into the H&B Diplomas. We can deduce that the BTEC courses in IT, construction, engineering and childcare had significantly increased theoretical assessments as opposed to practical methods. We can tell that the construction C&G course encompassed 150 practical assessment methods despite the

theoretical number being the highest of all the groups. Again, there is no evidence to support this rise or any explanation as to why this occurred, other than the generalisation of the level 3 courses to allow for progression. There was a dramatic reduction in theory assessments in construction on the C&G pathways but even given this drop the BTEC practical assessments constituted only 12.5% as opposed to the 42% on the C&G Diploma. The results from this chapter seemingly mean little in isolation and need to be combined with the findings from the interviews and also the destinations findings. From the interviews I hoped to discover whether the learners on the earlier format of Diplomas may have had an advantage into employment over those with a more general vocational qualification and whether this proved to be a disadvantage later on. The courses that had the funding removed that have been included in this study show that they delivered very specific skills in most cases. This may be problematic for those learners who wished to have a career change or applying for jobs with a different or less defined skill set. So it might be perceived as an advantage earlier on by learner's but may prove to be the opposite later in life.

The former vocational qualifications and models had more emphasis on competence assessments or achievement as opposed to academic depth or knowledge. For specific roles such as hairdressing or brick laying this might well be the appropriate training model but with such a narrow focus on specific trade skills, this leaves these learners with fewer progression options and a less rounded education.

5.4 Conclusion

The emphasis in this chapter was to identify how the methods of assessment changed after the policy reforms under the CG. Close analysis of each of the BTEC courses has been undertaken and all assessment types counted and grouped. As this research is concerned with the provision under the CG in 2010-2015, a comparison was required to identify any changes in skills and assessment methods thus this study included the previous courses offered prior to 2010 that then had their funding removed. This conclusion and summary in this chapter will mostly be in relation to the BTEC outcomes as these are the focus of the time period.

The curriculum analysis conclusion is not simple to define – H&B and Construction for example are diverse occupations, both vocational yet the C&G approach to funding and

format of these courses was entirely different. Without taking the findings from other chapters into consideration with findings from this chapter it does not seem likely that we can draw conclusions from the data.

It might be easier to make the logical connection between hairdressers and beauty therapists being armed with the correct skills for customer care and running their own business or salon; elements of general skills are taught and developed but the majority of the course consisted of learning purely vocational trade skills delivery. The course is not designed to allow progress to HE. What is harder to understand is why this would necessarily not be the case for bricklayers or labourers without making any judgements on gender. The Construction course moved from a model which was dominated by practical skills transfer to one that consists of theoretical learning only, like other BTEC courses at that time apart from Hair & Beauty, designed to allow progress in education. Conversely, it might be considered that the common use of the two assessment measures / verbs (describe and explain), largely under the BTEC courses, may not encourage learners to develop a wider range of higher thinking or researching skills.

The BTEC models delivered during the timeframe of 2010-2015 were shaped on an ethos that every learner must have every opportunity to pass, using multiple submissions as discussed earlier in this chapter. The assessment construct was seen to exhibit incremental learning based on their incremental improvements of the same piece of work via multiple and unlimited attempts. The overuse of the two assessment measures / verbs (describe and explain) does not encourage learners to develop a range of higher thinking or researching skills and multiple unlimited attempts at coursework or assignment work until the unit is achieved is a stark contrast from the one resit only format in HE, thus the question arises on the suitability of these learners for progression to HE in terms of how prepared they are. The relaxed approach to achievement on a BTEC course, smaller classes, constant formative feedback, easily accessible staff and general support might not help a BTEC learner in adapting to HE. Formative feedback is explained by the BTEC exam board;

The 2010 EdExcel course specification states:

It is important to give learners positive feedback that tracks and records their learning journey and achievement but also identifies areas for improvement. This is very valuable for learners who have missed criteria and need further encouragement and direction to achieve these criteria. (p.40)

And further the specification goes on to state

Learners could be encouraged to tackle criteria that they have missed, or are weaker in understanding (p.40)

And on page 43, if a learner has not achieved a Pass

Feedback and support should be provided to ensure that the learner is aware of any failings in the work presented for assessment and then given the opportunity to rectify these failings through some means (such as reworking material, taking advantage of a further assessment opportunity, etc). achieving via newly designed assignments (p.43).

The specification makes it clear that learners must be given the opportunity to improve their grades through multiple submissions and alternative assignments. In their statement about the number of times a learner can submit their work Edexcel state

If the assignment is prompting learning, then that is what the course is about in the first place and therefore re-work is to be encouraged whenever applicable (p.43).

And in the 2010 IT specification

Learners should have every opportunity to obtain the best unit grades they are able to achieve' and 'learners could be encouraged to tackle criteria that they have missed, or are weaker in understanding..'

Pearsons, 2010, p.40

All the above support the approach by the exam board for learners to improve until they achieve. It may be interpreted that the intent to succeed inhibits the enjoyment of the learner. The unlimited submissions practice was not representative in industrial practise. The criteria compliant design of the BTEC can be seen as a main focus in the design. Open assignments were the most extensively used methods in terms of written work for assignments during the period studied. The continual use of the two assessment measures / verbs (describe and explain) does not encourage learners to develop a range of higher thinking or researching skills. While the design of the BTECs could be considered restrictive both in terms of type and amount of competence assessments and also what could be delivered to the learners, they did allow for some rigour and allowed for learners to practise their writing skills and understanding of a particular phenomenon.

The dominant role of the assessment on a vocational course can define a student's perceptions of the course and is widely acknowledged according to Joughin (1999). Rowntree (1977) decades earlier identified that there were hidden assessment influences in the curriculum and on students learning where he discusses the value of assessments. In the late 1960s Bloom (1976) developed a theory of "mastery of learning" (p.4) which in essence looked at how to help learners to achieve. His research suggested a move from summative to formative, with feedback and signposting as to where the learners were going wrong and how to improve. This model however was not without its problems; the

approach of timely and quality feedback plus suggested corrective actions were designed to aid student achievement, but incidents were documented whereby students were handing in the same piece of work many times until it reached the pass criteria, changing little content each time. Ofsted also had cause to investigate FECs where there was a significant rise in triple distinctions within subjects for many years running.

In this research it might be argued that the value is placed on what the students learned and not how they received that learning and in what context. It could be considered that what the content is for each vocational course, is defined by those who control the curriculum (the government) and those who design the course (exam boards) and that these definitions are based on what they consider to be the most useful and beneficial to society. Knowledge from society and the workplace are recontextualised into pedagogic content and Bernstein suggests that the method of how the theory or content of what is being taught is not intrinsically linked to the content itself but dictated by those who regulate and control it (Bernstein, 1990). Using this approach this research suggests that the models of assessment and delivery may not have been appropriate for the content, knowledge or competence.

According to researchers such as Duckworth (2013) and Reay et al (2005;2010), educational establishments perpetuate existing social hierarchies. They suggest that there is a chasm between 6th form students and FE students and that these students are subject to 'institutional effect' (Reay et al, 2015). It may be viewed that the BTEC more generalised approach to include more theoretical content seeks to address this gap in terms of WP and the neoliberal approach to educational reform.

The analysis of course assessment material in this chapter suggests that the majority of the courses have become more generalised and less trade skills specific. However, it is not a simple generalisation as Hair & Beauty course structures barely changed yet Construction suffered significantly with a loss of competence delivery and assessment. Childcare courses had minimal change yet Engineering and IT lost most of their practical elements. Any assumption of a gender divide would be erroneous given the limited scope of this research however it is worthy of consideration for further research as gender patterns in terms of student profiles are evident in this study.

6 DESTINATION OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS

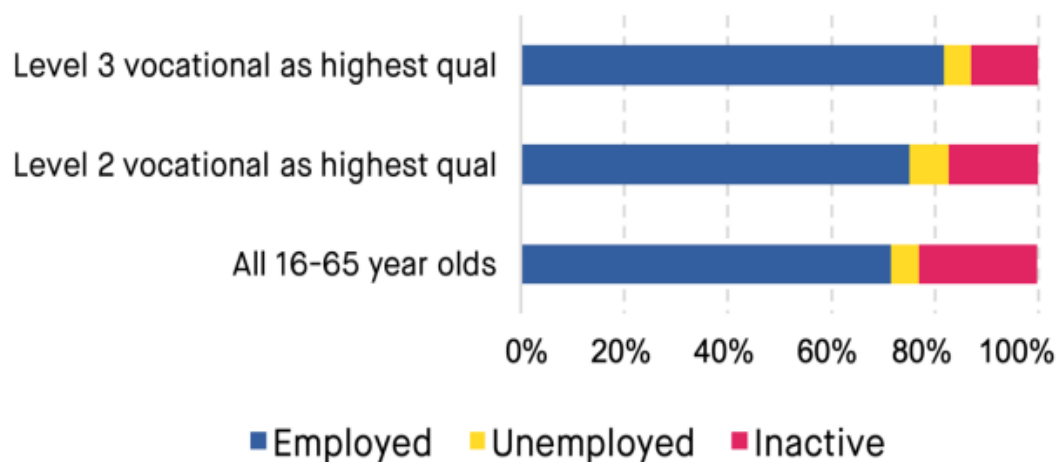
This chapter will firstly examine employment policy initiatives by the CG and national employment trends, as well as local employment trends to assess whether employment opportunities in the region were proportionate to those within the whole of the UK. The progression and destinations of the learners is then examined; this includes an overview of the rising number of BTEC learners entering higher education. Learners laying blaming not being able to secure related employment on perceived deficiencies of their course may not be justified if they lived in an area with low employment opportunities in that sector. It is important too to consider that while learners may have felt that they did not learn the correct skills for related work, their lack of success may have been due to few jobs with strong competition. Some suitable jobs may receive a large number of applicants, some of which may have industry experience, some may have a degree and some both. This notion of competing underpins the neoliberal ideology, which encourages individuals to see themselves as market units who must maximise their value through the acquisition of skills and accreditation to advance economically (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). The impact of this in terms of rising HE numbers at persistently lower status of BTEC is explored.

This chapter identifies the Coalition Government (CG) reforms in terms of employment and benefits system for 16-19year olds between 2010 and 2015. An examination of employment trends nationally and locally is then compared to determine if there are any patterns that may help answer the research questions. The progression options of the learners are analysed, including progression to HE, related work (related to the subject of their course) or other employment, and evaluated as to how this fits in within the research. The research seeks to understand whether the notion that If the BTECs did not provide the learners with the necessary skills for related employment, what other options were available to them? It questions how well a neoliberal approach to VET prepared these learners for the workforce and whether the number of learners opting for university change as a consequence of the vocational course changes or were there simply not the vacancies out there in the specific fields thus herding these learners into other unskilled employment roles? If this is the case, was there an increased demand for unskilled labour during the specified years?

This chapter will be followed by a qualitative analysis of interviews in chapter 7 which will describe and analyse learner experience and attitude toward perceived skills transfer. The current chapter examines changes in employment rates between 2010 – 2015 with a focus on employment opportunities for young adults. It will also discuss the skills gap and shortages within those years. Under the CG a focus was industrial policy and strategies both nationally and locally.

Some learners have expressed dissatisfaction in terms of trade skills learned on their course (see chapter 7) suggesting that this was to blame for not procuring a job in that field. However, this viewpoint can only be justified or measured if there was employment in that field for the learners to progress on to, and that successful employment in that field can be attributed to the skills learned on that course. If there were no related employment opportunities, the learners then cannot claim that their course did not qualify them for any roles in their chosen field. They cannot claim to have been unsuccessful in obtaining related employment if the job opportunities did not exist. If unemployment was low for the area at that time, it is important to examine what types of industry were attracting applicants as these job opportunities may not reflect the skills that the learners had been to the FEC to learn, which may have been too specific or not specific enough. With no evidence to suggest that within the five areas of industry studied there was any surge or obvious increases in employment opportunities, the research looks at whether in fact the increase in low skilled / low paid employment was the biggest contributory factor for gaining employment and what the alternative options were and identifies any reduction in options for college leavers under the CG. Did the learners get the trade skills and if so, did those skills equate to employment in the related field?

A 2016 study into VET progression routes for vocational learners found that there is a positive correlation in terms of likelihood of employment from both the level 2 and level 3 study (Mian et al, 2016). The report went on further to state that those learners with a Level 3 vocational qualification as their highest qualification are more likely to be employed than the 16-65 population generally.



Source: SMF analysis of Quarterly LFS 2011-2015, reported by Mian *et al*, 2016.

Figure 8 Unemployment by graduates 2006 - 2016

We can conclude from this then that the level 3 BTEC courses did have real value to learners. The Labour Force Survey of 2016, where data was gathered on vocational learners from 1997-2015, found that higher qualifications had average higher returns than lower and that the highest returns came from Level 3 BTEC learners. (NFER, 2019, p.9). BTEC also has the reputation of being ‘a more college-based program’ and had longevity of use in FECs. This is reflected in the Labour Market Survey stating that BTEC qualifications are higher in returns than others of their type (Moire *et al*, 2016). According to the UCAS End of Cycle report (2018) the BTEC learners form the majority of the alternative qualifications for entry to HE. These figures prove that the BTECs did indeed have value for the learners, not only for some types of employment but also for other progression routes.

The literature review in chapter two discussed the policy reforms, funding changes, vocational focus by the CG and skills. This chapter looks specifically at the reforms that had direct impact on these young people in terms of progression, which particular reform affected which group of society, what funding changes meant to the young people in the classroom, and the economic climate at that time. Setting the scene, this chapter then looks at policies and funding for the unemployed, employment rates for the UK and for the local area of the study and finally the options for these 16-19 year old college leavers, the employment landscape and progression into HE.

6.1 Coalition initiatives for post compulsory education

In the FE sector, since the 1980’s there have been 28 major pieces of legislation, 48 secretaries of state with relevant responsibilities and no organisational body has survived longer than a decade

(Norris & Adam, 2017). There was a 17% fall of adult learners between 2009/10 and 2013/14 as funding was heavily cut and the numbers for part-time and mature students fell by 40% (Lupton and Hills, 2015). The CG reduced the financial support available for students from low-income families and scrapped the EMA and replaced it with a 16-19 year old Bursary Fund, which cost the Government significantly less than the EMA. During 2013 and 2014 adult qualifications were reformed and the SFA removed funding from 2,800 qualifications that had a low take-up and changed funding for other courses. A further 5000 qualifications were removed by 2014/15 and a stronger framework promised (Lupton et al, 2015).

The Coalition laid out their plans for reforms in the Coalition Agreement '*Our Programme for Government*' 2010 in an attempt to address youth unemployment and education.

Coalition main policies for 16-19 Education and Training:

- Reduction in the number of qualifications that count towards GCSE performance tables, and their points value. Similar review of Level 3 qualifications – these are to be designated as either 'Tech levels' or 'Applied general'
- Reform to A level including a move to 'all exam' assessment making AS levels stand-alone qualifications
- New vocational courses at age 16-19 with increased general education component
- Implementation of Labour's Raising Participation Age policy – to 17 from 2013, and 18 from 2015
- Abolition of Education Maintenance Allowance and replacement with 16-19 Bursary Fund.

(Lupton et al, 2015 p.15)

The CG attempted to rectify problems with public spending by reducing funding to Education. One aspect of this was to scrap the EMA. Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove also announced the parties were scrapping a number of educational schemes including the General Teaching Council (GTC) for England, Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) and Building Schools for the Future.

A new Technical Baccalaureate was introduced for 14-19 year olds' taking vocational qualifications which were intended to be the equivalent of A levels. Courses (like the BTEC) that were reported to be focused solely on job-related skills, were replaced by curriculum models that would facilitate progress to HE or employment (Lupton and Hills, 2015). From 2014 all students who had not achieve an A* to C in Maths or English GCSE were required to continue studying them. Work experience was made mandatory for 16year old low achievers.

6.2 Coalition initiatives for unemployment / welfare

The CG cut public spending in its fiscal austerity program. Benefits were reduced and their conditionality increased, this was a key driver in their welfare cuts.

New Deals, introduced by Labour in 1998 focussed on the youth market and long term unemployed but differed greatly from the Coalition's policies in that under New Deal, the unemployed were offered four options; full-time education / training, subsidised employment, voluntary sector work or 6 month community placements. This scheme was seen to produce a high level of market participation. The Coalition continued in part with Labour's policies and adopted the New Deal strategy rebranded as the Work Programme. There was a shift however from re-training the unemployed to pushing them into low paid employment (Berry 2014).

Such active labour market programs (ALMPs) were not new to the Coalition government and schemes such as the above to enrol unemployed into the job market have been adopted by the Conservative Government since the Coalition.

The Coalition Government introduce at least 10 ALMPs:

1. Work Program
2. Mandatory Work Activity
3. Community action Program
4. Work Clubs
5. New enterprise Allowance
6. Enterprise Clubs
7. Work Together
8. Work experience
9. Sector Based Work Academies
10. Work Trials Youth Contract

These ALMPs all theoretically worked towards reducing unemployment and the financial strain on the economy. The UK policy system broadly sought to enable or rather 'push' people into employment and places with a heavy focus on job matching, employability training (such as CV writing, interview skills) and basic skills (IT, literacy etc) (Fothergill, 2013).

Replacing existing welfare to work programs rolled out by New Labour, a single programme was devised for those unemployed. Those claiming disability allowance would be reassessed and those assessed as able or fit to work moved on to Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). In 2010 the Pre-Work Programme was introduced to co-exist with existing strategies in the Job Centres and their advisers. This initiative included work clubs and enterprise clubs. New Enterprise Allowances (a total of £65 per week followed by £33 per week for 6 months) were rolled out from 2011 for those planning to start their own business. A Work Experience Scheme for 18-24 year olds, to coincide with their efforts to find work was introduced but seemed to have little impact. Work together schemes were introduced to 'encourage' those unemployed to volunteer. For those on benefits and in education, this meant they were set a compulsory amount of hours they had to volunteer for per week in order to still claim their benefits, thus their education was significantly affected. Benefit sanctions were applied to those who did not comply. JSA and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for those with limiting conditions claimants were also offered 'employability skills' training in numeracy and literacy.

The Youth Contract

Aiming to address the high unemployment of 16-18 year olds, The Youth Contract was introduced from April 2012. Largely this consisted of work experience placement whereby employers were offered a subsidy grant for employers running the scheme along with a wage subsidy.

Work Programme

Referrals to this initiative were high on its conception as claimants were transferred from the flexible New Deal programme. Unemployment fell but providers / employers increasingly were expected to support a growing number of disabled people and those 'harder to place' (SWP15, p4).

Introduction of Universal Credit

Introduction of the Universal Credit system began in 2013 to encourage people on benefits to start paid work or increase their hours in part time work. This initiative was designed to 'simplify the system' making the system easier to understand and cheaper for the CG to administer and to reduce fraud and error.

In 2013 benefits were capped for all 16 to 64 year olds, stopping those on benefits from receiving more income than those in work. In 2014 the CG proposed that those on JSA had to wait for a period of 7 days to claim as opposed to the existing 3 days to claim

benefits. Essentially the options for 16-19 year olds tightened year on year. The RPA meant unless these unskilled school leavers found full time employment, they had to stay on in education until they were 18. There was no unemployment benefit for under 19 year olds. Adults of 19+ had to pay for education and those entering HE had to pay full fees. This is relevant to the research as the scope of the study in part looks at the options open to these Level 3 learners once they had completed their course. It has already been established that their post 16 options had been narrowed in terms of funding for courses options and also any unemployment benefits they might be entitled to, so it is important to consider the alternatives. If there was no unemployment benefit and the RPA changed, forcing 16-19 year olds to remain in education, would they then be more inclined to sign up for courses that initially they had no interest in? The research also looks at the options for 19+ adults who previously would have had access to courses at level 2 and 3.

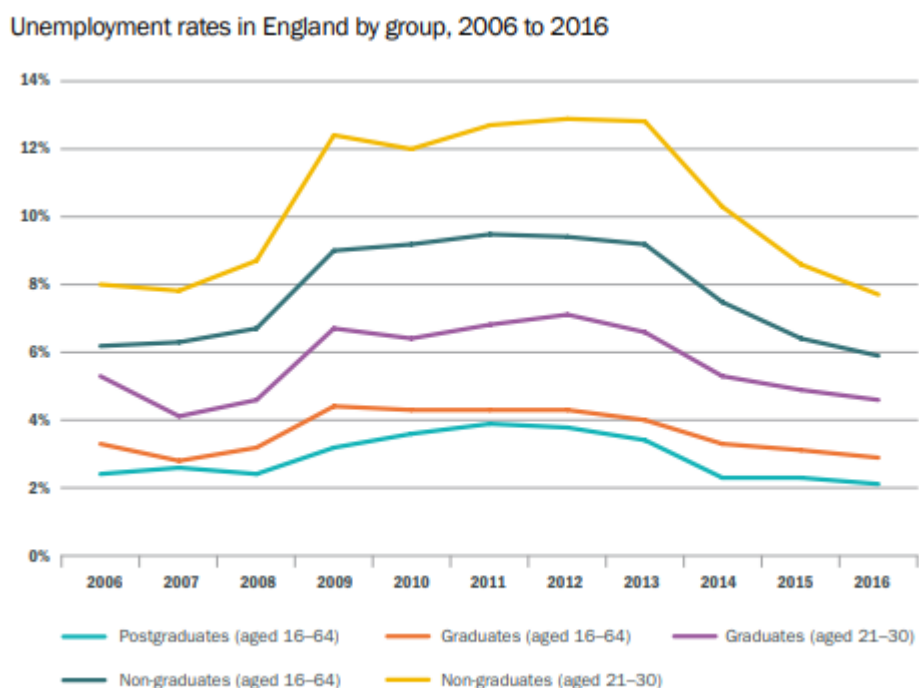
6.3 National employment

A look at local employment patterns and national employment trends allows an insight into employment progression to determine if this is related to local or national trends or lack of employment due to underqualified or under-skilled to obtain related employment. There are geographic patterns to unemployment. Cities such as Barnsley, Glasgow and Middlesbrough suffer a higher unemployment rate, in some cases double, than those of (for instance) York, Reading and Southampton, according to the Annual Populations Survey 2012-13. The survey examined evidence which shows that unemployment was down despite the economic output remaining fairly flat. However, many of these new jobs were low paid and there had been an increase in the 'underemployed' and rise of zero-hour contracts and other insecure forms of work (Brinkley, 2013). Adult employment rose but this was not mirrored by 16-24 employment which fell briefly before rising again. The increase of employment within this age group has largely been in London and the South East. (ONS,2016)

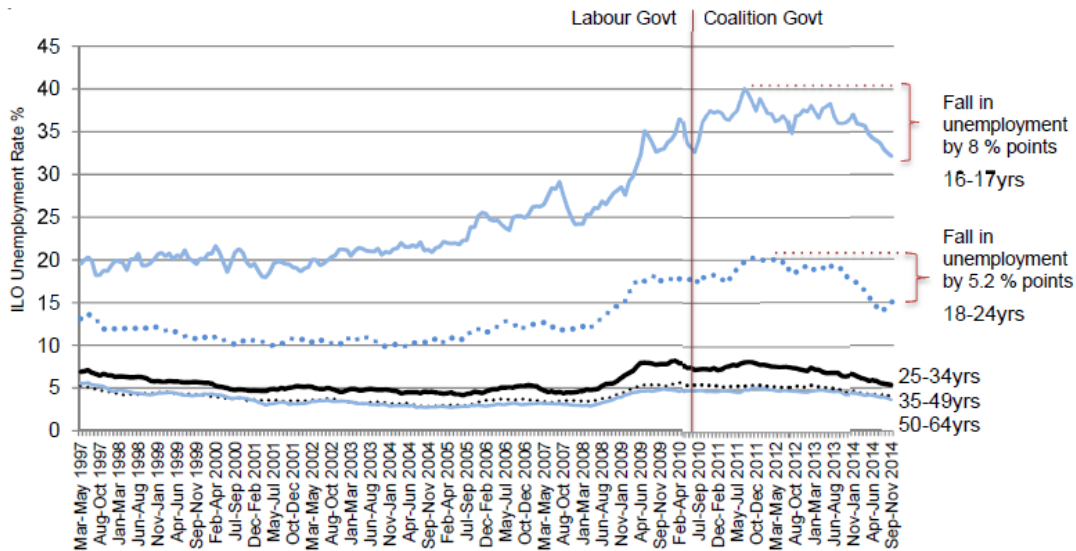
One of the major factors to consider when examining geographic employment patterns is the changing UK economy. Those cities with major industries which have closed (such as steel factories, coal mining) have in many cases failed to adjust to newer industries. The service industry and 'knowledge-intensive' work (C&G, 2020) have increased over the last 30 years and cities such as London, Oxford and Cambridge have benefited from the high

skilled occupations sectors. Counties and cities in Yorkshire which are included in this research by Crowley are Barnsley, Hull, Bolton, Huddersfield and Rochdale (Crowley, 2011).

The CG ran the country in a period of high unemployment following the economic crisis of 2007/08. The previous New Labour government had built on the changes introduced by the Conservatives in terms of active labour markets, but 1997-2010 saw many policy changes which aimed to address the mismatch between labour supply and labour demand (WP15, 2015). Unemployment fell from 2013, a 73% employment rate. A high percentage of these employed workers were part time (32.2%) and self-employed (15%). The recovery saw a decline in youth employment, an increase in over-skilled employment and a larger mismatch between skills and demand (UKCES,2014). In 2014 a report by UKCES identified that 48% of businesses reported that employees were overqualified and overskilled for their role. Similarly, in 2013 ONS reported that 47% of graduates were employed in under or low skilled roles (ONS,2013). The rise in underemployment included part time workers who wanted longer hours, young workers who were ‘overqualified’ for their role and graduates working in non-graduate roles or low/lower middle skilled roles (Tomlinson & Whitworth, 2017).



(source IFS, 2016) Figure 8 Unemployment by graduates 2006 – 2016



Source: ONS (2015)

Figure 9 Employment by age 1987 – 2014

Figure 13 shows that outcomes did improve over time however. A report from the National Audit Office in 2014 stated that the Work Programme initiative had not produced better results than the one it replaced. While reports noted a drop in unemployment figures, other initiatives could be responsible such as RPA, benefit cuts for 16-19 year olds and the removal of the EMA.

6.3.1.1 National Employment trends

Unemployment in the UK fell from 8.5% in 2011 to 6% in 2014 but the Work Program initiative from the Coalition was not a success with young people leaving the programme without finding permanent work.

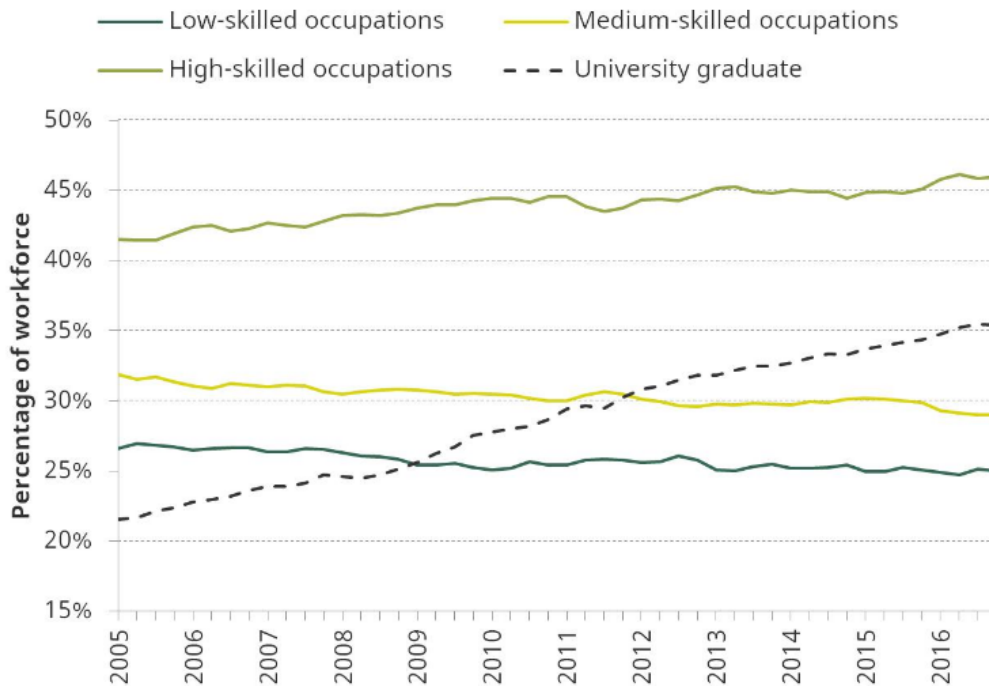


Figure 10 (IFS, [2017](#))

As the numbers of university graduates increased so did the number of graduates in employment which rose significantly under the CG and rose significantly in employment in lower or unskilled roles displacing non graduates when seeking work. There is no data to suggest that graduates take up employment in the Hair & Beauty Sector or Construction, however, the IT and Engineering sectors are popular graduate routes. Childcare is different in that degrees in childcare exist and workers can go directly into the industry as well as other occupations such as teaching, social work and Youth work Graduates are less likely to be a nursery worker or childminder.

Employment rose and fell from 2011 to 2015, the unemployment rate was 6.4%, compared to 12 months previously at 7.7%. Low skilled jobs saw little change, but the number of university graduates rose significantly. The proportion of graduates working in low skilled jobs increased from 5.3% in 2008 to 8.1% in 2016 (IFS). Over half a million more people were in work in December 2014 than during the previous 12 months in 2013 and 73% were 16-64 year olds (IFS, 2017).

6.3.1.2 Local employment patterns

This section looks at the employment context within the examined years for the geographical area of the FEC providing a comparison for vocational learners that undertook progression into the labour market in terms of opportunities, as opposed to those accessing HE. The section provides insight into the employment market however some jobs or employment information are not advertised or publicised nationally, and the figures used in this study figures were obtained via the web presence.

6.4 Yorkshire and the Humber employment trends

The city of the study itself has relatively low unemployment for young adults but some surrounding cities suffer with some of the highest unemployment rates (work foundation, 2014). The Employment rate in the region in 2014 was 70.5%, slightly lower than the UK average of 72.2% see table 29 The Unemployment rate in the region was 7.6% compared with 6.4% in the UK but previous year (2013) was at 9.1%. (DWP, 2018)

Overall the local area had lower unemployment rates than the UK between the years 2010-2015.

Economically Active population of city of study / Yorkshire & the Humber and Great Britain – table 9

	city of study	Yorks & Humberside	GB
2010	70.9%	68.5%	70.2%
2011	74.5%	67.6%	69.9%
2012	78.0%	68.9%	70.6%
2013	72.9%	69.7%	71.3%
2014	72.8%	70.6%	72.0%
2015	76.4%	72.5%	73.6%

Table 9 Employment by region UK 2010 - 2017 (ONS,2019)

In table 27 we can see that the number of people economically active is slightly higher than the rest of the UK and Yorkshire and the Humber. The percentages of those economically active between the local area and the rest of the UK range from between 0.8% to 8%. However when we consider the surrounding area of Yorkshire and Humberside the figures are different. Humberside and Hull are considered economically poor areas and every year their economically active figures are below the rest of Britain. Yorkshire & Humberside economically active percent was lower than GB but the local area's was higher within the period studied.

Providing a better insight into employment National Office Marketing Information Statistics (NOMIS) provides data by employment type – see table 30. If we examine the IT sector for example, this would fall under 'Associate professional and Technical occupations'. We can see that the percentage of workers in that field changed little between 2010-16 under the CG. This small change is echoed in the figures for the UK within the same timeframe. The area that saw a large increase within the area but was not reflected in the UK was 'Elementary Occupations' which is classified as unskilled work. This saw a rising increase from 2010-14 then a drop from 2014-15 by 3%.

Table 10 Employment by occupation locally 2010-2015 (ONS,2019)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Managers, Directors and Senior Officials	11.1	8.1	9.2	9.6	8.1	11
Professional Occupations	22.8	22.5	23.2	22.6	21.4	22.9
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	14.2	13.3	12.2	14.4	14.1	14.1
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	10.6	11.5	11.3	8.8	10.3	9.1
Skilled trades Occupations	10.4	11	10.3	8.1	9.3	9.8
Caring, Leisure and other services	8.4	7.1	8.3	8.9	7.9	7.7
Sale and Customer services	9.2	9.7	9.9	9.6	8.7	8.6
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	4.3	5.0	4.3	4.1	4.0	4.6
Elementary Occupations	8.8	11.7	11.2	13.8	15.3	12.3

Table 11 Employment by occupation GB 2010 – 2015 (ONS,2019)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Managers, Directors and Senior Officials	10.1	9.9	10.1	10.2	10.3	10.4
Professional Occupations	18.8	19.3	19.4	19.7	19.8	19.8
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	13.8	13.8	14.1	13.9	14.1	14.1
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	11.2	11	10.9	10.8	10.7	10.7
Skilled trades Occupations	10.8	10.8	10.5	10.6	10.7	10.6
Caring, Leisure and other services	9.2	9	9	9.1	9.2	9.2
Sale and Customer services	8.1	8.1	8.2	7.9	7.8	7.6
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	6.6	6.4	6.3	6.3	6.3	6.3
Elementary Occupations	10.8	11.1	10.9	10.8	10.8	10.8

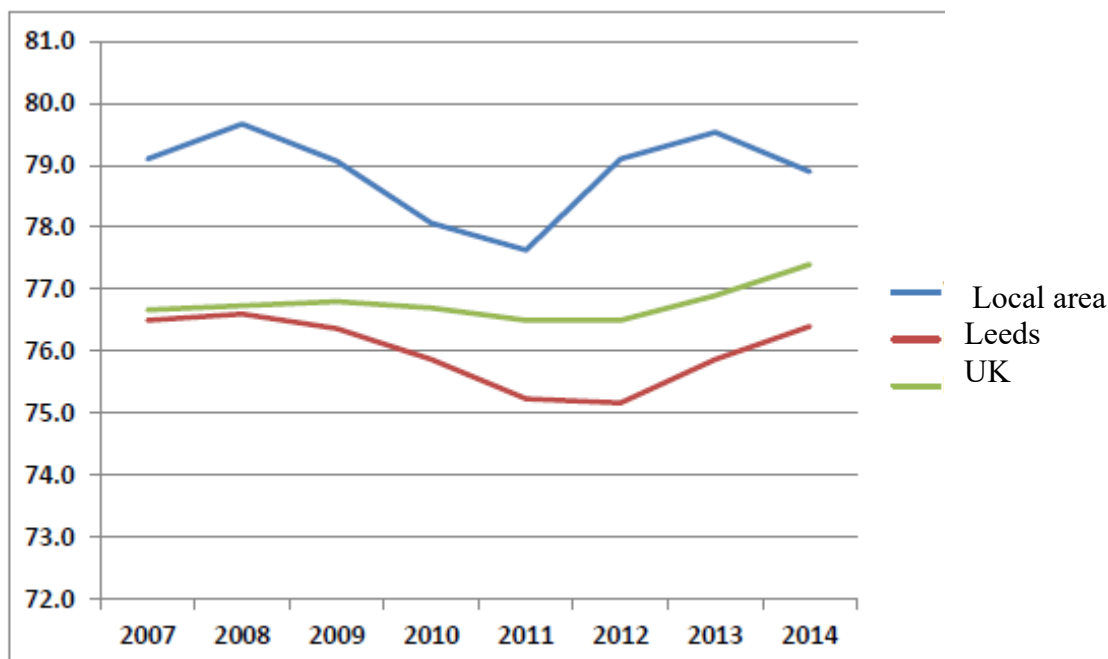
By elementary occupations the NOMIS means menial unskilled work. Construction would fall under skilled trade, Engineering in professional and technical, childcare and H&B would be categorised under caring, leisure and other.

The GB table 29 shows comparative data on occupations between the local area and GB. For the unskilled 'elementary' occupations the local area had a lower percentage in 2010, whereas until 2015 all were higher than the rest of Britain. In 2014 there was a 4.5% difference in percentage of works in elementary roles.

The evidence shows that there is a higher employment rate in care / personal services, food preparation and hygiene, nursing and midwifery and other basic services. There is however a decrease in ICT professionals, sales and marketing, business, research and administrative professionals, functional managers / directors which can be seen in table 11.

We can conclude that while the local area suffered slightly lower unemployment rates than the rest of the UK, the area also saw a rise in elementary roles and basic services which are also classified as low skilled roles.

figure 11 -Unemployment local area, Leeds & England 2007 – 2014



Source: ONS

The ONS chart shows that the growth in employment was lower for the local region after the recession than Leeds or nationally, and in 2014 unemployment stood at 21%. (Yorkshire LMI, 2017). Leeds was selected as it is in West Yorkshire and a large city with very different industries from Hull and East Yorkshire. The Unemployment rate in Nov 2015 – Jan 16 stood at 5.1% and had not been as low since Aug/Oct 2005 when the figure was 4.9%. Post-recession, in late 2011, the figure stood at 8.5%

- The employment rate (aged 16-64) 74.1% and from Dec 15-Feb 16 768,000 vacancies nationally.
- The local area had 0.6% claimant rate in the year, by region the highest figure being 10.5% At the start of 2016, Yorkshire and the Humber saw a 3% increase of business enterprises from the previous year. Since 2012 economic growth for Yorkshire and the Humber has been below the national average and employment has declined a further 5% in the area in 2015.
- Employment rate in 2014 70.5%, slightly lower than UK average of 72.2%
- Unemployment rate in the region was 7.6% compared with 6.4% in the UK but previous year 9.1% Sources : Annual Population Survey, Claimant Count, Lloyds Bank Yorkshire

(LMSI, 2017)

The evidence shows that unemployment in the area rose under the CG and only started to fall in 2013. In contrast, unemployment fell in GB very gradually until 2012 when a sharper rise in numbers was seen.

Occupations in the local area and North Yorkshire

The top occupations in the local area and North Yorkshire can be seen in the model shown below. In 2015 it is clear that elementary jobs outweigh other fields.

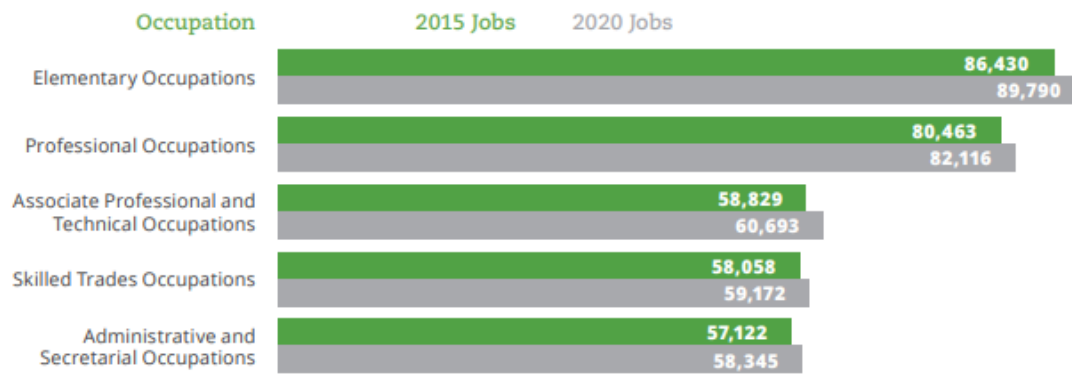


Figure 12 Occupation genres by region 2015 – 2020 a (LEP 2019)

The statistics show that there is a higher employment rate in care / personal services, food preparation and hygiene, nursing and midwifery and other basic services than professional roles. There is however a decrease in ICT professionals, sales and marketing, business, research and administrative professionals, functional managers / directors.

figure 13 Occupation genres by region 2015 – 2020 b

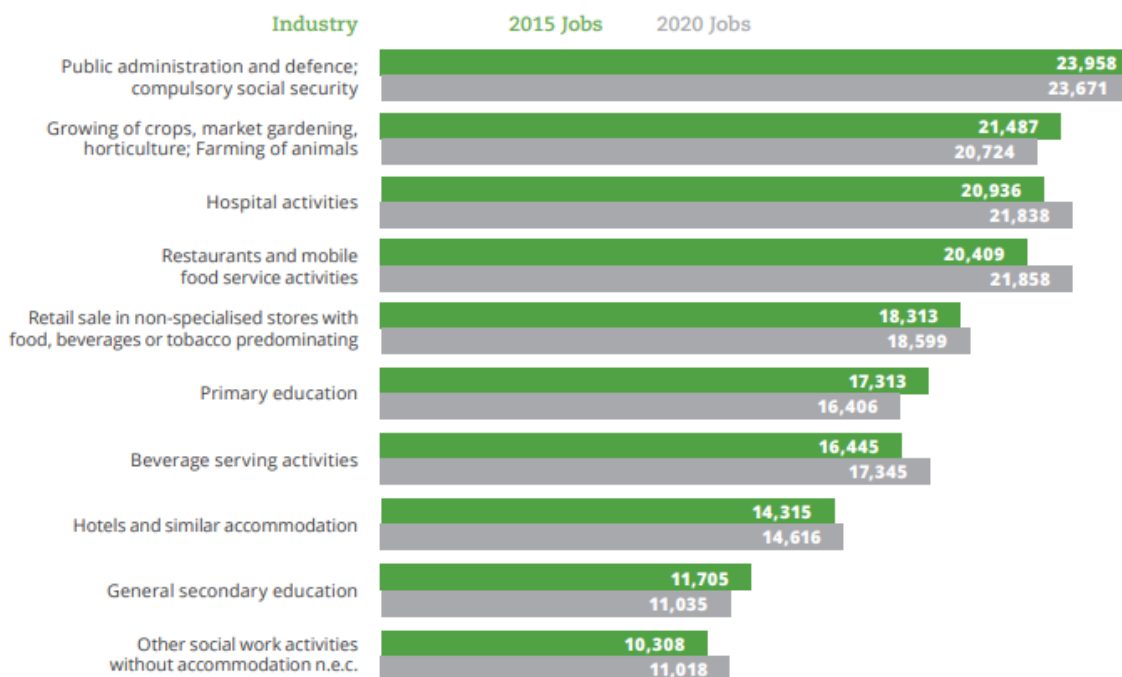
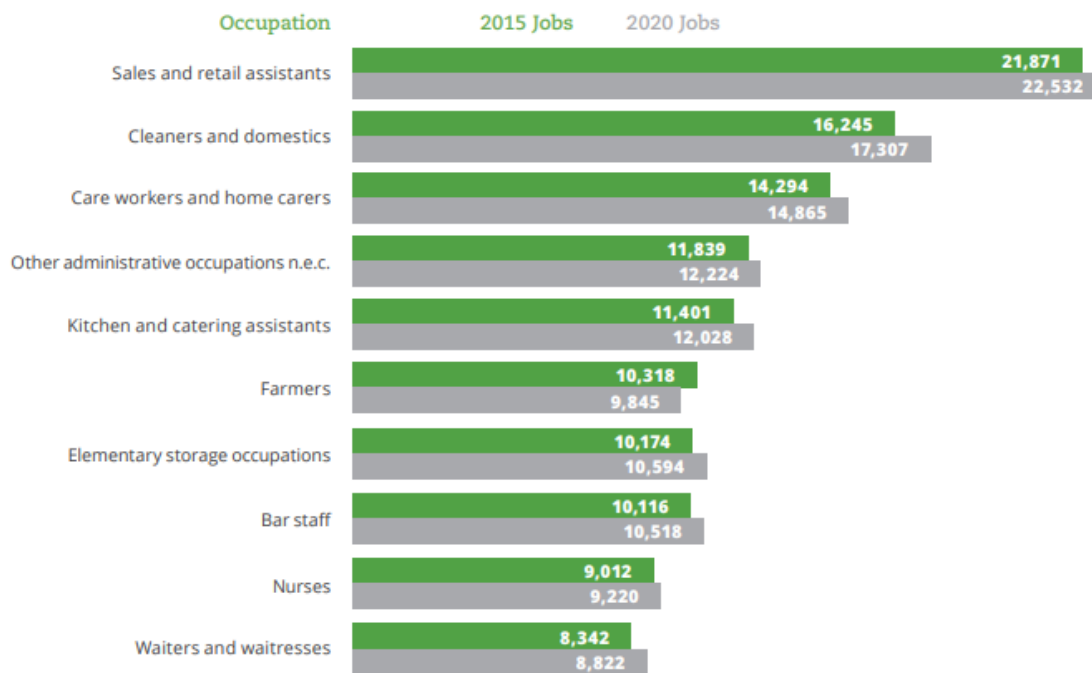


figure 14 Occupation genres by region 2015 – 2020 c



source LEP Report, 2019

Nearly 380,000 individuals work across the local area and North Yorkshire area. The largest employment sectors are (ONS, 2015):

- Health and Social work, employing 13% of all workers
- Accommodation and food services, employing 11% of all workers
- Retail, employing 10% of the workforce

(Business Inspired Growth, 2017)

This equates to a sum of 34% of the workforce for the area in elementary employment roles. Yorkshire and Humber's output (about £13bn) was the third largest manufacturing region in the UK, behind the top-placed North West (£16.3bn) and the South East ex-London (about £15.9bn), according to Office of National Statistics figures. Given these figures a higher number of employed people in the manufacturing sector would be expected.

According to the local City Council, all those who live and work in the local area have the education and skills that will enable them to 'reach their full potential, play an active part in society and contribute to the life, culture and economic well-being of the city'. They go further and state:

1. Skills for sustainable economic growth – to attract and nurture knowledgeable, skilled and creative people of all ages to meet the needs of a changing economy and job market
2. Skills for enterprise and an enterprising culture - to stimulate business start-ups, self-employment and an enterprising culture to match the city's growth ambitions
3. Skills for employability and financial inclusion – to tackle pockets of underachievement, lower level skills & non-participation in education, training and employment, particularly amongst the most disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. This will enable all residents to access business and employment

opportunities and maximise their life chances.

(local council.gov(2017)

There is no mention of what form these skills take, or how or where these people will gain these skills, or what their evidence is based on. While it is acknowledged that learners having completed a full level 3 Diploma will have gained the generic skills that are attractive to most employers, the specifics of which particular skills for which type of industry are noticeably missing. The City Council paper goes on to discuss a work force which is qualified largely with A level and its vocational equivalent with no inclusion of their 16-19 sector. They predict that long term growth in the area indicates 30000 extra jobs (City Action Plan, 2018). According to totaljobs, Yorkshire was claimed as a success in terms of job postings under the CG at a 17% increase (Coalition jobs,2015).

Concluding on the employment opportunities within the local area we can state that after rising from 2013, unemployment numbers started to fall. The statistics show us that the largest employment sectors in the area are for low skilled jobs. The options for the college leavers were therefore restricted due to the types of employment available.

6.4.1 Areas of study in context

6.4.1.1 Hair & Beauty

The Hair and Beauty Sector is valued at £7.1bn and is a key contributor to the UK's service sector. There are around 29,400 Hair and Beauty salons in the UK according to the research firm IBISWorld. Employment in hairdressing has fallen steadily since 2006 and is projected to continue to do so from 2015 onwards. Despite this, there are claimed to be over 3000 openings for hairdressers every year, largely through replacement demand which outweighs any industry declines (EMSI, 2019. P.2). In 2017 over 58% of hair and beauty businesses planned to hire at least one apprentice (beautyserve.com, 2019). Most of the workers in this sector are qualified at levels 2 and 3 and some of these are apprentices and juniors (VTCT, 2017). More recently newer pathways into the beauty sector have opened up; aesthetic nurses, non-surgical beauty technicians, semi-permanent make-up artists, trichologist and palliative care roles. These more advanced technical roles go against the long held belief that H&B only have careers for the low qualified. As the technical advancements grow in this sector and the demand is high, workers need to make sure their skills are updated to meet demand. According to VCTC there is a "clear recognition of where the gaps in competence and skills exist" (2017.p.13).

In the report they go on to make a clear definition between 'hard skills' and 'soft skills'. The former being hairdressing skills, beauty skills, massage etc and the latter being communications, self-confidence, team working etc. Research in 2016 by Royal Mail and Centre for economic Business Research identified that in 2015, 12 independent grooming salons opened up a week – 626 in total over the year. A high number of these operated in the lower end of the market giving cheaper deals (haircuts) without much customer service. Many nail bars open up and close down regularly and small service providers in the sector open up in supermarkets, hospitals, airports etc – places with a high footfall. All of these tend to squeeze out the more traditional salons who have had a steady flow of customers over many years, not being able to compete with the volume, speed or cut process. The elements of customer service and customer loyalty is lost in these smaller businesses. However there is job insecurity in these salons, lower salaries and little or low qualification entries. This has a knock-on effect at FEC's in the UK. The industry appears to be more reactive to changes in spending and service needs than in previous years. The sector is now more dynamic than ever before.

To summarise, the Hair & Beauty industry is changing to meet consumers' needs and smaller, temporary low costs enterprises are becoming more popular. The more technical treatments sought are becoming more popular and the skills required for these roles cannot be gained by level 2 or 3 BTEC's, they are more specialised. Some of the pop-up industries such as nail bars do not require any qualifications. Some of the treatments that do require certification are specialist and not available through normal education providers such as FECs. While the traditional medium or large salon numbers are in slow decline, the replacement aspect in hairdressing in particular means that there is a steady vacancy number every year.

6.4.1.2 Childcare

In 2010 the CG introduced a scheme whereby all 3 & 4 year olds became entitled to 15 hours of state funded education. In 2013 they extended this for all 2 year olds from families on low income and then later in 2016 to all families (Childcare and early education, 2015). The service industry in this field grew under these directives and thus employment opportunities for those qualified with a level 3 Diploma in Childcare or equivalent had plenty of work opportunities. Unlike the rest of Western Europe, the UK provided early education and early years care via the market (Penn 2007, Stewart 2013).

The Conservative approach was focussed more on getting mothers back into employment, and while incentives were introduced to provide 15hrs a week of childcare, the rest of the burden financially fell on the families. In 2015 only 58% of children were eligible for free childcare and Simon et al (2015) highlighted the growth of informal care by young unemployed mothers and the overall childcare consisted of Private, voluntary and independent (PVI) arrangements. From 2010 to 2015 the figures in PVI grew from 52% to 57%. The extension of funded places under CG created a volume of employment opportunities for college leavers qualified at level 3. A Government review commissioned in 2012 proposed that the minimum qualification level 3 be the standard for childcare (2012). Between 2010 and 2015 the number of employees in childcare (playgroups, childminders and nurseries) was 328,400 but dropped to 313,400 by 2015 according to Labour Force Survey (LFS), 2016. While nannies, au-pairs and childminders are required to register with Ofsted, there is a large proportion who do not, thus figures may be skewed. 98% of the workforce are female (LFS 2012-2014) and relatively young. Wages are largely on the border of the national minimum wage limit and this was also supported by the Low Pay Commissions which “suggests that 41% of the childcare workforce is paid less than £7 per hour” (Low Pay Commission ,2014 p.45). Staff turnover is a common problem in this field and the low pay is frequently cited as the reason. There were concerns about provision for children covered by the free entitlement and a report by the Health Commission expressed concerns about the quality of places, providers, availability of provision and that impact (HC, 2013).

In summary, employment opportunities grew in Childcare under the CG due to funding strategies for the under-fives. The level 3 qualification was the minimum required as set by the government. There is little information available on how transient the workers are in this field but evidence supporting the claim that the sector was largely populated by younger workers gives weight to the notion that employment for the FEC leavers was rarely a problem. There is also a dearth of information about how those qualified and into employment gain alternative employment without re-skilling or re-training suggesting that those that leave the childcare sector migrate into other low skilled, low paid roles.

6.4.1.3 Construction

Construction is one of the few areas of employment that allows for non-academics and manual workers to progress through to a professional status. Many start ‘on the tools’ or

'on the trowel' but through opportunities that exist in the sector, start their own businesses or work their way up the professional ladder. As the sector provides large opportunities for lower-skilled, casual if required jobs, it can be a stepping stone back into the employment market after unemployment. Much construction employment is local which boosts the local economy and resources are often sourced locally. (CIOB, 2014). In 2015 the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) claimed the shortage in construction workers was described as 'critical' (REC, 2015). BIS reported that in 2013-2014 there were 8,000 apprenticeships in the sector but that the figure had been dropping since 2009 and a 55% decrease had taken place since the recession (BIS,2014). According to a Commons briefing paper, there are 2.4 million jobs in the UK in construction which equates to 6.8% of all jobs in 2018. 2009 saw a fall in employment in the sector and 2010 was little better and the figures mirrored those of a decade ago according to the report. While construction output grew in 2010 and 2011, 2012 saw a lull equal to that in 2009. Between 2012 and 2017 the rate has grown steadily and the input to the UK economy stood at £113bn in 2018. (Commons Briefing Paper, 2018). In 2010 construction employed 6.5% of the UK workforce and only dropped by 0.1% by 2015 and by 2018 Yorkshire & the Humber had 7% of its workforce employed in the sector (HV, 2018). Vacancies in the construction sector were at 25,000 as at 2015 which was up by 6,000 from the previous year (CITB, 2015). Many people left the sector in the economic crisis of 2008 which contributed to a widening skills gap.

To summarise in an increasingly aging population, construction suffered particularly badly according to CITB who also report that over a quarter of the workforce is over 50. They also suggest that the workforce declined as new workers were not able skill wise to match the skills demanded of those retiring. In a survey in 2015, it was identified that bricklayers were the most difficult workers to employ. Coupled with the fact that the level 3 construction students were leaving college without the skills to go into employment directly, this was only likely to worsen.

6.4.1.4 Engineering

Key findings in the Engineering sector showed that in 2015, 38% fewer engineering graduates went into engineering than in 2012. In 2015 there were just below 465,000 engineers employed in the UK with a higher level of learners completing an apprenticeship than the average. 90% of engineering apprentices completed their course and gained

employment as opposed to 75% of all other apprenticeships. Engineering can cover fields such as civil, mechanical, electrical, electronic, design and development, production and process engineering (ECITB, 2018). The engineering sector contributes between 19-27% of the UK's GDP (ECITB, 2018). Apprenticeship starts in England since 2010 to 2015 have varied; 10/11 – 55k, 11/12 70k, 12/13 66k, 13/14 65k and 14/15 65k and by 2015 Engineering was the 5th most popular framework in the UK for apprenticeship starts (Foley, 2020). The CG invested £150 million into the apprenticeship schemes in the UK. ONS reported that 26.9% of the 2,55 million registered enterprises in the UK were in the Engineering sector, showing a 5.6% increase from 2014 (Engineering UK, 2018). In 2016 one in five people in the workforce were employed in an engineering role. Student numbers however have decreased between 2010-2015, with the biggest fall in numbers happening as a result of the hike of tuition fees but a small increase year-on-year has occurred since 2010-2011. In 2015 the UK was the 11th largest manufacturing nation in the world (ESB, 2016). From 2013-2014 the number of engineering enterprises registering grew by 5.6%, a growth from the 4.4% 2013-2014. In 2016 Engineering sectors produced the majority of the UK's exports and in 2014 the sector represented 55% of the UK workforce (Engineering UK, 2016). In a CBI survey in 2015, 44% of engineering, science and hi-tech firms reported difficulties in finding experienced recruits with the correct STEM skills (ibid) which has contributed to the "hourglass effect" – 2.3 million more high skilled jobs, 1.8 million more low skilled jobs and 1.2 million more medium skilled jobs (ibid p.12).

Summarising, there has been an increase in apprenticeships in the sector, the field grew slowly over the period. Employment rates grew steadily while the sector experienced a drop in applicants due to graduate fees and also a drop in graduates entering the field.

6.4.1.5 IT / digital professionals

IT jobs barely existed in the UK in 1990. In 2004 5.5% of the UK workforce were employed in the new occupations and by 2015, 6% of the population was employed in the IT sector. The slower growth rate in employment could be attributed to industry moving to a more technological system and thus reducing employment. By 2014 all regions in the UK saw an increase of 9.8% in new types of jobs apart from most areas of Yorkshire and the Humber which saw a decrease from 4.8% to 4.6% (PWC, 2015. P.4). South Yorkshire however had a substantial increase growing 1%. In another report by Parliament the digital sector employed 1.4 million people in 2015 which was 4.4% of all employment

(Research Briefing, 2018). Within this field the largest sub sector was computer programming & related activities comprising 47% of digital sector employees. The Government defines 'digital economy' to include the following; manufacture of digital equipment, wholesale of equipment, publishing activities, software publishing, media production, telecoms activities, computer programming activities, data processing and equipment repair (Research Briefing 2018). In 2015, there were 204,000 digital economy businesses, 9% of all businesses in the UK. (CBP,2016). 31million people were working in the digital sector by the close of 2015 and 7% of all businesses registered in the UK were in the digital technologies field. There was an increase of Of 30% of these businesses between 2010 and 2015 and by the end of 2015 3% of the UK workforce were employed in this sector (TechPartnership, 2016). Yorkshire & the Humber had the 2nd lowest number of digital enterprises within the UK at 5%, only the North East was lower at 2%. The digital enterprise market was reported to consist of IT (IT, telecoms & games), IT (manufacture, sales/distribution & services, Telecoms (manufacture, sales & services), Games (manufacture, sales & services) and Digital (manufacture, sales & service). The Games sector grew by 171% over the 5 year period. The digital sector grew over the period to 34% while the manufacture and sales/distribution sectors fell by 134% and 5% respectively. (ibid).

Summarising, the IT sector is fast paced and evolving. The creation of new roles is common as technology advances. Apprenticeships in the sector are increasing slowly and year on year there is an increase of IT related graduates. Newer apprenticeships were established in the sector but were slow in numbers. Regionally employment in the sector was low while the sector grew in the UK.

6.5 Learner destinations / progression

Examining local and national employment trends gives an overview on the opportunities for work and identifies which sectors were growing for Yorkshire and also the UK. However, on its own, this does not give a clear idea about the learners' progression into work.

This section explores the progression routes for the level 3 vocational students. Included in the analysis is an insight into those progressing to HE also looking at the failure rate in the foundation year for BTEC undergraduates to see if there are any conclusions to be

drawn in terms of the BTEC adequately preparing these learners for HE. This analysis then contributes to later discussions on the BTEC and its appropriateness for work and or HE. Documentation from the FEC which is in the public domain is examined to assess the numbers and types of progression the level 3 vocational learners were taking within the time frame.

While this research looks at level 3 student progression in terms of HE, it does not cover the type of institution entered (e.g. post-92 or older and Russell Group universities). Recent studies have highlighted the difference and effects in vocational student numbers between the two and looked at the causes and while it is worthy of noting, this research is concerned with the numbers progressing to HE and not to which type of HEI.

6.5.1 Higher education

The number of 16 to 18 year olds in full-time education grew from 67% in 2009 to 70% in 2013. The proportion of 18 year-olds applying to University grew from 31% in 2010 to 33% in 2014 (Upton, 2015). Between 2010 and 2015 an extra 50,000 16yr olds stayed on in education and 96% of these studied vocational qualifications such as BTEC (Social Market Foundation, 2016). This has contributed to the number of HE entrants holding BTECs more than doubling from 2008 – 2017 (UCAS 2017). Yet despite this rise in numbers and funding put into HE, the Office of Fair Access noted that there were more disadvantaged people entering HE than ever before (OFA, 2015)

University retention rates and graduate outcomes for vocational and disadvantaged students have barely improved over the last two decades, as confirmed by the Social Mobility Commission (2017). While across the UK there is a marked rise in applications and acceptances, Yorkshire and the Humber are low in numbers in terms of uptake.

BTEC students have been accepted into HE increasingly over the past decade. In 2008 there were 49,250 undergraduate HE places offered to BTEC students according to UUK and this had increased to over 100,000 by 2017. (UUK, 2017). In 2016 6% of 18yr olds who had a BTEC qualification (either as a single qualification or coupled with an A level) were accepted into HE compared to 20.1% of those via academic route

OFQUAL found evidence that L3 BTEC outcomes have offered progressively lower levels of preparation for university over time, and that the learners with the inflated grades did less well than the learners with A levels, combinations of A levels and BTEC and those not included or affected by the grade inflation investigation. The research also investigated the employment opportunities of the learners on these 'older BTECs' as phrased by

OFQUAL (2016, p.6) and found that older style' L3 BTEC students exhibited a progressively lower likelihood over time of being full-time employed, in a 'highly skilled' occupation". The 'older style' BTECs the research is referring to is the format rolled out under CG between 2010-2016 which allowed for multiple submissions with feedback. This did not effectively prepare the students for university or the workplace according to the research findings (ibid).

Regionally Yorkshire and the Humber saw an increase of 1.5% of University place acceptances between 2010 and 2017 which is significantly lower in numbers than the majority of the UK. Figure 15 demonstrates the percentage change in UK acceptances of University offers by region of institution 2010 to 2017. Yorkshire and the Humber are regions in the bottom three of areas in terms of numbers of undergraduate offer acceptances.

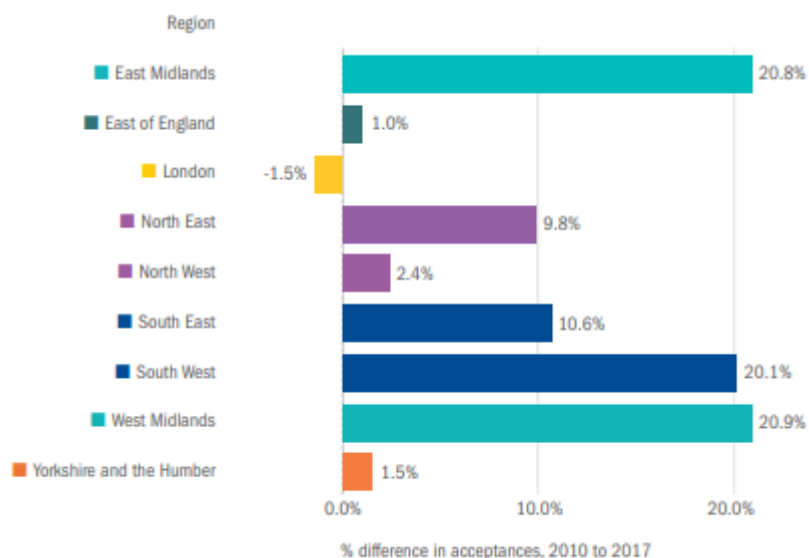


Figure 15 UCAS acceptances by region & England 2010 - 2017

We can conclude that while a low number of students accepted their offered places compared to the UK, statistically the actual entries to University was high in the region. So fewer offers were made, but of those few offers, a high number went into University. Further analysis shows that Yorkshire and the Humber were second only to London for University entry rates both pre and during the Coalition Government – see figure 15 Comparing entry level figures holds little value as there may be many reasons why the numbers were comparatively low such as economic factors, age of student, social background and the demographic of the largest county but with disparate communities.

Change in entry rates for UCAS from 2006 to 2014 for UK 18 year olds by region and country (UCAS,2019 p.35).

County	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Change %
North East	0.226	0.223	0.24	0.242	0.241	0.257	0.243	0.265	0.265	1.17
North West	0.245	0.25	0.265	0.273	0.277	0.296	0.289	0.297	0.309	1.26
Yorkshire and The Humber	0.228	0.23	0.243	0.247	0.244	0.261	0.257	0.271	0.29	1.27
East Midlands	0.232	0.242	0.25	0.258	0.255	0.263	0.252	0.267	0.275	1.18
West Midlands	0.236	0.239	0.25	0.256	0.251	0.269	0.261	0.279	0.292	1.24
East of England	0.246	0.257	0.269	0.273	0.279	0.293	0.276	0.293	0.302	1.23
London	0.292	0.299	0.314	0.317	0.323	0.348	0.333	0.359	0.378	1.29
South East	0.262	0.266	0.276	0.276	0.283	0.295	0.286	0.298	0.308	1.17
South West	0.227	0.231	0.239	0.238	0.243	0.261	0.243	0.255	0.263	1.16
Wales	0.25	0.242	0.251	0.262	0.249	0.247	0.256	0.259	0.271	1.08
Scotland	0.222	0.217	0.223	0.232	0.241	0.227	0.233	0.236	0.233	1.05
Northern Ireland	0.323	0.337	0.344	0.357	0.342	0.344	0.335	0.357	0.348	1.08

Table 12

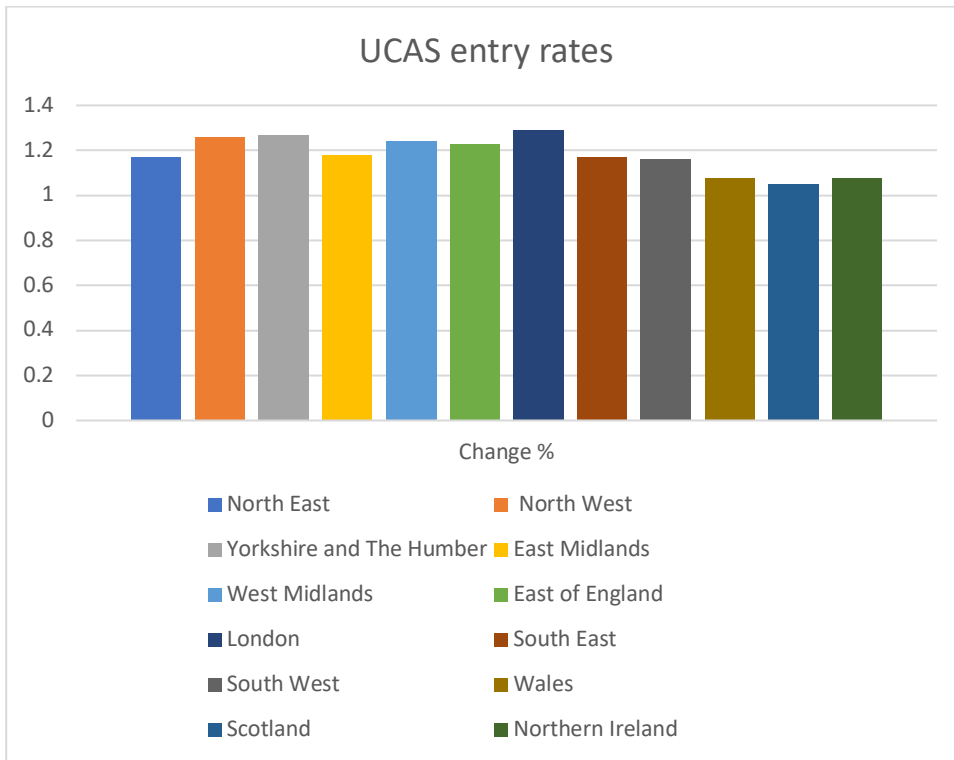


Figure 15 2006 – 2014 UCAS entry rates by County by % change in numbers (UCAS, 2019)

Yorkshire was 2nd only to London for entry rates for undergraduates seeing 1% increase over a decade.

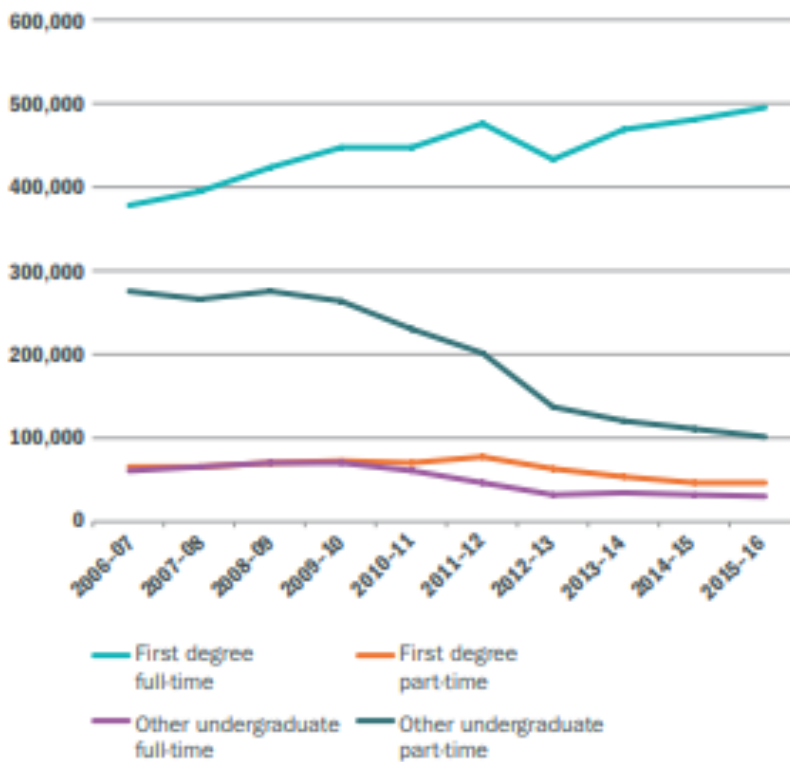


Figure 16 UCAS entry routes 2006 – 2014. source : UUK, 2017

Figure 16 demonstrates the steep incline in the number of undergraduate students year on year while a steep fall in other part-time undergraduate applicants has occurred. The rise of the BTEC applicants can account for some of this rise and the schemes for WP. There has been a steady increase in the number of students entering HE as undergraduates after a small slump in 2012. Figure 33 details HE students by provider and type of study 2011/12 – 2015/16

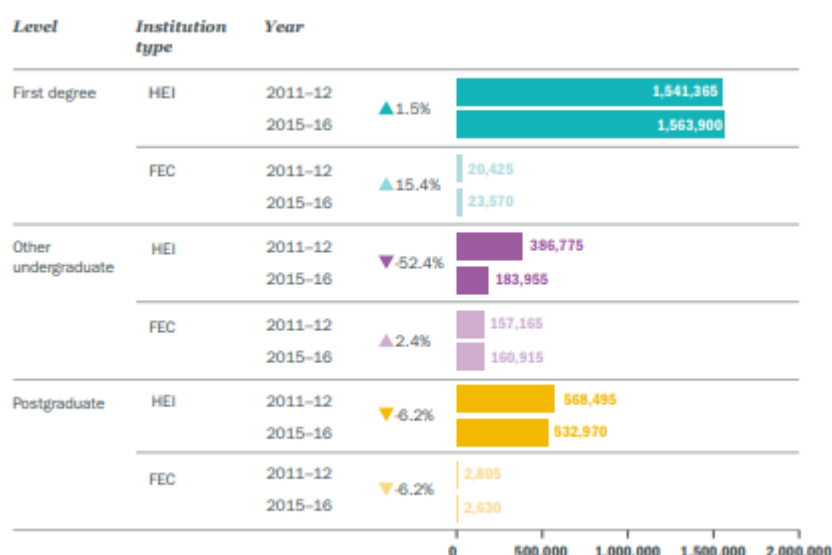


Figure 17 UK university entries 2010 - 2016

It is evident that the number of students entering HE with a BTEC or equivalent is increasing each year, further research is needed into the correlation of these numbers with those who do not progress on to the 2nd year of their studies. There is much documentation in this field by researchers such as HEPI, (2016); HEA (2015); Joslin (2017), Banerjee (2018) but in order to determine if the vocational level 3 students' progression was affected by the model of their vocational course in terms of skills transfer to employment, we need to examine external variables. The destination of the learners needs to be examined to establish any change of destination or employment patterns. HE applications need to be discussed for the period and employment both locally and nationally need to be considered.

6.5.1.1 Learner progression / destination from FEC

To get an understanding of progression patterns of learners within the FEC, a look at the progression intentions for the levels 3 vocational cohorts at the FEC from 2010-15 was included.

Level 3 vocational breakdown -

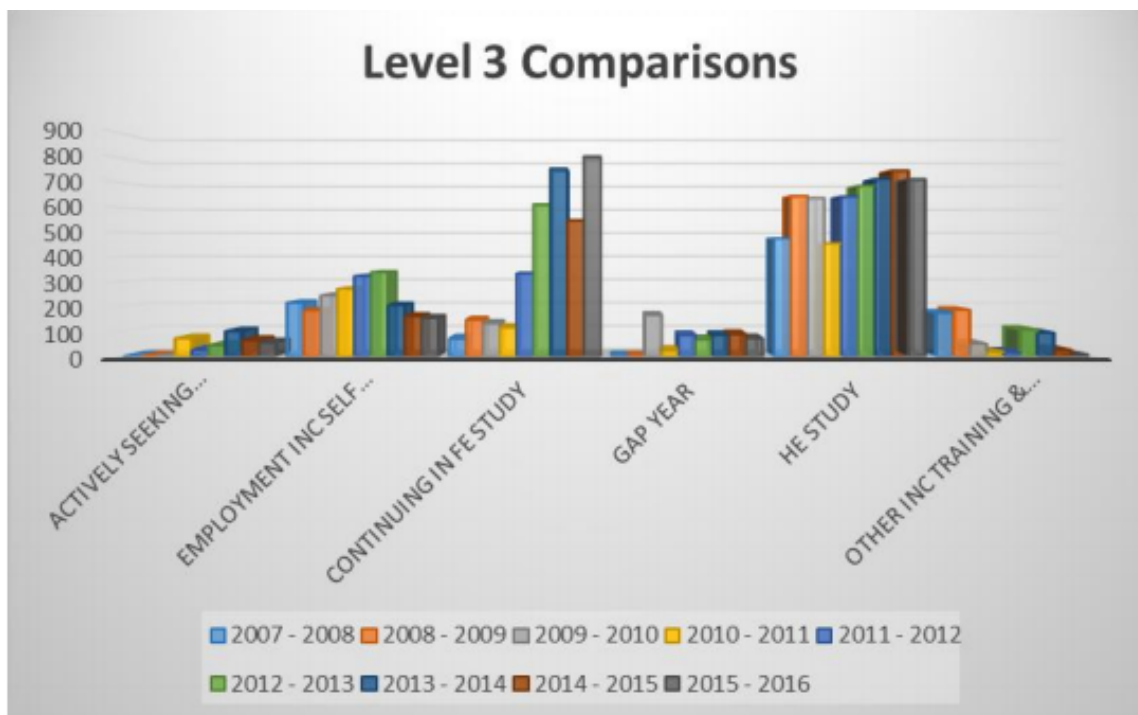


Figure 18 destinations by year at the FEC

source YC Destinations, 2016

What this data tells us is that year on year under the CG the numbers of level 3 vocational students progressing to HE have increased. The numbers of those seeking employment has slowly decreased, a steady number of students taking a gap year has been changeable and an increase of those on the first year of their level 3 program continuing to year 2 of their BTEC. On its own this is not remarkable as we have established that the number of learners entering HE with BTEC is rising year on year. This is useful when looking at the outcomes for the BTEC learners and what type of progression choices these learners faced.

6.6 Conclusion

Unemployment figures decreased under the CG with an upturn after 2013 (Johnson and Chandler, 2018). Youth unemployment went up and underutilisation increased (Keep and Mayhew, 2014). Reforms by the CG included far-reaching programs which included abandoning New Labour's efforts to address unemployment. EMA was ended, Train to Gain was stopped, benefits were cut or frozen. Access to benefits was dependent on accepting job offers which in effect forced people into accepting low-paid work. Trade union membership fell, and the increase of casual work was unchallenged, leaving a failure to oppose neoliberal employment reforms (Woodcock, 2018).

This chapter determines that an increasing number of workers were in low skilled, part time, low paid roles with zero hours contracts and low wages (UKCES, 2014). Wages fell consistently and were not in line with the rate of interest which equated to a lower rate of income. Student debt increased although the hike in tuition fees didn't seem to affect admission rates but student debt was on the increase. The 'Aspiration Nation' speech by Cameron encouraging higher aspiration for these young adults (see section 2.4.2) seemed to be disconnected to the employment opportunities, and a poor fit outcome for the CG's neoliberal strategy for employment and education as discussed in section 6.4, Yorkshire and Humber employment trends.

The demands of the changing labour market and the growth of ill-prepared college leavers plus overqualified HE graduates created higher statistics of underemployment and unemployment, particularly in sectors of industry such as elementary and low skilled areas. Employees that had the competencies or skills in alignment with their employment role put them in an advantageous position and less likely to leave and more likely to progress.

In many respects the challenges for college leavers in the local area are reflected nationally. Local employment strategies tend to focus on a narrower range of sectors, this chapter has emphasised the variance between the weak demand for skills and the lack of high-level skills. Some employers increasingly sought to employ graduates over college leavers, wanting the best qualified even if the qualification was unrelated to the role, applicants then compete for any employment opportunity as sanctioned by the neoliberal ideology. Other employers sought experience or industry related qualifications which would have been impossible for these college leavers to attain. It does appear from the evidence highlighted in this chapter that the vocational qualifications held little or no value to employers. This then supports the view that employers needed to invest in the qualification structure and prepare the future workforce. To address the balance of low-paid, low-skilled work in the UK, there was a need for Industrial strategies and a review of employment and skills. The LEPs' developed by the CG identified growth sectors locally and as such were limited in their scope. A weak employer demand for skills is associated with low skills equilibrium and low paid, low quality employment. Under skilled college leavers and over skilled University graduates have exacerbated this balance.

While the scope of this study did not intend to focus on discussion of social class, the students interviewed were all from working class backgrounds and most aspired to

occupations that were both class and gender specific. Colley (2006) comments that gender and class positioning play a critical role in their career choices through the medium of VET. Gender habitus can be seen to be influencing the students choices and aspirations (Colley, 2006), Skeggs notions of female aspirations and class are visible in the types of female employment roles and these findings support Reay's notion of gendered habitus. These findings require further research but have implications for the vocational context at large and gendered habitus. Atkins and Flint (2015) suggest that both the vocational courses and career areas are class and gender specific which is consistent with Bourdieu's view that individual choices are predetermined.

Under neoliberalism the way in which aspirations are achieved is not through any kind of government intervention or levelling up of social hierarchies, it is instead down to the individuals skilling themselves and adapting themselves for their own economic progress. When David Cameron talked about the Aspiration Nation what he meant was providing equal opportunity rather than equal resources.

The focus on skills and the tension that this study has revealed is that in line with the 'aspiration nation', Cameron and the CG's vision was that VET will achieve the same status as University degrees, they are trying to push more people to that higher accreditation level, because it is one of the ways in which the individual can advance their own lives. However in doing so, they were moving the focus from the practical skills necessary for employment, and for economic wellbeing.

What this reveals is two levels of self-aspiration: the local pragmatic employment needs "well you've got to get your level 2 haven't you?" (interviewee, detail here) , so yes they are taking responsibility for taking qualifications at the right level to get jobs. However, it is not a real aspirational model where learners see themselves as equipping themselves and constantly adapting to a changing labour market - they just want the skills to get the job.

Where you see the sense of further aspiration is the computer students – starting off with the idea that they are going to get exciting jobs in computer gaming, and then realising quite quickly that that was not going to happen. This relates to the 'cruel optimism' of Lauren Berlant (2011) which suggests that neoliberalism works by making us form attachments and get very invested in an idea of our future lives and future selves which isn't actually achievable. That's the reason it is cruel, because it works to make us form those attachments and those aspirations which are in reality never going to be fulfilled.

The idea that under neoliberalism anybody can be anything as long as they want it enough and work hard enough is called into question. Putting this responsibility back onto the individual hides structural disadvantages.

The study reveals a divide between the aspirations expressed by the VET learners and the notion of skills expressed by the tutors, and the aspirational package offered by the neoliberal vision. The study also reveals further tension; Fostering an aspiration Nation, following neoliberalism in VET can actually work to de-skill or to skill individuals less successfully while trying to foster those aspirations.

7 FINDINGS

This chapter details the analysis of the views and experiences of the stakeholders: tutors, learners and employers. The views of the learners were identified as a crucial stakeholder group as it is from their vocational course experience that their progression route onto employment or HE was steered. It is also through their perceptions of skills that we get an insight into the nature of the level 3 vocational pathways. The direction used within this research aims to look at the influential factors in obtaining employment and whether this employment was directly related to their level 3 course. Analysing the views using an interpretative approach of all the stakeholders in this chapter enables observations to be made about the vocationality of the BTEC formats during the Coalition Government and how, according to these stakeholders, this impacted on related employment. The case study approach adopted does not aim to be representative of all level 3 learners, of all level 3 vocational tutors or all employers within the sectors but rather to offer comparisons with similar employers or employment sectors.

The sections in this chapter are grouped by the themes identified in the analysis of the interviews;

- Embedding / delivering of skills
- Learning the required skills
- General skills
- Assessment
- Reform awareness
- Recalling the effects of the reforms

An overview of the tutors perception of skills and their ability to embed them within their pedagogical model is followed by the learner's understanding and experience of skills delivery. Emerging from this is discussion of how qualified the learners believed they were once they completed their course. The general skills theme was frequently commented on as the interviews allowed for different interpretations of the terms 'skills'. This flowed then into discourse on disaffection and boredom which ultimately affected how the learners enjoyed their course. The theme following discussed the assessment methods which are also part of the overall discussion of skills, as the practical assessment methods are identified. This received many comments from tutors and learners alike and led into dialogue about the understanding of the CG reforms that altered the ability to deliver a more practical or hands-on model in favour of a more general or theoretical model. From reform recollection the chapter theme moves to the effects of the reforms as felt by

employers and the FEC and this included student groups affected by the reforms as well as student progression.

7.1 Embedding / delivering the skills

7.1.1 Tutors' perception of skills delivery within the BTEC (or equivalent)

As the research examines a model of skills delivery it is vital to establish how these skills were embedded and delivered and to determine their form. The teaching of skills was the most prominent issue amongst the interviewees, in particular the tutors. For the students this was also a main concern and one discussed by employers. Issues related to embedding skills into the curriculum may be the most commented on theme because the majority of the comments overall were from the tutors. Interestingly, tutors gave more time for their interviews and more information was exchanged between the researcher and the tutor. This may be because of the professional relationship with the researcher but also this may be because all changes affect them directly and not for a fixed period i.e. the duration of a level 3 vocational course but for the duration of employment within that FEC, as the issues discussed related directly to their specialism and work role it is not surprising that the tutors had more to say. Policy and funding changes had a direct impact on what they teach and how they teach (see chapter 1). As all of the tutors had been in their role for over ten years, they had all experienced policy changes and ergo curriculum model changes before and sometimes many times. A constantly changing curriculum was partly attributable to progression options (Bathmaker, 2013) as seen in this study, example being the Construction course (see page 105) which is discussed in detail in chapter 8. Also within the period of this study, the 'fit for purpose' reforms to the qualifications was an initiative driven by neoliberal ideology, the unstable curriculum caused by constant reform is discussed in chapter 8.

This section considers the tutors' perspectives on assessment types, formative and summative, process and relates these concepts back to chapter 5, the analysis of curriculum material and also on referrals. A referral is a piece of work that has been submitted for assessment but has been referred back to the learner for edits and improvements. This term is used interchangeably with 'resubmissions' as different tutors and assessment documentation refer to them by both terms. By far the most common theme from tutors was the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) - see section 2.3 on VET

provision. In essence, all of the tutors with the exception of H&B felt that there was not enough time within the GLH to deliver core trade skills and tutors felt that this affected the students' engagement on the course and in lessons. The consensus among the tutors was that the GLH were a controversial issue, with a widespread feeling that the theory they were required to cover and deliver within the hours left little if no room for skills delivery or practice. The lack of time available for content delivery was a common issue, fitting all of the LO's into the GLH was a frustration for all the tutors and gave rise to comments on teaching to assessment.

The GLH issue consisted of four prominent themes and contractual hours was the most commonly mentioned. Pressure to achieve or get the students through was included and discussed in terms of getting through the syllabus or unit content to 'get them through', ergo to pass, and all tutors were under pressure to achieve, this internal pressure to achieve and compliance is a common tension identified by the tutors and in direct response to funding reform strategies by the CG and sat firmly within the redefined boundaries of accountability to Ofsted (see section 2.3.4). Hutchings suggests that this accountability caused significant stress to tutors (Hutchinson, 2015). Tutors felt under pressure to get good results and some referred to the practice of 'spoon feeding' to enable the best results possible, or in some cases, get the students to a Pass grade. This, coupled with the content covered in the units impeded their facilitation of skills transfer and formative practice. Also discussed with the GLH was the quality of the learning and reflection on the negative effects of little or no practical or competence work. In construction a tutor commented

There was no way to measure the understanding of a student's learning-by-doing due to time and how much we had to get through

Reinforcing this a childcare tutor commented

Descriptive writing was the preferred way (by exam board) to assess the students' competence

And an engineering tutor stated

Evidence generated by a student at assessment is not necessarily evidencing their knowledge or ability

In contrast some of the tutors of Engineering and some IT tutors had no problems with conceptualising what the employers required in terms of skills from college leavers in terms of programming languages web app development, operating a mill or a lathe and, where possible, they were happy to try to incorporate them and felt that there was merit

in spending extra time, often in their own time, facilitating their delivery and assessment – usually outside of the students’ timetabled hours;

Under my C&G, my guys [sic] would do an eight-hour practical exam / assessment taken over a few days and it was pure what I would call ‘spannering’ [this means manual work, tool in hand], and they might have to write up a few findings, but that’s it. On a BTEC, the same units, and it’s all ‘write a powerpoint on this, explain this, define that, describe the other’ so the verbs that are included in the assessment criteria are very different from the C&G

Timetabling was mentioned by some and in most cases it was referring to lack of free time or non-contact time within the timetable to teach extra, or core skills (as previously defined). Gaps between lessons on the students’ timetables was viewed as ‘wasted time’ as sometimes the periods were for three hours when the students felt they could be doing something, or learning / practising something in that time. Unfortunately, the resources to facilitate this were not available in those time slots – the rooms and equipment (facilities) and the staff were utilised on other courses as the timetables were a range of groups of students on different courses within each division. Further mention of facilities was made by Engineering staff and students in terms of the age of the engineering equipment and lack of modern facilities i.e. mills, lathes.

From the interviews with tutors it was clear that the majority were frustrated and felt unable to deliver what they felt was required or what the students wanted.

Adhering to deadlines, assessment dates, achievement levels and the GLH for the units meant that there was little room for any extra or room for change.

There was a sense of compliance among the tutors who seemed as frustrated on the lack of skills delivery as the students, this from construction:

It is a shame, but under the BTEC we delivered before this [current] model it was worse [referring to the BTEC and countless submissions of the same piece of work]. We only have the set amount of contact GLH hours with the groups, we can only teach what we can, trying to get the students to practise coding outside of the classroom has always been an issue. We end up teaching them enough for them to be able to pass the unit. It’s better than nothing I suppose.

There is clear evidence in this study that tutors felt there was a divide between theory and practice and that the binary distinction between them was deeply entrenched in their pedagogy. This knowledge dominant culture is discussed by Young (see chapter 2) who highlights the tutors lack of autonomy and creativity within their pedagogy. Tutors felt

that the assessment criteria was restrictive both in their in-classroom practice and their material design. There was also discussion of how they develop material for the courses within the unit criteria which was left largely to the tutors' flexibility, but often the delivery would change to suit the learning styles of the group. This could be in terms of depth, inclusion of practical elements or teaching materials produced.

There is little doubt that the tutors felt that the BTEC course formats had changed and moved away from skilling the students for a particular career, this is discussed in chapter 5. Other responses indicated that the theory units were dominant in the new pathways and were a bone of contention with students and tutors alike.

A construction tutor discussed embedding skills:

We definitely see a greater or rather more successful student engagement when they are applying the learning – I mean in terms of practical etc. Managing their expectancies can be quite tough, they get sold the course as something it is not. I definitely don't think the balance of theory and practice is right or appropriate for a vocational program. One of my concerns is that I don't think the courses prepare the students for going into employment, more for going onto Uni or HE level. Some trades would need much more knowledge or experience of them to operate effectively in the workplace, health & safety, first aid and anything else practical for example.

A fellow tutor in construction added;

...because it doesn't equip them for the role at all, it doesn't. It claims the title but it doesn't at all. Our BTEC's, no it doesn't. It's a weakness in it isn't it?

And a H&B tutor expressed her regret at losing the opportunity to offer more skills;

Not sure, we dropped NVQ to do VRQ [vocationally related qualification] but the main changes for us were that we used to offer so many extra things that we can't offer now, that's been the major change, it's the main programme and nothing else. So, we used to have students who used to come in and pick up all sorts of added things along the way, and they can't.

An IT tutor discussed how the lack of practical skills delivery affected the students after their course:

The BTEC despite its newer model still wasn't responding to employer needs or industry, the top few programming languages in industry were not the ones delivered in the classroom. It's different now but I don't think it prepared any of the learners wanting to go into industry.

The consensus from most of the tutors was that they felt the format of the new level 3 provision which replaced the former models, did not support the facilitation of trade skills

transfer and in part was due to box-ticking and pressure on target. However, Hair & Beauty tutors and learners were unanimous in their agreement of skills for the role being delivered on the courses, despite the tutors lamenting the loss of the 'extras'. This seems to conflict with the Social Mobility Commissions statement that VET disadvantages young women (Bates, 2016) as it is clear that for the H&B students and tutors alike, practical skills delivery have 'vocational specificity' and shaped that curriculum model.

7.1.2 Going the extra mile

Some tutors found ways to encourage the students to go ‘that little bit further’ than writing descriptive content in reports. Where possible they would base the questions around activities allowing higher grade learners to show autonomy and extend their learning. These extra activities and sessions appeared to take place in lunch hours and tutors and learners alike sacrificed their lunch hour to get involved in some hands-on skills training. As discussed in the literature review, according to some, the tutors beliefs influence their judgement and behaviour in the classroom (Pajares, 1992) suggesting that curriculum delivery can be customised by the tutors, however others state that the increased accountability was more of a determiner for pedagogy. For construction, the students remarked that they got to practise bricklaying, the IT learners got to fix and diagnose hardware and build networks. A later IT student recalled the tutor delivering some coding lessons outside of the syllabus and outside of their timetable. All of these instances were very much reliant on the goodwill of the tutors and availability of resources, such as classrooms, equipment etc. Some tutors were able to create practical skills activities with stretch and challenge exercises and include these under the differentiation remit. An example from one construction tutor:

I may ask the students to partly answer a question on the criteria with written notes but then for some I would go further and give them an activity that went just that bit further than anything we would have covered, also to try and get group work going. Some would still only get the Pass, but it gave the others incentive to strive for better grades.

Another characteristic shared by the majority of the C&G student participants was one of formative feedback and instant results. This is important in its link to skills delivery, the reported sense of achievement when an exercise or activity was successful was interwoven with the sense of enjoyment, achievement and engagement reported by the learners. A former C&G IT student recalled;

One of my tutors was the only one who included loads of practical stuff. I don’t think she was supposed to, but she had all the equipment from courses she taught before and as we were in the room anyway, we did loads of practical. I think she would probably be in trouble if she was caught but as long as we put in some of our own time to do the theory stuff outside of the classroom she didn’t mind, in fact she lapped it up! The best part was that we didn’t learn from books in the practical’s, she threw loads of challenges at us and sometimes it was really tough but she made us figure out how to do it. Looking back, she was inspiring. Other classes we would have to sit through one powerpoint after another and even though some of the tutors were funny and we liked them, we were just so bored.

This viewpoint shows a wider understanding of the implications for the tutor undertaking non-syllabus activities with the group. This however is not as modest as it may seem, the hardware lessons were in a dedicated room where this teacher taught all her lessons (thus having access to all the machines); the other lessons on the course were all theory thus comparisons made by students were always going to be favourable for the ones in which they did mostly all hands on, and when learners find tutors inspiring, they try harder and engage fully.

Another recollection from a former IT student under the older City & Guilds Diploma, explained his experience as a learner on the old course structure:

..the practice in the lab provided me with the confidence to carry out tasks in the workplace and allowed me to practise skills

This student made the link from skills to confidence. Similarly, an engineering student recalled:

The teachers tried their best and gave up some lunch hours to teach us how to use the Mill and that but the stuff at college was not commercial size and really really old. But at least we got an understanding...

There is an awareness in this recollection that the tutors were not at fault, were trying hard to accommodate the learners and their needs but that the equipment was out of date. In contrast to this, an IT student remembered a particular tutors efforts to pass on current industry skills which in turn created a positive learning experience.

The assignment only had some pretty basic HTML but the tutor gave us some stretch and challenge stuff, we learned a bit of PHP and JavaScript – we had to give her our word that we would do some work outside of the classroom so we could get time to fit it in but it was worth it. We didn't tell the other groups though because they weren't getting the same thing from their tutors. I reckon we had the best tutor.

Again, these comments highlight an undercurrent of tutors not following due process. There appeared to be an understanding by the learners that when the tutors 'did more', there might be consequences and that 'keeping it quiet otherwise they will all want the same' shows an insight into the learners recognising that the delivery they were receiving was not 'the norm'. An IT tutor stated when discussing doing extras

As much as you want to do extra for the students it isn't always possible. I am ok because I am in the lab and can give them sessions in the lunch break and I try to get them doing instead of writing wherever possible but the tutor is constantly

reminding me that all of the students must receive the same teaching thus I am unfavourably helping my group. You can't win....

Giving the learners opportunities for practical work off timetable is commendable but it seems that policy dictates that all students have the opportunity or none. H&B however was again different and one of the tutors told me

We do competitions to get the girls [sic] to go a bit further, there is a set amount of time and learning they have to complete in the salons but where we can we try and motivate them and get them to try more difficult styles, not because it's in the syllabus but because we want to see them grow.

Two construction students commented that they had a couple of lessons '*mixing the concrete, trowelling and laying the bricks*' but that the rest of the time was spent in the classroom. They did however divulge that one of their tutors allowed them to work through their lunch breaks a couple of times practising bricklaying skills. While they appeared to appreciate this extra effort on the tutors' part, they were still negative about their course saying that they didn't learn enough skills to be able to get a building job, as did all the other construction students interviewed. The chances of leaving a level 3 course in construction and going straight into a brick laying role on site are very slight as employers would look for experience or more qualifications so it is not as simple as stating that a lack of skills delivery on a construction course prevented a learner progressing into related employment. This was a common theme across most of the courses.

It has emerged that the fields or classes in dedicated rooms such as salons, IT hardware rooms, engineering machine rooms, and construction areas give the learners opportunities to practise skills and hands on. The problem appears to be that the hands-on lessons are very much dictated by who is in that room at a particular time. The rooms get allocated by the department management and resource division and the practical rooms are mostly shared between tutors, groups and courses. Theory lessons are also timetabled in practical rooms. While there are many constraints on rooms and utilisation within the FEC, with a little more careful planning the practical rooms could be dedicated to the units and classes which have elements of hands-on work in them therefore expanding learners' experience and engagement.

7.1.3 Learning the required skills for the job?

There was agreement amongst all of the student participants that they did not have sufficient time to practise trade skills learned on the course. Many of the comments

referred to specific activities such as bleaching hair, installing a network, skimming plaster or creating a play theme. Responses indicated that skills development and delivery was the students' preferred method of both learning and assessment. However, this research shows that theoretical delivery and assessment methods were the most common, as described in Chapter 5 on the curriculum material analysis.

Unlike the engineering learners when discussing the equipment used on the course, an IT learner stated that while the equipment at the college was not the same as the equipment he had worked on in his workplace, nor as modern, he was able to confidently approach tasks in maintaining the network and related network devices and hardware equipment in his job. He added that he felt confident in approaching most technical tasks as the course had given him the technical understanding and necessary transferable skills. This chapter looks at skills transfer in detail later on.

7.1.3.1 *Qualifying for their chosen career path*

All of the hairdressing / beauty therapy students saw the usefulness in what they were learning and doing in relation to employment and some of the comments reflected this. In terms of achieving a level 2 or 3 qualification overall, a learner claimed

No one will take you on without your Level 2, I mean it's hair isn't it and no one wants to get sued.

When asked about the qualification or progressing on to level 3 she replied

Most salons will take you with a level 2 or 3, if its level 2, they can pay you less but won't pay for you to do your level 3 so you are better off staying at college for the level 3 then you can just get some experience and either do it mobile or rent a chair or even get your own shop.

The learner appeared to have some basic understanding of the Hairdressing trade and how employment worked at a basic level in the sector.

We all did our NVQ – that's what they all want and you need to have done lots of different stuff like perming, colouring and that... it's start at the bottom of the ladder and feels like it's taking forever to do your own styling in a shop but once you have got your certificates and some work experience you just need to be confident.

Progression was also seen as the logical step for a fellow learner whose comments reflected her ambition

I wanted to do my level three straight after my level two, not only because you can earn more but you get to do more – won't stay a junior for so long.

One learner seemed less career minded and less motivated having been persuaded to undertake the course by her mother, we can see here of the gendered habitus as discussed in chapter 1.

On completion she did not appear to be pulled into either side of the industry

I did hairdressing and beauty therapy because I wasn't sure which one I would like most in a job and my mum said to get all the training I can while its free, I got my VTVC [vocational training charitable trust] level 3 in Beauty Therapy Treatments but can be a stylist too.

The learner went on to explain that even with a vocational qualification some of the National companies would still require their employees to train 'their way', but she did not seem over keen on this idea

I could work in any hairdressers – oh but some of the big names like Vidal Sassoon would want to train me up more their way

What was evident was that there would be little employability scope for these learners other than in the Hair and Beauty industry, and that the industry was not suffering from the economic crisis as established in chapter 6. The data from college leavers indicates that all the learners progressed into related employment and the level of Diploma was essential for entry into the industry. Within the industry some salons prefer only qualified nail technicians and semi-permanent makeup therapists which would require further training and qualifications as these skills are not covered in the H&B Diploma.

The childcare learners were in agreement that they knew they had to achieve the qualification and get their Diploma in order to work in their field but seemed less enthusiastic about how the qualification related to their actual job role

You have to do a ton of legislation and health and safety stuff – and I get that but some of it was draining and useless. Obviously you have to be qualified to look after someone else's children but some of the units were so boring.

The Hair and Beauty learners were required to take units in Health and Safety, Customer Care etc. but this seemed less of an issue to the learners on those courses and a reason might be because all of the other H&B units were practical, there was less resistance to or negativity towards the theory units whereas all the units were theoretical for the childcare learners outside of the placement.

Within Childcare, whilst there was full agreement on the 'dryness' of some of the units, the learners were quick to enthuse about the work placement. This placement is done during the second year of their course. It could be considered that this was a carrot to work towards in terms of effort and achievement in year one or it might be considered that in order to engage the year one learners and keep them motivated, some work placement could be introduced in year one. Given the importance and depth of

knowledge required to look after small children in a play / learning environment, the logical time for the placement would be after all knowledge units were completed in year two.

The placement was good, I got a real insight into the job. Some of the theory stuff I could use for making up play activities, so I didn't mind it, but some of it we just wanted to finish as quickly as possible.

This response clearly shows a level of enthusiasm when discussing the placement and considering the theory in relation to that placement.

And from a tutors perspective

You shouldn't work with young children without the right qualifications so our NVQs were just right but even with them you are not really prepared for everything that happens.

The engineering students were unsure whether their course trained them for an engineering role and thought that a high proportion of what they were learning was what they considered to be irrelevant. When pushed on this for clarification the learners had clear ideas about the shop floor, designing, working with materials and Computer Aided design (CAD), CNC etc.

I don't see why we need to do it, write reports and talk about business, it's not what we want to learn to do the job

We didn't have the machines to do the jobs, so we had to watch videos on how to machine parts. How are you supposed to get a job based on that?

One learner criticised the BTEC course saying

If it hadn't been for the EAL [Ema Awards Ltd] I would have jacked the course. There was no hands on and I felt like I was learning nothing but the smaller qualification they tuck on makes it worthwhile. Ok so we didn't have modern equipment so couldn't try out all of the technology or machining but it was a good starting point. The BTEC though was shit.

Most students identified a clear division between theory and practical and the engineering learners felt that what they learnt at college was of little relevance to their chosen path. The aim of the BTEC's was to prepare learners to progress into an array of industries as opposed to one specific role, yet the views and the experiences of the learners suggest that they did not feel equipped to enter into the Engineering industry. Chapter 8 discusses the progression options for these learners and considers social mobility, aspirations and gender differences, all of which impact on the destination options for these learners.

7.1.3.2 Student interview questions

The student questions contained some binary questions – these were largely expanded on by each interviewee.

The questions which I asked the students that initially could be responded to with a yes or no but in the majority of cases students expanded on their response (when prompted).

- Q2 Did you obtain valuable related skills on your course?
- Q3 Did you obtain more general as opposed to trade skills?
- Q4 Did your course offer the opportunity to learn and practise new skills?
- Q5 Did your course relate to the required or necessary skills in a job role?

	IT	Engineering	Construction	Childcare	H&B
Interviewees	16	7	5	4	5

Table 33

Table 33 details the total number of student interviewees under each subject area giving a total of 26 interviewed. The numbers varied between divisions; nine students from IT, five from H&B and four from the other three divisions. The number of students from the IT courses was greater as this was the researcher’s teaching area, giving greater accessibility to the learners, old and new.

Question2 – ‘Did you obtain valuable related skills on your course?’ had mixed responses. All of the H&B students confirmed that they gained valuable related skills and around half of the IT students agreed. The reasons why there is a fluctuation between the responses for question 2 and question 3 (see below) from the IT students is that not only were more students interviewed from that division but also there was a higher number of students who were enrolled on vocational courses prior to policy changes thus have a different experience than those enrolled on the other forms of BTEC. The Engineering and Construction students felt there was a lack of practical skills on their course and the childcare learners all agreed that the placement was the practical element of their course.

A construction student commented

I was never brilliant at theory and used to daydream a lot in class at school. I thought I would be learning new skills, buildings stuff, diagnosing stuff, real learning. I dropped out after year one, I couldn’t face another year of writing reports and the tutors reading from a powerpoint. Bored me senseless.

Student Question 3 - Did you obtain more general as opposed to trade skills?

Of the responses to question 3, nearly two thirds stated that they obtained more general skills. The majority of the IT students felt that they had gained more general skills in particular and both Construction and Engineering commented that they learned more general skills, 100% in both cases, however none of the H&B students agreed with this

question and all stated that they learned more trade skills. Two thirds of the childcare learners agreed with the question.

According to an Engineering tutor

The skills transfer and real job training bore little resemblance to the quality training portrayed for the course.

And one learner said of his IT course

I thought we would learn to fix computers, learn loads of different coding programs and get the opportunity to spend lots of time on them. What we actually got was lots of businessy type units which would have been fine I guess if you wanted to go to Uni I guess, but I wanted to get a job coding. I did a very basic website and one or two small programs and that was it. No-one uses VB in the outside world anymore either...

This statement from an IT student indicates a level of dissatisfaction of the course which was a common theme with many of the interviewees. Other students who studied on an IT BTEC post

2015 did not seem as disaffected although still harboured feelings of resentment; one felt he learned some valuable skills:

I am not saying I used all of the learning but some of it allowed me to talk confidently at interviews and at least have an elementary idea of what was going on. The development stuff was I think, the most useful. I found it really boring in the classroom but get it now, I thought the course should have been all about programming at the time but can see the value of more of it now I am working.

This statement is evidence that while learners might not see the relevance of particular units or theoretical content at the time, once in employment and reflecting back they are able to see the worth of that learning and went on to add that:

Me and my mates all had ideas of being games designers and earning big money but that's not how it is. I got into a software company by a fluke really, a couple of my mates ended up going to Uni (I think partly because they knew they couldn't get a job programming straight from college) and have ended up thousands in debt. I am on a shit salary and still live at home but it's given me a couple of years' good experience and beefed up my CV.

One learner's narrative showed a different perspective:

I think that maybe some of us had immature expectations from our college course. Some of the group really thought that they could just walk into some amazing games programming job on over £30k a year, some of us were more realistic and knew if we wanted to get into industry, we had to buckle down, get good grades then go to uni and try to specialise in what we were good at. We weren't prepared for all the debt that was going to come with the progression to Uni but maybe we were naive and think we should have had more of a fundamental idea or knowledge of Computer Science on the course as that was very embedded in the first year at uni and there was an expectancy for us to know our stuff. Unfortunately the BTEC did not prepare us for this but chaps [sic] from the A level route were fine.

So, while the reforms and funding changes for vocational courses were designed for progression and to prepare learners for University or the workplace it seems that in some cases it did neither.

Student Question 4 – Did your course offer you the opportunity to learn and practise new skills?

All of the H&B students felt that they had the opportunity to practise new skills – the division has a large salon specifically for this purpose and the majority of teaching and training is done in the salon or in any number of the treatment rooms. The learners were assessed on competence via witness statements from their tutors / assessors. Of the nine IT students interviewed, fewer than half agreed. This division of opinion is a reflection on the mix of students interviewed, some prior to the curriculum changes and some during. Half of both Engineering and Childcare students felt that they had opportunities to practise any skills learned. We know with the childcare students that this is because of a mandatory nursery placement they students must be enrolled on.

Student Question 5 Did your learnt skills relate to the required or necessary skills in a job role?

Construction students felt that they did not learn any skills that could be related to a work role. This was in complete contrast to the H&B students who all claimed that the skills learned were required or necessary and learned on their course. Engineering responses varied to other subject areas, the discipline is so wide that some of the employment gained was related in some way to the course content.

Overall the consensus for all student groups other than H&B was that the students felt that their course provided them with no real skills training towards employment at all.

7.1.4 Skills question responses

The most prominent theme across the interviews for tutors and students was the delivery and learning of 'trade' skills versus general skills. These are categorised as the skills directly transferable to specific employment roles, for example, learning to cut hair, learning how to lay bricks, design a 3D model and applying the CNC [computer numerical control] code to the lathe, learning how to create subnets using IPV6 (a method for naming computer devices on a network to keep them logically separate from other devices). These are trade-specific skills required for particular roles, see chapter 3 for discussion on framing skills.

The majority of the responses referred to the concept of 'general skills' and the overarching perception of how unimportant they felt they were. By general skills I mean communication skills, maths & English, IT skills, teamwork, time keeping etc which Wolf refers to as 'employability skills' (Wolf, 2011), the less trade-specific skills but nevertheless important to employers and for students to possess and demonstrate. What was evident from the responses was the lack of importance placed on these general skills and their perceived importance of the trade skills.

The second subject which received the most comments was the required skills for the job or role. The topics identified within this area were:

- Skills criteria change
- Required certificates / skills
- Trade skills learned
- More general skills learned
- Related / necessary to role
- Able to practise

Student discussions indicated that overall, they viewed trade skills as a relevant and necessary part of their route to the potential chosen careers. There was discussion on the various views of their qualification: as a stepping-stone to their selected career, as an enhancement to their CV or as a step towards HE.

The students placed a high value on the trade skills and clearly felt they were of more importance than general skills in terms of applying them into the workplace. This viewpoint is supported by C&G who differentiate between transferable skills over character skills (C&G, 2016) – see section 3.2. The enjoyment or usefulness of these trade skills changed the enjoyment of the lessons according to some comments from the groups. From the comments overall it was evident that the students associated the relevance of practical skills with successful employment and were making the link from their education to work. One of the difficulties for the students was the relative value of the more general skills. The attitude towards these was negative and students had doubts of their usefulness. There was undoubtedly an exchange value of their BTEC course and what students perceived as knowledge or skills. While comments were many regarding the lack of trade skills delivered or learned, the learners failed to identify the intrinsic value of their learning experience and the place of their course in the context of their wider learning. Few showed any evidence of the learning in the perspective of their wider development other than when references are made to gaining confidence on their course

to apply for employment even if they did not feel they learned the necessary trade or related skills for that role. It seemed that the students associated active participation in their learning as successful learning.

A sense of antagonism was felt from a number of the student interviewees in that they felt they were mis-sold the course. The understanding that the BTEC's were career / skills related was a strong selling point for all of the interviewed students.

I was told that the new BTECs were modern and up to date with what industry wanted.....I didn't want to learn stuff that was decades old or skills that were out of date

The practicality of the course was the main reason for enrolling according to most;

I was told at the interview that I would get to learn and practise loads of new skills. That's an outright lie – I barely learned any programming.

I was supposed to be learning how to operate machines and learn mechanical engineering processes – if you mean watch a YouTube video we found on Google then yeah, we did that but use was that for us? I felt like I needed a whole new course again after I finished it as I didn't have a clue about the aspects I went there for.

Comments on learning via YouTube were not uncommon both in the course of this research and within my own practice. In some cases, where a physical demonstration is not possible, learners will be provided with sources on the internet to investigate or will be asked to conduct their own research online. However, this should not be confused with examples of poor lesson material preparation or lack of subject knowledge from the tutor or poor teaching. In the case of this research, the former were the circumstances. The example from the engineering learners perfectly highlights the use of on-line resources for understanding a process or theory. The FEC did not have the machinery that the learners required to gain a basic understanding of in terms of functionality, thus showing how a particular machine works by video was appropriate however unhappy the learners were.

Another interviewee responded when asked about how much time he spent on his construction course learning practical skills:

Trowel in hand? Oh yeah, that's a bloody joke. In total in the whole year I would be lucky to get 20 hours. We were told the course was hands on with very little writing – what a lot of old shit that was. There was way more theory than we wanted or could do – it made me feel f**ing useless and I had enough of that at school.

Further examples of his frustration over the course content were captured:

I took the course to be a bricky not a bloody pen pusher.

All the lads were totally pissed off and we couldn't be arsed after a while to even turn up. They got on the phone to our parents.

These views are consistent with the whole group, motivation was low due to the lack of engagement with the theoretical content and assessments.

Those learners who were on previous versions of vocational level 3 course had a different story to tell as did the learners on H&B. It is evident that there is a link between enjoyment / engagement and learning methods / delivery models.

7.1.4.1 General skills

The highest instances of the comments – nearly half of all comments, were related to the delivery of general skills (as opposed to trade skills) where most learners agreed that they learned more general skills as opposed to specific trade / industry skills. These general skills are discussed in chapter 3 and the varying differentiations of the term examined. Examples of the trade skills were: cutting hair, waxing, child play, child activity creation, laying bricks, using a lathe, learning CNC, advanced programming, virtual networking, This total in itself seems unremarkable until it is compared to the minimal amount of learners who agreed that they had had delivery of mostly trade skills. This is a reflection of the number of learners on the level 3 courses who felt they had the opportunity to learn their 'trade' skills. It has been explained that Hair & Beauty were assessed practically in nearly all the units, that Childcare had a strong percentage assessed on placement, but that Engineering, Construction and IT courses were less focussed on delivering or assessing practical skills, students receiving a more general teaching and assessment as discussed in chapter 5. The analysis of the exam board documentation in chapter five supported this viewpoint. Only a very small number of tutors interviewed felt that the students had general skills delivered, which in isolation tells us nothing but when you look at the tutors' responses for the opportunity for trade skills delivered on the course or assessed practically, the number drops significantly. It is worth reiterating that these questions were not posed to the tutors as 'did you deliver more general skills than trade skills?' in their interviews, but different questions which encouraged the tutors to comment on the delivery and assessment of the student skills.

Other key points which were highlighted in this area related to general skills were; Theory, Health & Safety, Powerpoint heavy, Explain, working under pressure, IT skills and Teaching

to assess. All of these areas were identified and counted but by far the most common theme under general skills was 'writing not doing' and we look at this shortly.

When pushed for their definition of 'general skills', comments were noted on the viewpoints on what constituted 'general' skills or at least non-trade skills. Over half of the comments were in agreement that there was 'more writing than doing'; this perception is supported by the analysis of curriculum documents in Chapter 5 and the over-use of 'explain' as an assessment instruction. There is strong indication from the learners' interviews that general skills and written assessment were the main element of their course. Interestingly there were several comments discussing IT skills. All of the IT students would have been PC based and thus would not have included 'IT skills' as a component of their course as IT was a tool for their coursework. However, we would expect the Hair & Beauty, Childcare, Construction, and in most cases Engineering to have elements of Maths, English and IT embedded into their syllabus, thus this percentage is likely to be representative of that group. This then makes the comments on IT skills more vague and difficult to assess properly. This is one of the areas of ambiguity identified in the analysis.

When asked about his course, a BTEC student stated

It's a bit harder with IT – we have loads of skills going in and we thought we would get loads more but actually after two years of study on computers studying computing we didn't have a lot to show for it.

When pushed for what skills he had learned he said

Well, most of us had had a play around with HTML or Python but we only learned basic HTML which is no good if we don't want to go into games design, a bit of C# but not enough to make us confident in passing an interview with a test in it and some VB. Out of 18 units I reckon we did altogether 20 hours of coding.

A childcare learner stated

It's not like there is an awful lot of practical stuff we could do when we weren't with the kids so we wrote about stuff. [shrugs] I don't even remember now what we wrote about but we just googled it and typed it up to get a Pass. Nothing exciting, just theory.

All of the above are examples of students' dissatisfaction with their course. This viewpoint was echoed across all on the BTEC under the CG apart from the H&B students.

7.1.4.2 Writing not doing

An overarching consensus from interviewees was that their course consisted of far too much writing and that the balance was very much skewed to producing reports or PowerPoint presentations as opposed to practising trade skills. This knowledge basis has

historically been attached to the general education model Bathmaker (2013) This curriculum model could be viewed as an attempt by the government and exam boards to address the divide between academic and vocational education. This theory heavy design certainly does not cater for all students of all abilities (Young, 2008).

The majority of the engineering and construction students thought that their course would be of little use outside in the related roles they were trying to apply for, and the engineering students felt that the practical skills they had developed were not broad or specific enough to equip them to work in the engineering industry.

We did hardly any CNC, we covered it but not much of it and hardly got to do it. CNC is in demand everywhere so we should have got much more practice at it.

In contrast and adopting a more understanding viewpoint, one childcare student commented;

My biggest problem was a lot of the writing, I wasn't brilliant at English on the course so I struggled with the amount of writing we had to do but I made friends who helped me so it was OK. There was a lot of theory though...but I think that's right because you are looking after people's kids so you should know what you are doing. It's a big responsibility.

This student clearly understood the relevance of the theory within her subject area and this was echoed by some of the Engineering students who overall agreed that the principles of Engineering were theoretical and had to be covered on the course. The Construction students however were less generous in their opinions about theory work on the course;

It was so boring. We were shown one thing in the classroom and then on site it was completely different. I didn't want to look stupid doing something I learned in class in case it was wrong, so I always asked around first.

This viewpoint was echoed by another construction student who stated

What we learned in college we didn't really need on site, but I get that I couldn't go on site till I was 18 anyway so had to do something. Lots of it I didn't see the point of cos it didn't help in the job.

And a further criticism of the course was that it was viewed as a stopgap to get where students wanted to be, not as a course to qualify them to go straight into employment. When pushed, this student was asked if he enrolled on the course out of necessity and he affirmed this, stating he had no other options as he wanted to be a builder.

There were a number of comments indicating that the new BTEC model was detached from their expectations of what vocational education should be about. One student from

Engineering recalled that when he started work on an apprenticeship, his employers did not rate either his course or his learned knowledge. He went on to express disappointment that the courses were not designed with the help of employers.

This dissatisfaction felt by students was evident across four of the pathways, with the exclusion of Hair & Beauty and one IT student on the BTEC said of his IT course

It was such a drain to just go in and listen to the tutors reading Powerpoints which we could have done ourselves, we spent most of the lessons on our phones or looking at stuff on the internet. I would have paid attention more if it had been more interesting, if we got to do stuff

All I did was look on the internet and copied it, changed a few words. It was rubbish and boring and I wish I hadn't done it.

When asked about how her time was spent on the course a H&B student commented
Spent most of our time in the salon. That was OK but it could get a bit boring and it killed my feet. We all moaned about that.

When gently prompted about other aspects of the course she said

Yeah lots of stuff to do, I liked it when I got to cut and style hair, I was nervous but I did it. Nails was fun and massage except for we all had to do each other as we didn't have real clients and we kept giggling. Waxing was good but I didn't do privates...

The H&B students from both before the changes and within the period of CG rule, had similar stories. Most of their days were spent in the salons, assessment was done via competencies, the range of treatments they learned each term varied, they all had to complete each task or skill to move on to the next and the classroom based sessions were minimal and none of them felt a great expectancy to be able to write fluently or 'perfectly'. Skeggs suggests that this gender conditioning is indicative of class or gender based acceptance (Skeggs, 1997). They found a lot of the theory learned was useful such as time organisation, IT skills (for booking clients and taking clients details), stock control, maths for figuring out the percentages of bleach and colour to mix and general product handling. The majority agreed that they found the course engaging and benefited from it.

7.1.4.3 Disaffection through boredom

Disaffection with the course was reported by a high proportion of the students. The learners that studied during the specified years and post 2015 had similar thoughts on the course content: a student, who was on the construction course said he felt:

I didn't like the course, from the start we was told it was something it wasn't. I hated it...I'd rather be bricklaying or labouring, I didn't like being inside the classroom all day either. Half of what they taught us I don't remember anyway, it was rubbish.

Two of the childcare interviewees expressed similar viewpoints:

It was so boring. I thought when I left school I wouldn't have to sit and listen to teachers drone on, but I had two more years of it. The only good bits were the friends I made and the nursery placement, that was really good.

I hated it. I was on my phone in most of the lessons. All you have to do is google the units and there's loads of other students work on line, so I just used theirs and changed it a bit. I am never going back in a classroom again.

The intent of this research is not to be critical of tutors' teaching styles, but it is clear through the comments that there were a number of students not engaged in the lessons which ideally should have been addressed. Not having been present in the classroom at that time and relying solely on learners' recollections, it might be considered that the teaching practice was weak; however the purpose of the interviews was to highlight the experience of the learners on their course and not the effectiveness of the tutors. I acknowledge however that the latter impacts on the former. One female student seemed to be more accepting of the theoretical aspects of their course. It could be because on both pathways there was a large element of practical work which balanced the experience out for the learners.

Probably the health and safety was the worst...it made me want to fall asleep but I knew I had to do it even though I am rubbish at writing. We didn't really mind too much because we all had a placement and know that some of our jobs will make us have certain qualifications like health and safety.

Across most of the interviews it was evident that disaffection was not felt by all participants and certainly could not be attributed to a dislike of learning. While the BTEC's were supposed to be preparatory, the male student dominated courses felt that they were of limited use for their working lives. For the computing students in their desire to be games programmers, we see an example of 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011) which I return to in my conclusions. The courses had no representation from female learners in any of the years examined, and this is an example of gender stereotyping as discussed in chapter 1, where authors such as Reay (1998), Fuller & Unwin (2003) and Niemeyer and Colley (2015) highlight the gender divide. This dilution of skills and abolition of more

hands-on vocational courses were perceived as a negative policy from all the stakeholders interviewed.

As detailed in chapter 5, this study revealed that the assessment verb used most commonly for the majority of the courses was 'explain'. The percentage of the number of times this verb was used across all units for the courses are: for Construction 45%, IT, 32%, Engineering 32% & 97%, Childcare 58%, H&B 55%, 78%. The three main areas for comments on the general skills were writing not doing (78 mentions), theory (61 mentions) and explain (for assessment) (36 mentions) followed by PowerPoint heavy (both in terms of delivery and the production of) (32 mentions) and IT skills (33 mentions). Working under pressure, teaching to assessment and Health & Safety were the areas commented on the least amount of times however they are still valid points from the students because they tell us about the experiences of the learners and highlight the perceived negative aspects of their vocational courses. While teaching to assessment was commented on only a few times it is noteworthy that this was an impression from the learners themselves. In some cases, it was clear that the learners identified that they were covering material that was going to be assessed and little else. Teaching to learning outcomes and assessments is a method that is being phased out in favour of a more holistic approach according to Ofqual.

Comments from learners who were on the older NQF courses which were removed from funding under the CG reported a very different learning experience and it is suggested from the responses that the learners had received ample opportunity to practise the new trade skills learned.

One learner who had studied the C&G Level 3 IT Diploma in 2010/11 stated

To my recollection the course focussed solely on technical skills and knowledge related to those skills; to be able to do the job.

Further discussion revealed that the learner gained mainly trade skills but there were also general employment skills.

As he was a mature learner on the course who had been employed in a different role before he went to college, it could be argued that this learner had a different understanding and appreciation of general employment skills and their usefulness or relevance. This viewpoint was echoed by a number of other students, most of whom were mature or had part time work outside of college. This highlights that those having been

in employment saw more benefit to the general skills and how these may be applied or used in the workplace.

Childcare placements fared better in terms of appreciation and positive recollections. This gender division on child care courses characterises gender stereotyping according to Reay (Reay, 1998). The placement seemed to be pivotal to whether the learners enjoyed their course or not. As one student said

you get all the crappy jobs that no one wants to do – like empty the nappy bins and clean up the kids who have messed themselves. We had to do a lot of cleaning and the others treated us like gofers a little bit.

When asked if she felt the work placement was of any benefit, she replied;
yes, a bit but I didn't think so at the time. Some of the girls [sic] on it decided they hated it and either dropped off the course or finished 'cos their mums made them but went on to work in different jobs.
Physical growth and aging process and H&S were similar to what we learned at school. Some of the stuff we had to do was stupid and boring. Some of it was just shit.

This was in direct contrast to their experiences of their work placements overall, which all felt were of great benefit.

Most of us preferred to be on placement than at college, even if we got bored sometimes it was better than writing reports.
Gave us a good insight into the playgroup work – at least we could make our minds up having had some experience in one.

7.1.5 Summary of skills transfer from interviews

It is clear that some general skills (such as basic business skills, time management, communication skills, teamwork) were present in each unit, but it is also clear that most of the learners did not see the benefit of the 'soft' or general skills. A perception of skills is evident, trade versus high-order skills need to be identified and made explicit both in IAG and in the syllabus material.

The contrast between the skill-specific training received by both genders highlights a remarkable gender differentiation. Reay, Clarke, Fuller and Unwin and Le Doeuff discuss this gendered habitus and suggest that job opportunities are shaped by gendered stereotypes. (Reay,1998; Skeggs 1997; Fuller & Unwin, 2003; Clarke, 2002; Le Doeuff, 2013). Historically the fields studied have been gender biased with males dominating IT, engineering and construction and females in H&B and childcare. There has been much

research into gender segregation within employment and while this is not a focus of the thesis, it does identify that there is a contrast between the construction course and the H&B courses in terms of skills delivery, design and assessment. I could find no evidence to explain this phenomenon; however, Reisel claims that previous research has shown that educational systems with strong vocational orientation exhibit stronger horizontal gender segregation compared to general education systems (Reisel et al 2015).

This study also highlights that the skills the male engineering and IT students acquired would be more transferable in other low skilled roles as the BTEC format made their knowledge skills adaptable. The general consensus was that the general skills learned could be translated to many job types but not to specific trade jobs. IT skills, time management, communication, all were what the learners considered semi or unskilled.

Considering the diversity of the comments it is not possible to arrive at indubitable interpretations of the interviewee's views and experiences relating to skills delivery. I am therefore suggesting that the views expressed by the learners did not indicate a phenomenon across all of the course types in terms of skills delivery, but that as discussed in chapter 1, authors suggest there is a gender inequality evident (LeDoeuff, 2013; Skeggs, 1997; Colley et al, 2013). Certainly, it can be seen from the responses that the experiences on the earlier courses, those prior to policy and funding changes, delivered more practical core skills and ergo resulted in the learners recalling a more positive experience at college. In essence, the majority view is that the course failed to address the development of trade skills for students necessary for the workplace or to progress them on to related employment. However, while acknowledging the importance of trade skills transfer (or rather the lack of it), the interviewees argued that that courses on the whole gave them the confidence to apply for work, the majority affirmed this on the question in the interview and were clear about differentiating between trade skills and other' skills they learned on their course such as communication, team work, working to deadlines etc. The value of this gained confidence should not be undervalued and is a key tenet of PCET. The generalisation of the vocational courses is a key tenet to neoliberal approach to educational reform under the CG.

Contrary to the comments from all other subject groups, the Hair & Beauty students argued that they had learned and practised the necessary skills for their chosen profession. Having examined the curriculum material and established that for Hair 78% of work was practically assessed and Beauty 86.6% it is evident that the students on these

pathways had been on traditional vocational pathways akin to the NVQs. Their educational experience at college was very different to the other students and the data gathered is in agreement.

The lack of skills delivery was not specifically related to the students, tutors' comments reflected their frustration at the loss of core skills in the units and employers bemoaned the loss of skills in potential employees.

7.2 Assessment practices / pedagogy

It is important to consider the assessment practices for the units and this section refers to the views of the tutors. The literature review (chapter 2) revealed the target chasing culture within FE and prescriptive teaching to test brought about by accountability and funding under the CG's neoliberal system. And the AoC acknowledged that the accountability aspect took priority over the quality of teaching (AoC 2015). While the majority of the assessments were set by the exam boards, some tutors changed the assessment methods or evidence types where possible. An example of this was highlighted when interviewing an IT tutor: the learners on the IT course had to explain concepts in digital graphics and assess and evaluate the processes. The tutor in this case got the students to create animations which explained in animation form the processes or got the learners to make videos which went through the explanation processes as a teaching tool for others. This allowed learners to practise and implement skills learned while meeting the learning criteria and learning outcomes.

Re-submissions (resubs) of work featured heavily in the tutors' comments about assessment. It was an area which clearly caused irritation and dissatisfaction. Under the old BTEC format students were permitted to resubmit marked work as many times as tutor / college allowed in order to Pass and / or better their grade.

An IT tutor stated

Under this BTEC format a student could re-submit as many times as they wanted to get through. This effectively meant that you gave countless amounts of formative feedback. I had one student a couple of years ago who did a Powerpoint presentation on something or another. Every time I marked it and suggested changes, he merely changed an odd word and handed it back in again for a remark. It was ridiculous – the whole piece became more or less my words! Under the BTEC rules, students were to be given the opportunity to better their grade as many times as they wanted and had a period of up to 5 years to do so – which was utterly undoable of course. But it was such a pain marking and remarking constantly.

This was a common occurrence according to the tutors and all the tutors expressed the stress they were under for the students to achieve. It is clear that this system was very frustrating for the tutors and he further commented:

The thing is, because we are under so much pressure for achievements figures, the spoon feeding and hand holding was ludicrous. We had to get them through and the students who were really struggling or who made absolutely no effort during the year had stupid amount of one to one input from the course tutors at the end of the year just to get them through.

This frustration was reportedly also felt by management and by the Heads of Divisions. The constant pressure of achievement - to get students through, and also to try for triple distinctions across all units was omni-present. A senior tutor in Construction outlined when discussing the triple distinction subject

It does not help with your ALPS (management figures) though – if the college are looking for triple distinctions, that is going to go out the window. Well that’s what we find, that’s why (our division) are not. I said to a colleague in another Dept, they have all triple D’s, I told him that if all of them get triple D’s then no one has got a triple D really and he did not understand what I was saying. When you level it out like that – no one had got it – they are meaningless. And that’s because you keep re-working and re-working.

The triple Distinction phenomenon gave cause for concern to most tutors interviewed as discussed in Chapter six and the single resubmission system which replaced that BTEC model in 2016 was welcomed as an end to the older system which could be manipulated. Most tutors critically reflected on their teaching practice and evaluated it under the changes in curriculum model in the interviews (see page 2.3.3). Most expressed that they wished they could deliver more hands-on or practical content but that the Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and assessment content did not support this. Tutors mentioned the pressure for achievement and getting a good set of results. Some mentioned ‘spoon feeding’ which is a term often associated with the BTEC level 3 courses and school leavers. Much of the tutors’ time was spent delivering the necessary explicit content to enable the learners to pass the assessment. One Engineering tutor said

I do think that the new BTEC’s are more vague using assessment verbs such as compare and contrast, explain etc. In some units there is quite a wide spread of knowledge to be covered but not the time to go into enough depth, I think the students lose out under the new structure.

This indicated a clear concern about the quality of what the learners were being taught. One H&B tutor discussed the assessment practices in the Beauty area and reflected back on earlier versions of level 3 vocational H&B courses

When I first started training it was exam at the end and then it came all NVQs and continual assessment and now it's going back to exam at the end of the year so it does a full circle doesn't it?

She explained her concerns were that the learners were not particularly strong academically which put students off the courses but also that the nature of the skills they delivered could only be assessed by competence assessment.

There were some references to the Widening Participation strategy and how the BTECs had changed from strongly vocational courses to those that were theory based to satisfy the entry requirements for university places.

A senior tutor for Childcare recalled:

I believe that a lot of the changes, including funding towards the voc quals were to do with widening participation for universities, not about skilling these students for employment....it doesn't equip them for the role at all. It [the BTEC] claims the title but it doesn't at all. It's a weakness isn't it?

And the spoon feeding drives me up the wall. I embraced the recent news (2016) that BTECs are introducing more stringent assessment measures....

A senior tutor for Construction summarised his interview saying

I think that a lot of the changes, including funding towards the voc quals were to do with widening participation for universities, not about skilling these students for employment.

'Spoon feeding' was a label used by many of the staff interviewed except the H&B interviewees. An interpretation of this might be that the H&B course taught hands-on skills that were assessed by competence using witness statements and observations thus the 'spoon feeding' element was not obvious. In some cases tutors were referring to the nature of essentially delivering almost what the students submitted for their assessment, a replica of the rote model used in schools and in other cases the spoon feeding related to the passing of information in the format acceptable for the assignment, at the right level containing enough to meet the learning outcome, but heavily scaffolded, this is discussed in chapter 5, see section 5.3.

Most tutors felt that the lack of practice or applied learning had seriously impacted on the learners' college experience. Some tutors felt that some or most units were not fit for purpose. Tutors also commented that there should have been multiple elements to

assessments including practical components, optional projects and some coursework. A few comments were made about the student satisfaction of completing units and the course. Examples of non-engagement were identified and suggest that this was because of the design of the units and lack of practical focus. One Construction tutor recalled

While the lads [sic] might have been keen at the beginning, what we began to see regularly was an attitude of just getting through, you know, only working for a Pass. The less useful they viewed the course, the less they tried and less effort they put into their assessment work. It's sad really, a whole two years of not trying hard.

His colleague in the Construction Division further commented

A gripe is that they only learn sufficient to pass the assessment, but there is no time for wider teaching in the syllabus. Try as you might they won't take on board independent learning and work outside of the classroom. They seem to moan and say one thing but do nothing about it on their own to make it better. Lots of lazy attitudes.

This viewpoint was echoed in the Childcare division and one of the tutors commented

The girls [sic] can't really practise unless they are babysitting, I have never had a student come into college in the morning and say 'oh I read a great book on Child Psychology last night', they won't learn what we don't put in front of them. They can apply the hands-on stuff on their placement but outside of that it is predominantly theory based and the girls know that before they start.

One hair & beauty tutor was reticent about the intensity of skills assessment on their level 2 programs and stated:

Real learning can only really take place in the real work environment. Whilst we can give the girls [sic] the skills to cut hair or apply a beauty therapy, their ability to work with customers and their expectations can only take place in a real salon. We have all the equipment, what we don't have is the range or number of 'real' customers, and that's a major part of the job, customer skills.

She went on to discuss how important real customers were for the salon, the interaction between the customers and the learners and developing the learners' professional skills.

This differentiation between soft skills versus trade skills is discussed in chapter 3.

The interaction between clients, management, other staff and other professionals all come within the real work settings and only small elements of this can be obtained through the college salon environment.

Don't get me wrong, the skills and experience they get in our salon do have value and really are an important step in building their skill base that they will need for work.

In contrast, in Childcare the tutors enthused that the learners benefited more broadly. They felt there was a greater degree of emphasis on other attributes in childcare other than academic qualifications or the number of hours of work experience on the course.

On the whole they get a good, rounded education on the course, only a small amount of girls [sic] advance past the level 3 once they are out in the field, the course gives them what they need to know to do the job. It takes more than an exam to look after people's children...

The assessment methods clearly affected both the learners and the tutors. Engagement in the unit / subject lessened and frustration by both tutors and learners was evident from the comments. As all of the tutors had been teaching at the FEC since before the Coalition Government ruled, they were able to critically compare the difference in course formats and this included how the units were assessed and how much theory content was included, this is discussed in detail in chapter 5. If we take these viewpoints into consideration plus the findings from the Curriculum material analysis findings in Chapter 5, we can determine that the format changes were not well received by either tutors or learners and that the theoretical nature of the units did not enthuse either or inspire the learners to strive for or achieve higher grades.

7.2.1 Summative / Formative feedback

While the tutors were scathing about constant resubmissions or referrals and considered them to be a 'cop out' for the learners – see section 5.4 and appendix 7. Their comments indicate that taking away all forms of formative assessment in favour of summative was not beneficial for the learners. Summative assessment for vocational courses was not popular amongst the tutors in most cases. While the majority of tutors recognised that summative assessment was necessary in most cases, the formative model which allowed for competence learning and testing was very much missed by the tutors in traditionally hands-on subjects with the exception of Hair & Beauty. Childcare is all theoretical until the work placement in year two and the tutors stated that the learners saw the benefits of their learning once they were on their placement. As one Childcare tutor reported :

It is within this placement that many of the students make the link from theory to practice and relate to the use of equipment and methods.

7.2.2 Teach to Pass

Another issue that came to light during the interviews was the reluctance by learners to take on board learning if it was 'not part of the assignment' or if they didn't need to know it to pass an assignment. The notion of 'teaching to the test' has become increasingly common as tutors both in schools and FE are under increasing pressure to 'get them through'. These views are supported by James who suggests that the marketplace is qualification obsessed and training is too narrow (James et al, 2013). Young also challenges that vocational knowledge was not context based (Young, 2008).

An Engineering tutor remarked

We have seen a huge attitude shift with the learners only willing to learn or practise something 'if they are going to use' i.e. will it be in the assessment. This is a curse of the BTEC in a way.

I don't want to sound negative about it but the delivery model is not doing any good for the students. It's no good them knowing how to do something and not doing it – how is that going to get them a job? Assessing them on their understanding of making something when they never have the opportunity to make it is ludicrous and won't bear well when they get into a job.

This viewpoint indicates a complex issue which encompasses a reluctance to learn or understand the benefit of anything that is not assessed but also a lack of demonstrated competencies that can be translated into the workplace. The former is a common theme reported by the tutors and also relates to resistance to learning and learner apathy. It became clear during the research that on a BTEC a Pass level standard of work and summative assessment was constructed around tutors' experience in their classroom and that particular group. The aim was for all to pass without resorting to resubmissions or extra work and sustaining that level of effort throughout the whole course. A tutors perspective of the BTEC philosophy resonates: "I think that if they stick at it – turn up and do the work – they will eventually get through".

7.2.2.1 Reform Awareness by Tutors and Employers

Two out of the three groups of participants were asked about their recollection of the qualification changes within the specified years. All of the tutors interviewed were aware of some of the changes under the CG but many did not have much understanding of why the changes came about, this in part could be due to the constant changes to vocational qualifications (Aynsley & Croussouard, 2010). All tutors acknowledged that the learner profile had changed – having lost all or the majority of their adult provision. Some courses

ran specialist pathways and thus were not affected by budgetary constraints or funding withdrawal – courses in childcare, hairdressing, EAL for instance.

There were many references made to employer awareness –in particular to Government Policy that changed the qualification format / framework. The majority of the comments were made by tutors and usually it was the Heads of Divisions.

Some tutors were unclear of the reason why changes had occurred, but the changes resonated within their division. A H&B tutor said

we dropped NVQ to do VRQ but the main changes for us were that we used to offer so many extra things that we can't offer now, that has been the major change. It's the main programme and nothing else. So, we used to have students who used to come and pick up all sorts of added things along the way and now they can't.

All of the tutors interviewed were aware of the changes under the CG but many did not have any understanding of why. All knew that the learner profile had changed – having lost all, or the majority of their adult provision. Some courses ran specialist pathways and thus were not affected by budgetary constraints of funding withdrawal – courses in Childcare - CACHE, Hairdressing - VTC, and Engineering - EAL for instance.

For some there was a recollection of standardisation and qualification framework changes as a H&B senior tutor commented

I remember the move to NQF and that funding was behind it...

As the frameworks are an integral part of the module design and assessment, the adoption process and recognition becomes second nature to tutors. Understanding the changes beyond acknowledging that they were instigated through funding cuts or policy changes was overwhelmingly the position of the tutors. Highlighting this an Engineering tutor added

Can't remember – probably budgetary – you just kind of go along with it don't you? The Government come out with this and you follow it.

Tutors from other divisions were less concerned as they felt the changes made little impact to them. For instance, very little curriculum changes were experienced by Childcare, the assessment models were very similar, and the learners were still assessed on a work placement. They did however have a better understanding of the change impact (if any) for employers and were able to inform the employers of any change. A

childcare tutor stated (when referring to the changes in policy and the effects) and how the employers were informed

Yes because we did it – our division. We brought employers in, because all our employers have placements out with them, we can get at them pretty quickly and therefore a group came in and we went to (name) restaurant and put forward our point.

The FEC has strong bonds with local industries in some fields (such as Construction, Engineering, Childcare and H&B) and thus relationships are forged which allows for the informal discussion. The Childcare tutor went on to comment:

We have had so many different changes, we are on, in 13 years I think there has been about five or six different changes. The best people to ask are [two staff names] who run the CACHE course since 1993. I have been teaching courses since 1988.

This viewpoint reflects the constant changing environment in FE and lack of clarity of what changed, when and by whom. Policy reform is examined in detail in chapter 1.

While not all tutors expressed any understanding of policy changes, they were aware that funding was behind course format change and course offerings for students. The above comment and approach to her role as a tutor was common within other divisions. A construction tutor recollected

It's this NQF QCF thing I am not sure about, we were NQF before. As long as I have been here, we have always been with C Skills, so 17/18 years. I think it changed in the '90s here when we went from Guilds to C Skills, it was a joint awarding body, CIT (Guilds) with C skills. They went through their separate ways – about eight years ago and the Guilds tried to sell their quals, C skills tried to sell their quals and we always went with (it was forced upon us – we wanted to go with Guilds because of the brand name) but there was more money attached with the C Skills we have been with C Skills since.

When questioned about their interpretation of the changes one tutor stated "*League table for schools – accountability.*"

This comment highlighted that some tutors were quite confused about the changes. All of the tutors have been in the college for many years (since before the CG) and seen many changes in one form or another, constant changes to VET are discussed in chapter 2 in detail. This might be the reason why their understanding or recollection might be vague having been through many cycles of reform / model / curriculum changes. An example of this is a comment made by a childcare tutor:

In real terms changes (to the written work) to the qualification, from NQF to QCF, there were no changes, they just changed the name.

This comment echoed other comments made from tutors in the division regarding the small impact that the changes had on their courses, despite framework and exam board change. Similarly, the Head of H&B stated

I remember the move to NQF and that funding was behind it... and it didn't really affect us, the girls [sic] still had to do the same activities and get signed off so we were less affected by any changes

When asking the tutors about whether they thought the employers knew about the changes, some thought that few employers knew what was going on in terms of reforms. Engineering and Construction companies however had more insight into qualification and loss of skills learned. A senior tutor for Construction said

...again it depends on if it is a traditional employer, they wouldn't know who construction awards are, but they know who City & Guilds were, so they would say 'right, we would prefer them to do a City & Guilds qualification'. In reality both quals are virtually the same.

This comment underpins the reputation in the trade for City & Guilds as a standard of quality. The qualifications were esteemed for decades and were the expected and accepted qualification to have for trades such as builders, plumbers, electricians. In contrast to this recognition as a standard, a national hairdressing chain manager stated:

we don't get involved...I don't know if any other hairdressers chains or franchises do, we take them on if they have done level 2 and train them up to level 3 or if they have level 3 they can come.

The employer however had a good understanding of the qualification structure and went on to add

With college students they tend to have been more involved training with all sorts of skills like perming, colours and that, if they have done it to level 3 it helps their profile when they come to us..

and concluded with a comment on the company's employment policy; "In terms of school leavers, we don't recruit from there, we always look for college students." This large chain of hairdressers interviewee showed a better understanding of the qualification structure and standards than any other of the employer interviews.

For tutors delivering the BTEC National Diploma and A levels, there was arguably little change in assessments. The BTEC units were still assessed on the BTEC by Pass, Merit or Distinction and the course still required a set number of units toward each level of qualification. What was different was the ability for learners to secure APL – accreditation of prior learning – they could use the credits gained on another course to combine with the BTEC strands. This was not the case prior to the QCF framework. “I think the credit value was a good idea so that across-the-board learning could be accredited” was a viewpoint from one tutor, this is a fit for the neoliberal approach in policy reform.

What is evident is that the changes brought about by the Coalition austerity cuts were not explained and understood college wide. Instead of ensuring that each division had a sound understanding of the budget cuts and ergo course changes, each division essentially relied on their line manager to cascade their knowledge and in some cases it was evident that there were gaps in that knowledge. For the divisions who ran specialist courses under specialist exam boards such as CASH, EAL, Hairdressing, this was not an issue *per se*, as a change in learner profile was a direct impact of the cuts, the tutors should have had a better understanding.

All tutors felt that funding cuts were responsible for the course changes. Acceptance of reforms and changes is commonplace in FE and feelings mirrored across all the participating divisions. For those tutors who had been teaching in FE for many years, they will have experienced cuts and structure changes many times over, and a few teachers commented that the changes were ‘cyclic’.

Others were unclear of the reason why but the changes resonated within their division
..we dropped NVQ to do VRQ but the main changes for us were that we used to offer so many extra things that we can’t offer now, that has been the major change. It’s the main programme and nothing else. So, we used to have students who used to come and pick up all sorts of added things along the way and now they can’t.

Others from other divisions were less concerned as they felt the changes made little impact to them. For tutors delivering the BTEC National Diploma and A levels there was perceivably little change. The system of constantly re-submitting work was also dropped by the exam board from the BTEC courses post 2016, only one re-submission was permitted with tighter restrictions (see chapter 5).

7.2.3 Recollecting the effects of policy change & curriculum model

7.2.3.1 *Did the employer identify a change to any particular qualifications required for a role? If so – how did they know?*

The tutors were asked about their understanding of what the employers knew about the changes in policy / funding / student profile. These questions were also put to employers in this section and the focus here is from the viewpoints of the tutors and employers. A response from an Engineering tutor when questioned about the employers' understanding of the changes was

The students are not the same as they have been previously. They are not ready to take on the technical challenges, I think it's because their course was too theory based.

One Engineering company director put the deskilling of learners into perspective in business and economic terms;

If you consider the progression for these students, it takes much longer for them to move on or up. We have to start from scratch with a lot of them and they have to spend time learning the trade. This affects the whole business, the whole trade if you like. The youngsters earn less for longer so that has consequences, they move on within or outside of the firm at a much slower rate, it allows for less new starters and ultimately we have to employ more mature experienced staff which has financial implications for the business. The youngsters just aren't being trained at college.

He was able to relate the changes in student profile directly to the employment market and economics. Echoing these comments an Engineering Manager recalled

In my opinion it is a mistake to think that an engineering course is mostly theory. It's not preparing the students for work.

Further, a Construction company owner added

Once the lads [sic] stopped coming to us with the right papers we had a fair shortage, a BTEC is all very well and good and the distinctions they can get on them but they still can't mix cement.

There was some cynicism regarding the BTEC's reputation within industry. One tutor commented:

As far as I am concerned BTEC's, is that it means absolutely nothing in terms of skills qualification. It means something in the terms that it shows that they can

cope with that level of qualification, but in actual skills for outside in the workplace, it's pretty meaningless I think. And in fact you can do a Level 3 in engineering having never been in a workshop – what's that about?

Acknowledging that there was no notification or general knowledge about qualification changes, a senior manager at a large national construction company commented

I did check with Head Office and all I got back was an email saying they weren't aware that the qualifications had changed but would look into it. The only reason I found out is because my nephew did construction at college last year and he told me they couldn't do the C&G anymore.

A medium-sized construction company owner echoed these comments with his understanding of the changes

We get youngsters who want to train to be a builder or a gas fitter, we get older blokes [sic] wanting to retrain but none of them can do the courses we need. The youngsters can do a BTEC and the older blokes have to pay for their qualifications themselves. Apprenticeships don't really exist for older blokes plus they couldn't support their family on the low wages. It's ridiculous.

The views were common in the Construction field within companies of all sizes. It is evident that Industries of any size were not informed of changes to qualifications that happened under the CG reforms, but they were aware once the student or employee applications changed, and the inclusion of trade skills competence was removed from these applicants' profiles. There was a general acknowledgement that the employee profile had changed.

7.2.3.2 Knowledge of Government Policies

The range and frequency of comments from employers in terms of governmental policy and educational reform were light and few. It was very clear that the majority of the small to medium enterprises (SME's) and limited company / small companies had little knowledge of policies and education funding. There was a reluctance to discuss this area and questions related to Government / politics were met with a hesitancy to answer or the interviewee admitting knowing nothing and moving the questions / interview on. The probing was not continued in these cases as it was clear that this area of questioning was making the interviewees uncomfortable and this would not bode well for the rest of the interview. What could be considered from this study is that there exists a lack of connection between employers and VET policy in the UK, this employer involvement is discussed in section 2.

7.2.3.3 *Employers Relationship with FE*

A number of comments were made, in this instance the context related to the development of skills on the course and the difference between the old format learning outcomes to the introduced format. An Engineering Tutor recalled

There are two sorts of employer profiles really. People like Nestlé and people like Unipart really want well qualified people. They will look at people on the BTEC level 3 because they will want to send them on foundations degrees etc, so they are looking for management personnel. But those people also need to work on the shop floor in the first instance. So they won't push them forward for foundation degree unless they know that they are capable people. So they are on the shop floor and at the moment I don't think we are meeting the skills that are needed for the shop floor. And then there is the other employer that just want people, they are not looking for progression, they are not looking for foundation degrees, they are just quite happy that they can come and work.

His account gives a good insight into how the changes were affecting the students in Engineering at ground level and their employment prospects.

Employer awareness was a more complex issue to understand. The employers themselves expressed their own recollections of policy changes and then the tutors expressed their perception of what the employers knew or didn't know. It was difficult to corroborate these as the employers interviewed were not necessarily those that had relationships with the FEC thus the tutors could only comment on those employers that engaged with the College. In terms of vocational courses, there was much confusion.

The companies struggle with the BTEC's, they think it is all practical, which it isn't but the vocational courses used to be.

One tutor conceded that whilst most employers understood what an apprenticeship was, consisted of, other vocational courses were still a grey area.

The feedback we get from employers is that, it is often levelled at the qualification and is not fit for purpose for what they need, for the skills sets that they need. We actually try to explain that, they tend to then try to blame the College, and when you say we have got an awarding body, and the standard setting body sets the standards and the qualifications for the national occupational standards, they dictate what we teach basically.

Liaison between colleges and employers generally is not happening and the gap just seems to get bigger despite what any government says.

One viewpoint from an experienced tutor was that the term 'vocational' was wrongly used. He claimed that identifying the term as who the course is for rather than what the students can learn from it was partly to blame for all the confusion.

Tutors agreed that there are different values placed on vocational routes as opposed to academic routes (see chapters 3 and 5) and also on different subjects under the same qualification level. There were several comments from tutors representing this view. One Construction tutor remarked

... there are now thousands of construction students at level 3 in the UK, none with a major company, none in full time jobs. They will come out of college with a qualification that is worthless in the trade.

Engineering staff supported this viewpoint on the value of the qualification

... I think the employer wants what they want. They are not really as interested in the qualifications structure as that's not really what they are...If I want a plumber, I want a plumber that can be a plumber, and can do all those tasks....old school they tend to recognise the awarding body, so if you say NCFE they might go 'NCFE?' C&G – ah yeah, BTEC – ah yeah. ITEC – yep. I think it's the awarding body is secondary in what they understand but what they actually want is the skills set that's required for that job role. Because all we do, in ways is just re-badge it differently don't we? You are still going to teach someone IT or someone IT skills, it doesn't matter what rubber stamps that qualification, you are still going to teach them what they need to know.

A Construction tutor added views on the recognition of the qualification branding and in particular C&G

They understand it, they know it don't they? They trust it because it's what they did, and any other sort of awarding body, they are a little bit sort of unsure of or wary about, so it's that brand image that Guilds have.

There was a confidence in branded qualifications by tutors and employers. Some brands such as City & Guilds have been associated with vocational training and competence for many years in various trades (as discussed in chapter 1) and the brand is respected.

Engineering added that when discussing apprentices with employers

They will recruit young people if they have got an opening, a vacancy. They are not bothered about whether they have got that qualification or not. What we are finding now, is that as apprenticeships emerge, employers do say 'right I need this, I do need to get an apprentice', they will look at one of my full-time students, they will have a look at that because they are part qualified.

An Engineering TL discussed the industry view of the newer BTEC qualifications

...also the employers felt that the new qualifications had been watered down and were not meaningful. Construction particularly had feedback from industry that

the new qualifications were not fit for purpose and lay some of the blame at the college.

In contrast, a H&B tutor stated

We run our own training courses at level 2 and level 3, NVQ so we are not concerned about changes in policy or courses at FE. Tony & Guy International does recognise and come under the branding umbrella of City & Guilds Diplomas.

And from a large manufacturing plant spokesperson;

Systematic under funding means that investment is needed for youngsters to be trained properly. That isn't happening at the moment.

A dilution of the qualification was the opinion of tutors and employers alike with the exception of H&B. There are no apparent reasons why H&B have a different experience to other areas of industry but the courses and the qualifications seemed to be minimally affected, other than the age of the learners and the loss of 19+ learners on the courses. Certainly there were no comments from any H&B Industry interviewee that supported the views of the other sectors. Engineering and Construction have long standing relationships with apprenticeships and FEC's and thus it is expected that they would be more familiar with the qualification structure.

7.2.3.4 *Employing young adults*

Frequent concerns were expressed about the theme *employing young adults* as identified from the questionnaire data. A common concern among the students was the lack of related employment opportunities which is discussed in chapter 6. The majority felt that whilst their vocational level 3 course had contributed to their confidence when applying for a job role, in contrast few stated that the course contributed to employment in a related field. This indicates that while confidence levels increased for the majority, few felt that their course contributed significantly enough for gaining related employment. Responses showed that only a small number felt that their course was directly related to the job and even fewer felt that they learned skills relevant to their current employment role. We can see from the discussion in the destinations chapter that the majority of employment opportunities were for low skilled roles within the time period studied, this is discussed in detail in section 6.4

In the childcare sector, nurseries have their own set of qualifications and legal requirements they must abide by. One tutor commented

Clearly, we have to abide by strict legislation and students to work with children need to have DBS clearance and insurance. We only get the funding to teach 16-19 and they have to have at least a level 3 to go and work in childcare so that is

the age group we work with. Some younger girls [sic] get placements on a voluntary basis but they are heavily supervised.

And in Construction, a construction site manager added:

To be honest we recruit mainly through agencies and they deal with the qualifications etc. We look for experience and knowing how to do the job. For labourers, there is no requirement for any Diploma, they must be able to read and write but we would realistically expect them to have CSkills or C&G at Level 2 in construction.

An employer from an internationally-recognised nursery company stated that they take nursery assistants with a level 3 qualification in the related field and then they have to enrol on the company's internal training programs. A spokesperson from an Engineering business commented that they only take college leavers to place them on (time served) apprenticeships and the company does not consider them trained or qualified until the successful completion of their apprenticeship. The local City Council has a policy of taking on 16-18yr olds in the IT division, but these young people were all expected to enrol to the relevant apprenticeship scheme. When questioned about whether there was an organisational preference for 16 or 18 year olds (FE or school leavers) the interview said

It's not really feasible to take on school leavers in any role other than work experience, we are looking for a bit of maturity, a demonstration of some technical capability or skills and an enthusiasm in the subject which school leavers don't necessarily have. They cannot progress within the Council unless they complete an apprenticeship program and possibly two.

7.2.3.5 Lost Adult Provision

The loss of adult provision was a common theme across subject tutors and divisions. This loss is attributed to the withdrawal of funding for 19+ learners and the removal of all non QCF courses. This consequence was mentioned by all tutors. Most subjects lost all of their adult provision and most of the tutors interviewed further commented on the reasons why they lost their 19+ learners or the contributory factors, showing some awareness of policy and funding changes at that time. The Hair & Beauty area was the only area to maintain a few adult students although it may be worth noting that these adult learners were not necessarily enrolled onto a full level 3 vocational program. IT and Construction tutors were the two subject areas to discuss the funding changes for students over 19 in detail. The policy and funding changes in effect meant that if a learner started a two-year vocational course aged 18 or 19 and did not have a previous level 3 qualification, they would receive funding for year 1 of that course but would have to fund year 2 themselves

(see chapter 5 and appendix 7). This is because the funding changes introduced by the Coalition Government did not allow for the funding of a level 3 course if the learner already had a level 3 qualification and also resulted in the 18/19 year old learners who enrolled on a two year course and were aged 19 before the start of year two being funded for year one only. To address the issue of these 19+ learners dropping out after year one due to lack of funding, thus affecting retention and achievement figures, the FEC created a different course code for a two-year programme, as opposed to the system of two separate one-year programmes. Historically the FEC used to enrol the level 3 vocational learners to separate one-year programmes in order to improve figures for retention – if a learner dropped out after year one and was enrolled on a two year program, this affected the College’s retention and achievement figures. Enrolling learners who would be 19 before commencing year two on a two-year program was managed by creating a separate course code for a two year program and much effort was made to ensure the learners progressed from year one to year two.

Construction discussed ‘bridging’ courses which construction students could take to enhance their employability prior to the funding changes

Oh you can get a student loan but you have got to get, so if you do the bridge course, so you are a bricklayer and you want to progress up the ladder as a joiner, and you pay that kind of fee, £3400, you have then got over £4500 for your HNC... ... they have got to pay for the bridging course, something like £3400. Just to do six units to get them up to the level so that they can step on the HNC.

Some of the tutor interviewees pointed out that they had also lost their night class provision, IT and Hair and Beauty lost previously funded vocational short courses that ran in the evenings and were largely populated by 19+ learners.

We used to have loads of adult provision, we do two classes now for adults but we used to have them every night. Are those full cost? Yeah

And significantly, the comment was made “The colleges, the FE’s don’t serve the community anymore, do they?”. Lamenting on the loss of funding for adult provision, a construction tutor stated that he gets contacted by all age groups of learners but they cannot afford to fund the courses themselves and he missed the inclusion of adult students in his classes.

All of the learners in the years included in this study were male, this is not a field which attracts many female learners. The learners were mostly referred to as ‘lads’ but

occasionally 'blokes', this gender divide is discussed in chapter 2 by Atkins (2010) and Niemeyer & Colley (2015).

The overall perspective from all the tutors interviewed was that losing the adult provision was not a positive step for the learners or for the college. This was one of the direct impacts of the reforms introduced by the Coalition Government. This would then impact on the local labour market in terms of skilled workforces and research by the Economic Affairs Committee suggests that some graduates may have been better off studying alternatives to HE that were shorter and more relevant to the workplace (HoL, 2018)

7.2.3.6 Employment law considerations

Some of the industries had legal considerations for not employing under 18's: Construction due to insurance, Childcare due to Insurance and DBS.

An Engineering small firm representative stated:

It does mean that we are more forced into employing certain age groups for certain roles – not sure how legal that is – we can't [for insurance purposes] take an under 18 year old but the college leavers at 18 are not skilled so we have to invest time and money training them so if we need skilled workers we have to look for older blokes [sic].

And a small Construction company spokesperson added:

You only need one youngster to have an accident on site and that would have huge repercussions for the firm and the industry – it affects everyone. Plus at the young age, they still are immature and some arse about, we can't have that on site.

We have taken on a couple of 16 year olds and have to supervise them all the time – that's a drain on the other men so it's not really ideal. We don't do work experience – too complicated with insurance and legal stuff.

Other considerations with the law include driving licences etc., even for driving plant machinery or a digger – this prevents learners from getting experience on the job and also restricts opportunity.

Construction companies were also legally bound by regulation and considerations such as a driving licence necessity to drive the plant machinery dictated that all employees be over 17.

Despite the intentions of Government to create college leavers who would be equipped to progress into a vast array of industries and a move away from tying a student to one specific role for life, this reform clearly falls short in many sectors.

7.3 Summary

This chapter has analysed the responses of the interviewees and identified relationships within those responses. The main argument about the reforms has been examined in

terms of the understanding and perception of what shape those reforms took by tutors and employers, we can draw parallels in these outcomes with the work of Black and Williams (2002) 'black box' notion and Spours approach that not all initiatives are visible (Spours et al, 2002). The different tutors seemed to have a clear understanding of the causes and impacts of reforms under the CG and were explicit about how that affected learners' profiles, in terms of losing the adult learners and loss of funding. Teaching staff had a more general sense of understanding of the reforms and there was a high degree of consensus over the constantly changing shape of the curriculum and qualifications frameworks which they saw as a direct consequence of reforms, Lupton claims that policy changes were more concerned with accountability than learning (Lupton et al (2015). While some tutors expressed dissatisfaction with the new formats, all tutors complied with changes in pedagogy. Measuring a tutors performance is a concept central in neoliberalism, the measuring of human activity. Indeed, Ofsted states that 'you can't manage what you can't measure' (Smith & O'Leary, 2016). While the dissatisfaction was evident from most tutors, all conformed to the changes.

The generalisation of the syllabus' under the CG and the neoliberal approach saw a shift in curriculum format leaving some learners with few options if they did not want to, or could not progress to HE, and it is these tensions that are the basis for this study.

The employers were less candid about their understanding of the reforms. There was a reluctance to discuss politics or reform changes when questioned however the larger organisations and those who had strong historical relationships with VET providers demonstrated a better understanding of at least the outcomes of policy reforms. This was evident in the views from the Engineering, Construction and Hair & Beauty employer participants, all of which had established relationships with the FEC. The larger organisations interviewees appeared more informed than those from smaller businesses who lamented about the lack of skills from FEC leavers, in particular Engineering and Construction. There appeared to be little change in Childcare and IT.

All participants expressed views about skills. Overall it was evident that all teaching staff other than Hair & Beauty believed that the courses they taught under the CG were more general and that general workplace skills were embedded in the new curriculum while the practical skills were removed, this is evident within this study in chapter 5, analysing the curriculum material. Some tutors felt that there was pressure to 'teach to the assessment' and the GLH lacked time to embed activities. Target setting and compliance have been

discussed in this study (See chapters 2 & 5) and the culture of accountability is evident with OFSTED's mechanism of funding based on student outcomes (Pratt, 2014) and OFSTED uses this student outcome and destination data to fulfil funding using this target data. It can be seen in the experiences and views of the tutors that this target chasing culture results in a lack of autonomy and a strong focus on outcomes, and in turn shapes the pedagogical style. IT and Engineering tutors were the only two divisions to discuss WP and student progression onto HE. In contrast, the Hair & Beauty participants appeared relatively unaffected by reform changes other than losing their adult students and short courses. Skills learned and delivered were mostly left unchanged on H&B courses. Employers in Engineering and Construction in all but the largest organisations discussed frustrations at lack of hands-on experience of college leavers; these sector representatives worked directly with college leavers on the ground.

The student's interpretation of skills was different and in contrast to the tutors in most fields. IT, Construction and Engineering learner interviewees were very vocal about what they perceived to be a lack of skills delivered or learned on their course. There was an overarching theme with these groups that the courses were not what they expected, not enjoyable and not useful for finding related employment. Neoliberal reforms under the CG do not take into account the experiences of the students or the tutors, the experiences of those directly affected. It may be that students received conflicting IAG prior to enrolment but there was a clear sense of dissatisfaction for learners who were on course during the period which was opposite to those interviewed that were on course prior to the reform changes.

Assessment was discussed with tutors and students. There was a clear theme across the tutors' responses that the practice of teaching to assessment took place, this was always coupled with a frustration of the course design. Any desire to include practical elements was stonewalled due to the GLH for the content to get the learners to pass the assessments. The aspect to cause the most comment from tutors was the process of constantly resubmitting work for marking which was a common practice. The tutors felt this did not reflect the true ability of the learners and pressure to 'get them through' and accountability meant that this was commonplace. Tutors identified negative consequences for the student with regard to preparing the students for HE and a compromised learning evidenced. The WP initiative under neoliberal ideology appears to

be flawed in terms of preparing these students for HE, this is discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

There were positive views overall on the course in terms of the social aspect of being a student within the FEC, the class sizes and relationships with tutors and the building of confidence. The students' interviews had a perspective on the purposes of the courses which are closest to the designs discussed in the curriculum analysis chapter, they viewed their course as preparation for further study or for general employment. The accounts of their views given in chapter 7 overall in terms of its relevance, other than the Construction cohort. The relationship between theory and practise is clearly displaced. While literature in chapter 2 outlines recommendations from policy reforms in terms of equipping the students with the necessary skills to progress into the workplace, this study suggests that there was much more concentration on theory as revealed in chapter 5 curriculum analysis and this chapter, the interviews with both students and tutors.

With regard to the BTEC, there was a consensus amongst the students about the course's shortcomings in all pathways other than H&B. Overall the view was that it lacked vocational content in terms of skills transfer and opportunities to practise the development of trade skills. The students and tutors felt that the more general and soft skills were embedded at the expense of trade skills.

The findings from the interviews in this chapter will be discussed in the next chapter summarising all findings.

8 SUMMARY

This chapter presents key findings from analysis of the interviews with stakeholders. It is organised around the three original research questions. Themes identified from the interviews are considered in the context of issues defined in the literature review (Chapter 2), of methodological issues emerging (Chapter 4) and of Curriculum material analysis (chapter 5) and employment patterns (Chapter 6). New knowledge emerging is identified from analysis of the data, in terms of stakeholder views on key factors affecting the employment outcomes of learners; responses to changes in assessment practice and skills delivery, and how learners were prepared for various progression routes. Drawing on these findings, it offers recommendations for both vocational course design and for pedagogical practices.

My interpretive perspective meant that I took a reflective stance in terms of examining social structures and relations within the FE and local employment (Doolin, 1998). Data collection via interviews and using a case study suggest that this approach is the most appropriate paradigm for this study. (Spradley, 1979; Walsham, 1993). Every effort was made to understand the world view of the participants and not from my own view or understanding. Acknowledging that context knowledge was vital in this study for interpreting the participants' realities (Guber and Lincoln, 1985).

8.1 Research question 1: what do the views and experiences of key stakeholders tell us about the impact of the reforms?

The first area from the findings to be discussed involves the impacts of the changes, policy, funding and assessment. Since 2010 16 major changes to the VET / skills system created an unstable vocational landscape.

Data drawn from interviews with employers offers a different perspective on the policy changes and their effects to those emerging from interviews with those involved in education.

The research considers external factors such as local and national employment trends, the attitude and beliefs of those delivering the changed curricula, and debates concerning the impact of the reforms had bearing on learners' decision making about related employment. Patterns of 'gendered habitus' as discussed in chapter 1, are evident in the

decision making process for the learners in this study, and these patterns reproduce wider class and gender stereotypes (Reay, 1998; Colley et al, 2003; Clarke, 2002).

This chapter identifies issues regarding the commodification of learning or knowledge (see Chapter 2 above). My findings accord with Youngs (2008) assertion that a reshaped curriculum does not account for all learners of all abilities and in fact created barriers certainly for the construction learners in this study, HE was not a realistic option and progression into the industry was not an option either. Responses from construction employers discussed in section 7.2.3.3 above reveal the frustrations in the demise of skills development in the FE leavers and their inability to work on site straight from FE. This is an example of what Young claims is the government, by their policies and the curriculum model changes, failing to distinguish vocational knowledge from academic knowledge (1998; 2008; 2009; 2011 and 2012). Lack of vocational context can be seen in this study in the construction course, the engineering course and to some extent the IT courses.

The lack of opportunity to practise skills, lack of equipment, lack of timetable hours and generalising of assessment verbs / methods as identified in Chapter 5 curriculum analysis were all consequences of policy reforms and budgetary constraints and a move to a more general course format. This contextual learning was removed from the syllabus for these courses, but not for the Hair and Beauty which exposed the gender divide in education as identified by McNeil (2010).

The research also considers whether outcomes from the reform impacts allowed employers to make informed decisions regarding required skills for roles. Despite discourse by the CG about employer involvement, in the CG Rigour and Responsiveness paper of 2013, and notions of 'black box' thinking (Black and Williams, 2002), there was little evidence of addressing the demand side of employment and VET and employer involvement under the CG years. Further, 2015 saw responsibility for skills development move from employers and industry back to the Department of Education, this constantly changing landscape is discussed in chapter 2.2 and as Lupton, Unwin and Thomson (2015) point out, are in response to statistics and not learning (see section 2.2.1). Getting an understanding of the tutors' perspective and experience of the qualification structure change is important as in FE a tutors role is much more involved with industry (Maxwell, 2014). Not only do all the tutors have industry experience, many deal with industry through their role. This might be through teaching apprentices, reference writing,

relationships with local businesses or awareness of the local job market. The tutors are also in a position to identify whether the newer course format changes in skills delivery were implicit or explicit. Some learning outcomes are stated explicitly in the unit guides and others were implied by the examination board in discussion on what students should cover. Tutors integrate pedagogical principles and educational values into their practice. Their overriding belief or preference for practical work as opposed to theory was not encouraged by management or within the neoliberal approach to education as Rizvi & Liguard state, education is re-imaged from an economical viewpoint (Rizvi & Liguard, 2010).

Comments on accountability, punishment and one size fits all teaching approach were included in the interviews. While ideally all tutors wanted to give their learners the best experience possible, in reality if a tutor introduced extra learning activities or practical assessments, they were reprimanded as the ethos of the FEC was that all groups of students on the same course must get the same lessons, delivery and assessment. While this is a reasonable approach, it also meant that those students who could potentially have a more practical based delivery, were unable to. Contextual factors in FE result in an environment in which assessment procedures completely dominated the students learning experiences as discussed in chapter 5 and authors McGinty (2015) and Courtney (2016) comment on the results driven culture and shaping of pedagogy; this is in contrast to Youngs stance on the 'acquisition of knowledge' for learners being at the heart of shaping pedagogy (Young, 2011). Compliance by tutors and learners alike evidenced an acceptance of the assessment criteria and not on the overall learning or a holistic approach, an acquiescence. Torrance suggests that this is a form of 'assessment as learning' as opposed to assessment for learning (Torrance, 2007, p.282). The comments suggest that assessment procedures and practices dominated all aspects of the learning experience and criteria compliance replaced learning (Torrance, 2007). However, this emphasis was also evident as the Engineering tutors developed their summative assessment instruments, chose assessment methods that accommodated their perceptions of students' dispositions to study and academic abilities, and which underpinned a *pursuit of a pass* ethos. This orientation appears based on the FE practices and notions that the BTEC programmes offered multiple chances to pass students, not allowing tutors to fail learners – see section 5.4. Historically, vocational tutors moved to alternative assessment methods based on their perceptions that students are unlikely to

prepare themselves well for such tests, and so unlikely to pass. To counteract this concern, tutors' used assessment methods that limited or eliminated the need for students to prepare, and through which they could more easily facilitate students' achievement of a pass grade.

8.1.1 Policies

It is evident that changes brought about by the CG's austerity cuts were not explained to either tutors or employers when the new formats were rolled out college wide. Instead of ensuring that each division had a sound understanding of the budget cuts, framework sea changes, funding withdrawals and ergo course changes, each division essentially relied on their line manager to cascade their knowledge and understanding and in some cases it was evident that there were gaps in that line managers' knowledge. This is not a problem in itself as all the tutors within the FEC interviewed were experienced enough to be able to adapt and teach whatever content is presented to them (given the necessary preparation time). The ability of FE Colleges to respond quickly to sweeping reforms is well noted (AoC, 2015; ESRC, 2013; Norris & Adam, 2015; James, 2019; BOS, 2016).

For the divisions who ran specialist courses under specialist exam boards such as CASH, EAL, Hairdressing, this was not an issue per se. A change in learner profile was a direct impact of the cuts, and the tutors could have had a better understanding. All tutors knew that funding cuts were responsible for the course changes. There was a reluctant acceptance of these cuts and changes which mirrored across all the participating divisions. For those tutors who had been in teaching for many years, they had experienced funding cuts many times over and rolled with the changes. Like other participants, this 'getting on with it' for a specific purpose or assessment outcome was a transformation in terms of their attitude towards their delivery but also signifies a slight shift in teaching identity as outlined in section 2.2.3. Certainly, for those tutors who taught largely practical units prior to the reforms, the new theory based delivery may well have reflected a lack of confidence or competence in some. Whilst all of the tutors in this study said that they were 'sold' the concept of the new BTEC and how it advantaged the learners, there were significant differences in their perception of what this meant, as reflected in their comments. As tutor responders compared their current practice to previous experiences before the curriculum changes under the CG, there was a sense of frustration by many and concern that the emphasis had been diverted from what they perceived as 'true' sense of

vocationalism, in terms of equipping the students with the trade skills to 'do the job'. This binary divide was evident from the views of the teachers who clearly could differentiate between theoretical work and practical and lamented the ability to deliver both. Burke's view was that teaching and learning was compromised (2002). The value of practical work or trade skills delivery was seen as a negative aspect by the tutors who expressed frustration with the format of the newer qualifications, and this is discussed at length in chapter 2.

A further tension point between the students / tutors and the college / exam boards was the perception of quality, which is a direct impact of the reforms, this perception of value is discussed in sections 2.2 and 3.2.1 -3. Achievement is a benchmark that FECs are required to statistically report and are held accountable to – certainly in terms of student funding. The students and tutors however were less accepting of the structure of the newer course formats in considering their course as reduced quality. The dropping of standards was not mentioned by the teaching staff but moving of the barriers was commented on in various forms often throughout the interviews.

Neoliberal policies which dictated what constitutes knowledge and its assessment plus the central regulation of the curriculum has been discussed by authors such as Yandell (2017) and Jones (2013). Debates on what constitutes knowledge are not new and under the CG and their white paper *The Importance of Teaching White Paper* (2010) a revised curriculum was published defining a newer knowledge model. Believing that this new 'knowledge-based' curriculum model would address inequalities in cultural and social capital Gibb declared "...our reforms were based on a desire to see social justice through equalising the unfair distribution of intellectual capital in British Society" (Gibb, 2015, p.15). Keep (2006) identifies that the size of the FE sector makes it attractive to policy makers and Smith and O'Leary go on to suggest that government intervention through policy allow 'policy effects to be achieved through the use of funding incentives and disincentives' (2013, p.245).

8.1.2 Pedagogy

Having already established that the BTEC 2010-2016 format gave learners a wider knowledge base (see chapter 5), the findings attempt to identify how deep this theoretical base was and whether there was room for the embedding of trade skills delivery. This model did however deliver a more generalised curriculum and satisfied the neoliberal approach of a more rounded educational model which promoted progression by the CG. The curriculum documentation analysis in chapter 5 and appendix 7 established that the verbs describing assessment emphasised theoretical writing as opposed to practical activities. The interviews looked to identify how the tutors managed this change and if measures were introduced to embed skills that were not being assessed within the GLH of any unit.

While students' experiences across different disciplines can be comparable it can also be the case that where staff skills, attitudes or capabilities were lacking this could negatively impact on the learners' experience. Whilst tutors could influence the extent to which skills were embraced by learners there was no standard infrastructure to influence staff within the college that occurred through training or CPD. CPD is essential for tutors to keep abreast of industry developments (see pages 39 and 183).

An outcome from the interviews was the concept of lack of teacher partiality in delivery of the courses in terms of curriculum / skills content changes and the removal (for some) of trade skills delivery. Students expressed different dissatisfactions than their tutors so the notion that the learners were not being best served was a perspective of the tutors but not necessarily the learners (see section 7.1). The dialogue analysed within the research revealed unique student experiences that represented their understanding of their BTEC courses. As discussed in Chapter 2, the fear that FE tutors operate under and the unstable curriculum have led to pedagogical practices that are assessment driven and the focus is on funding as opposed to quality delivery. Compliance and conformity were common among comments from tutors and Smith and O'Leary states that this is at the cost of the educational needs of the students (2013). This study has revealed elements of neoliberal policies effects at the chalkface, this undermining of vocational specialism and delivery was evident from comments by tutors, internal accountability to produce statistics for external bodies such as Ofsted was prioritised by FECs. These changes in external accountability and focus on outcomes is discussed by Bacarro and Howell (2017)

who state that institutional change and institutional outcomes are two moves towards neoliberalism.

This study has highlighted some pedagogical issues in the more theoretical format of the BTECs (in terms of skills delivery to a theoretical model as evidenced in the curriculum analysis in chapter 5 and tutors' perceptions from the interviews). It considers these in context of exploring pedagogical change such as that identified by Young (2008), Collini (2013) and Pratt (2014) who observe a loss of autonomy for the tutors and a criterion based curriculum in curriculum reform. This view is confirmed by the Sainsbury Review (2016) that claim that the BTECs are an academic pathway as opposed to a technical one.

The interviews revealed tensions between the teaching methods of all tutors with regard to embedding some trade skills development. Engineering students described how, that while they got to use some aged machinery (lathes and mills) for some basic task, they could not relate this learning to their perceived careers. The tutors were concerned about the lack of opportunity to teach hands on skills to the groups. This area of the study requires further research. In chapter 2 we identified the changing practise of tutors, result driven culture and the lack of autonomy for tutors. The study has revealed that changes in teaching practice at FE can be identified as consequence to neoliberal policy changes under the CG.

8.1.3 Qualification value

The professional identity of the tutors in this study is an additional unexpected outcome that requires further research. At the time of this study, the Government focus is increasing the knowledge and skills for vocational learners with the introduction of T levels but there is no discussion of how this extra knowledge for tutors is going to materialise or what form it may take. Some tutors adopted changes to their practices but viewed their course format in the more traditional sense. Some considered the new formats as a short-lived change that was cyclic. For some, ambiguities surrounding the notion of VET were reflected in their practice by 'going the extra mile' (See section 7.1.2). Nevertheless, evidence in this study suggests that differing responses by tutors were not particularly significant in terms of outcomes. Whether the tutors evidenced their practice in methods

other than the preparation of young adults into employment, the outcome did not alter for the students other than in some cases enjoyment on the course.

Addressing the integrity of submitted work and addressing the practise of 'constant submissions until they passed' culture was cancelled by the examination board when more stringent assessment rules were put into practice in 2015 (see Chapters 1 & 3). All tutors were under pressure for 100% achievement and both these factors support Youngs (2011) view that few tutors had any faith in the assessment methods which they saw as detrimental to the equality of learning. Supporting this view, Smith and O'Leary identify that corporation-centric cultures that demand compliance and conformity from staff result in the needs of the student coming second place to the financial needs of the FE (Smith and O'Leary, 2013).

With effect from 2019/20 BTEC marking of a number of their mandatory units was marked externally (Pearson, 2017). This is a significant shift from the model rolled out for over a decade where all work is set and marked internally with external moderation of a sample for each group. One of the reasons for this is to prepare students better for HE and include some exam practice. This move also has implications for the accountability of the tutors and the FE for funding, particularly in terms of pedagogical delivery.

Some Hair & Beauty students' viewpoint was that academic knowledge was not important for their chosen career. This lack of 'learning identity' contradicts the understanding of KS3/4 and associated learning identity that is assumed in schools (Raffo, 2003; Swain, 2007). This viewpoint is in contrast to these learners recognising and aiming for their qualification so that they can get a job. It can be questioned whether the neoliberal approach to provide a more general education assisted in equal opportunities while trying to address the vocational and academic divide, but this neoliberalist approach by the CG left few options for those who did not wish to progress to HE.

Working towards a career or trade was a common theme as opposed to academic learning. Although this study was a comparatively small size, this feeling was explicitly linked to all learners. Some were familiar with their preferred field of work and environment and some found work in different work areas due to the lack of employment opportunities in their chosen field and the competition to fill them, this is discussed in

section 6.4 Some of the childcare participants chose that field of work due to experience of babysitting and a lack of drive or interest in other areas.

Overall, the Childcare learners' aspirations were met, which included their achievements on the course and their career goals. This fits neoliberal thinking about aspirations and attainment of related employment. However, this is a reproduction of gender issues on a wider scale as discussed by Niemeyer & Colley (2015). The main theme was that although different levels of engagement or 'boredom' were highlighted, the learners' overall experience was that their courses prepared them for employment in childcare. While the reasons the learners had chosen childcare were not covered, 'I have always wanted to work with children' and 'I didn't really know what else to do' were common themes discussed by these participants. Some authors suggest that young people attracted to Childcare are uneducated and lack motivation or aspiration (Vincent and Braun, 2010 and Alexander, 2002).

There was low-level dissatisfaction from the Engineering learners interviewed. This was related to both lack of practical content and lack of relevant equipment to practise on. There did however appear to be a better understanding of the qualification by the learners and they had more realistic progression aims. Most understood that they needed to progress on to an Apprenticeship or HE in order to qualify in the field and thus gain employment so saw the course as a necessary stepping stone. Government at the time stated that they had 'much to do' to skill a workforce to meet Industry needs (Engineering UK, 2013). In a government paper in 2012 *Building Engagement, Building Futures*, the government identified there was a need for a strategy that included reforms to VET and skills in engineering. Despite this, in the same year the CBI said that action needed to be taken to address the relevance of the vocational qualifications (CBI,2012), the neoliberal approach is in direct contrast to this. While more funding was applied to the Apprenticeship schemes, the BTEC's changed little other than becoming more generalised.

IT was a little more difficult to define in terms of expectations. The format of the C&G courses prior to CG reforms were practical in nature and prepared learners well for particular roles in industry. The BTEC which was taught alongside these other

qualifications, was less practical by design. The students on the BTEC all bemoaned a lack of skills transfer which they equated to working with computer hardware and programming. While 2 – 3 units covered programming, the students claimed that they were only taught enough to pass the unit but not to be proficient in any programming language. Where there were units that involved computer hardware the students all reported positive experiences in building computers, diagnosing faults, installing operating systems, but this hardware unit was a core unit and the BTEC qualifications were software centred by design thus the expectations of the students needed addressing prior to coming on the course. While the BTEC did allow for learners to progress to HE on some form of Computing degree, the course did not cover the basics of Computer Science which is desirable on HE programs (A-levels did). The level of maths in the IT units was also very basic and this would have put any learners progressing to HE under further disadvantage due to the substantial maths content of HE computing courses. The performance of BTEC students in HE compared to their A-Level counterparts has been researched (see chapter 6), fewer BTEC students attain a high grade and there are high numbers of non-completers (Shields and Masardo, 2015). The Government responded by instigating a number of changes to increase the academic rigour of the BTECs including pass or fail exams, these course models were delivered from 2018 (Kelly, 2017). However, the students did get a rounded experience of different coding or programming languages which would help them in further studies.

BTEC formats (as at 2016) were designed taking into consideration the constant resubmission issues as every student had to be given the opportunity to pass and allowed for one referral of any piece of work only. This constant resubmission of the same piece of work was attributed to the target chasing culture within FECs. It did not however move from its criterion based design which Torrance et al state is 'integral to the educational method of the qualification' (2005, p.14). However, within the context of the FEC, the students and tutors concentrate on the assessment process and passing each unit, which is mirrored in some of the research literature (see section 2.4.5) and noted by authors Carter, (2012); Watts, (2013) and Braum, (2018). The LOs and assessment methods were highly influential in pedagogical design and practice but are not specific just to FE or to BTEC. The replacement assessment criteria are all Pass or Fail with no grading.

Bradley and Waller suggest that the credentials from qualifications are not considered an indicator of skills but in fact of position and class (Bradley and Waller, 2018). Spohrer suggests that policy focus on raising aspirations which then leads to educational achievement and success is flawed (Spohrer, 2011). This would suggest that where aspiration is low, so is academic achievement, that aspiration is a barrier to educational achievement and that successful employment is contingent on educational achievements (Rainford 2018). Class and location can impact negatively on aspirations as discussed in chapter 2. Stahl sates that working class people may reject what they perceive as middle-class learner identities (Stahl, 2016), this can be seen in the interviews with the construction learners who did not aspire to progress to HE but wanted to be builders.

This research cannot detail all of the changes in policy and curriculum over the past 20 years and previous Governments but aims to provide the reader with an outline of the changes to vocational curriculum under the Coalition and in some way, its neoliberal approach to educational reform, and how those changes affected those featured in the study. Certainly, the pattern of reform in education of the 1980s and 1990s within FE emphasised and re-emphasised the aspect of vocational education in relation to its content. "Employers have been complaining about our system of vocational training since at least 1867" (Hyland, 1994, p.81).

8.2 Research Question 2 : Is there evidence to suggest that any changes in employment outcomes can be attributed to the introduction of the reforms?

Here I consider in what ways the changes in policy and ergo delivery model were perceived to have an impact on employment and also identify the route of vocational learners to related employment. I identify and explore a range of difficulties in understanding policy change related to employment described by both the employers and students perspectives.

The rise of elementary and low skilled work suggests that trade specific roles were scarce and competition for the low skilled rolls would have been considerably higher. I argue that some of this can be attributed to the expansion of the class gap as described by the Social

Mobility Commission (2016) and explore gendered aspects of class division in competition for low skilled opportunities as identified by Skeggs (1997) and Colley et al (2003).

Local data suggests that employment in the local area against the national average was below the rest of the UK under the CG but that overall, in the UK unemployment fell steadily from 2011-2015 (LIM, 2015). Unemployment for the area was at 7.6% by 2015 as opposed to 6.4% for the UK. Figures in chapter 6 above show that there was an increase in care work, food prep and hospitality, nursing and elementary occupations, levels for which were higher than for the UK. However, roles in IT, sales & marketing, research and administrative professionals and associate professionals and managers / directors were lower than the national average by 2015 (LMI 2015).

8.2.1 Progression

There is evidence which supports the viewpoint that VET is diverse and provision is fragmented (Young, 2011). Wolf acknowledged that some vocational qualifications are highly specific and strongly oriented towards well established, predictable pathways to employment, but others are more general and flexible in nature and designed to deliver a wide range of skills (Wolf, 2011, p.19). The VET provision remains fragmented and this study has highlighted that some courses, in this case Hair & Beauty, remain employment role specific but others such as Construction, IT, childcare and Engineering become more generalised but despite examining the gender divide in education (see chapter 2) there is no supporting evidence to explain why some courses allow for progression and some do not. Chapter 2 included a discussion on gender and VET, chapter 5 analysed curriculum material and identified that the female dominated course formats remained unchanged which was not the case for the male dominated pathways. I then consider whether these gendered roles are considered less aspirational. Platt and Parson write that males are more likely to aspire to software developer or engineering roles (2017) and Archer (2014) claims that girls are more likely to aspire to creative roles. The data in this study reveals repeating patterns of gendered identity but questions why some male dominated course formats were changed to allow for progression despite having been historically vocational, & skill based the construction course is the example.

BTEC qualifications were advertised as designed for employment and *'designed to provide highly specialist, work-related qualifications in a range of vocational sectors. They give the*

learners the knowledge, understanding and skills that they need to prepare for employment' (Edexcel, 2011, p.2). Wolf argued that there was a mismatch between the skills that the learners acquired on their course and the skills that employers were looking for (Wolf 2011). The BTEC became referred to as 'stepping stone' (Atkins, 2010; O'Shae, Lysaght and Tanner, 2012) for becoming occupationally ready for employment or for further learning towards employment. Bathmaker (2013) comments that the BTEC Level 3 courses were different from the traditional vocational qualifications supporting the view that the courses had become generalised and not trade specific. Mendick et al claim that neoliberal policies create a hierarchy of aspirations that privilege some pathways and denigrate others (Mendick et al, 2018, p.60). My consideration of curriculum changes (see chapter 2 above) points to some ways in which this generalisation of qualifications is related to the neoliberal policies enacted in FE at that time, producing a number of learners that were neither skilled enough to progress straight into work – the examples are Construction, Engineering and IT students but not equipped academically to progress to HE. Reay writes that these young people were considered as failures who were 'not working hard enough' should they attain neither employment or HE status (Reay, 2017, p.13). This underpins the notion of individual merit and mobility as discussed in Chapter 2.

As detailed in Chapter above on 6 destinations, most of the jobs created in the UK in the period from 2008-2014 were zero hours, part time and self-employment (Rubery et al 2016). The period and data used in this study did not include details of long-term careers and largely reflected their short-term employment concerns rather than just immediate employment, but all learners agreed that pursuing a qualification would assist them in their imagined career even if they were not sure of the next step. For the majority financial worries were not a consideration until wanting to return to education if aged 19+ after the CG funding withdrawal and changes.

Most of the students accepted that they had to go further in education after school, largely towards an end goal; the RPA act did not come into effect within the period of this study, see section 6.2. The students' perceptions of a professional career were largely informed by personal experience, family and peers (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999). Images and success stories portrayed by the media would appear inviting compared to the option of entering into a stagnant labour market with no more than level 2

qualifications such as GCSE's (CVER, 2016). The decision to continue to HE from many participants is based on their perception of better employability. Constant references to 'trade' 'transferable' or 'industry' skills suggest that the students did not feel equipped to apply for industry related roles or believed they did not possess the right skills present to an employer.

What was once a reasonably straightforward process of finding employment within the local labour market by seeking opportunities after completing a level 3 course - a progression mostly unproblematic by both the relative availability of local work (for instance for construction, engineering, H&B and Childcare learners) and the clear options of possible pathways, is now a more complex and protracted process. The shift towards mass university participation has been crucial in changing this transitional process for young people, presenting new choices and risks. Despite neoliberal narratives that the education system was preparing these learners for employment, or as Brookes states 'future workers', the types of employment young people undertake is personal and likely to be far more influenced by factors such as the local employment opportunities (Brookes, 2017, p.13)

In 2008 14% of students progressing to HE held a BTEC qualification but by 2015 that figure was 26% (SMF, 2016). While WP has played a major part in increasing the numbers of traditionally under-represented groups into HE, there are still challenges. Studies suggest that BTEC students follow narrower pathways such as Sports Science and Business (Gicheva and Petries, 2018) and they are more likely to achieve a lower degree outcome or drop out in year one (McCoy & Adamson, 2016). Mian et al suggest that BTEC students are only gaining access to low-tariff universities (2016) which has led to some top universities being accused of 'BTEC snobbery' (Savage, 2018). BTEC students come from a range of backgrounds and traditionally these types of learners have low representation at HE (Mian et al, 2016). These students are more likely to be first generation HE students, male, older than traditional students, have a disability or come from non-white backgrounds (Banerjee et al, 2017). Banerjee goes on to suggest that BTEC students are more likely to drop out in their first year (32%) than A level students (8%) (2016). The findings in this study show that many of the learners would progress to HE as an

alternative to employment, but attainment and retention require further research (Holland, 2017).

The study did not focus on apprenticeships and there was little interest in the apprenticeship schemes from the learners and only discussed by Engineering students as a viable progression option. It is of worth to note that the gender divide is evident in apprenticeship schemes: engineering is 96% male and beauty therapy 99% women (Kirkby, 2015). Apprenticeships are open to anyone in the UK over the age of 16 but entry requirements differ (Foster & Powel, 2019). Further, Kirkby states that in 2014/15 only 32% of apprenticeship places were taken up by under 19's but 36% by those over 25 years (ibid,p.2). By 2020 the Government has created 30,00 apprenticeships but they are at a higher level thus inaccessible to the level 3 learners.

In contrast to neoliberal ideas, I identified that some learners had no aspirations to attend university. The notion of 'may the best person win' was coined by Young and is a cornerstone of neoliberalism (Miller, 1999). Supporting a society where there were winners and losers results in inequalities; the assumption that all participants have a level playing field and equal opportunities, which of course, they do not. Dorling states that this meritocratic approach legitimises social closure and exclusions (Dorling, 2015). However, in this study, for those that rejected university as an option, there was no discussion on the sacrifices that would have to be made in terms of finance and moving, (Archer et al 2007) and no mention of feeling like an outsider (due to class, wealth etc) (Reay et al 2009). The view of those who had no HE aspirations did not cover any sense of entitlement; the questions did not prompt for any discussion on the social backgrounds of the learners. Any mentions of inadequacies were directed at the course content and not the feelings of the learners.

8.3 Research question 3: What shape did skills take under the reforms in terms of course delivery

A major theme that appeared in a cross section of the research is the degree to which the level 3 courses did not allow for the practice of strong technical competence in terms of delivery or assessment, this was evidenced by the findings in chapter 5 and chapter 7. It was identified that vocational knowledge was a higher priority for the assessment bodies

as opposed to vocational skills delivery as identified by authors James et al, (2013), Ainley (2013). The exam board assessment documentation targeted knowledge and theoretical focus more (in line with the neoliberal thinking of a more generalised VET) and focussed less on vocational readiness. The curriculum assessment and interviews highlighted that the emphasis was on acquisition of fact, decision making and completion of set assessment work and less so on the acquisition of trade skills. The distinction between knowledge and skills is discussed in chapter 2 and in 2.5.1, the notion of context knowledge and specialist knowledge according to Young is introduced. This study aligns to Young's approach, in that the removal or demotion of skills as discussed in chapters 2 and 3 underpin the suggestion that there are divisions in who 'gets' which type of knowledge and Young states that working class learners were offered a different curriculum model than the affluent. Chapter 3 discusses Bathmaker's approach whereby skills are attached to vocational provision ergo adding to the educational divide, however this study has highlighted the removal of skills and a move to a more general content in qualification, as identified in chapters 5 and 7. The gender divide is introduced in chapter 2 and chapter 5, the curriculum analysis and chapter 7 highlight that removal of skills was evident on the male dominated courses but not for the female – the contrast between format change of the construction qualification and Hair and Beauty as identified in these chapters are indicative of an ongoing gender divide in education which is discussed in chapter 2.

The participants made judgements on what they perceived the skills to be, how successful they were in acquiring them (in the case of the learners) and what value they held. For the learners I would expect there to be a different viewpoint from those within the education system and those who were previous learners now in employment – their view would be more realistic in terms of employment and their future versus the current students' aspirations and a neoliberal curriculum design. The definition of skills may differ from tutor to student, so it is important to bear in mind that in this study some of the terms have been used interchangeably by the participants.

Practical learning activities were largely absent from most courses (with the exception of Hair & Beauty). Findings suggest that the lack of practical skills delivery was due to curriculum model changes which were implemented through budgetary constraints.

There were no arrangements made for practical exercises in four of the five pathways, so the students could not translate these to their chosen profession or indeed gain employment in that profession. Hence a suggestion is that the curriculum or educational model should make adequate provision for the delivery and implementation and assessment of practical skills. Tutor autonomy is essential for the embedment of skills on these courses and thus the vocational model should be designed to allow for this. The T level qualification was introduced in 2020 and devised under the Technical and Further Education Act as a means to address the skills gap. In The Post-16 skills plan of 2016 the Government recognised that technical skills and their provision were still weak in the UK. In the paper they discuss “rather than the current crowded landscape of overlapping qualifications” (BIS, 2016, p.8) and insist that the new T-Levels will address this lack of skills.

Many of the course specifications and documents claimed that the learners were assessed on their abilities to relate or map theoretical concepts to competences or practical work. Analysis of the course documents and interview responses suggest that this was common practice in the three male-dominated trades, Engineering, Construction and IT. Hair & Beauty however was very much more skills and practical based. Childcare was all theoretical other than the work placement aspect of the course where the student skills were assessed via a workbook in the workplace. In this context students were required to put techniques into practice. The question then is why was one pathway suitable for WP and not the other?

Skills which are transferable across sectors and job roles are desirable by Industry, thus students may have preferred courses that offered a wide range of these softer transferable skills rather than occupationally specific skills (FutureLearn, 2020). BTEC in this case fits this profile. But for the sake of Construction or Engineering learners who wished to progress straight into industry, the BTEC did not prepare them for the role. The BTEC design was driven by framework and policies and not by students’ or employers’ needs. Assessments had learning outcomes defined by exam boards requiring all students to achieve all criteria to at least a Pass. While the assessment practices were essentially under the control of the tutor, the exam boards had control over what and how, number of LO’s etc

An outcome was that learners were predominantly focussed on what their versions of skills were, this version may have been different to the tutors version or the examination boards version. This interpretation of skills may not be comparable with those in related industry, and an example of this is the desire of the learners on the IT BTEC to be 'games programmers' and what they considered that entailed.

I have considered the debate on skills and their place in VET in chapter 2 and 3 above, particularly with regard to the BTEC courses included in my study where I have analysed the format of these courses and their suitability for FE students (see Chapter 5 above). I have highlighted that the BTEC was in a precarious position with the then imminent roll out of the more technical T levels to be offered, as well as general education qualifications. I questioned the place for these BTECs in the qualifications market and within VET. Pearson's website states that the RQF BTEC which were still funded (as of 2019) still had an important place alongside the T levels and academic pathways. They do however state "It is unclear how T levels will affect Applied Generals and Technical qualifications at level 3" (Pearsons,2019). A conflicting report claimed that "Government consults on plans to withdraw funding from BTECs" (schoolsworld, 2019; FENews, 2019). The report also refers to BTECs as 'legacy' and questions their place in the new curriculum offerings. There is fear however that thousands of students who do not get the entry grades for either the T levels or A levels will be left without options, but given the rhetoric on skills, where will the BTECs fit in? We know that the BTEC played a positive role in widening participation over the past decade but there still remains doubt over the success of BTEC students once they are on their undergraduate programs, having the highest non completion rates (see section 6.5.1). The choice between the T levels and the A levels is now being referred to as a 'binary choice' in which case the question arises of where do the BTEC sit. As of 2021, the DfE is removing funding from BTEC courses in its attempt to address the qualifications landscape. Funding for T levels and A levels will continue but the DfE state that the T levels are 'more rigorous than existing technical qualifications. and 'at the end of a T level a student will be competent to start entry roles in their chosen occupational area' (DfE, 2021,p.18)

Throughout this research I have used the notion of skills and transferable skills, or lack of and the students were able to articulate the significance of these skills on their learning.

It emerged that the learners expressed increasing confidence from their course and autonomy. I suggest that this could be a new perspective on transferable skills or employment skills and further suggest that this study could be a contribution to the ongoing skills debate.

8.3.1 Skills

A key finding was a tension between academic and technical skills, in contrast with the aims of the Coalitions reforms.

In a review by Sainsbury et al (2016) a recommendation was made for a technical education strategy that allowed for technical competence to be delivered through apprenticeship frameworks and the academic component pertaining to 20% delivered through FECs. The report stressed that the technical option – delivered through a workplace “needs to be clearly delineated from the academic, as they are designed for different purposes” (2016, p.9). The experiences of the tutors and students and the curriculum material analysis in chapter 5 show that this is not what manifested from the reform changes. Supporting the view that the vocational qualifications offered little in terms of skills transfer or vocationalism (other than H&B) Coffield identifies in his research that vocational qualifications have been ‘watered down’ (Coffield et al, 2005) and others such as Gleeson and James (2007) and Berger (2003) propose the notion that the vocational tutors become deskilled as well as the learners. While there is no discussion about this within the research, the efforts taken by teachers to deliver all of the LO’s within the BTEC courses in order for the students to pass indicates a move away from the more vocational side of teaching which is essentially part of the recruitment requirements for FE tutors. Gleeson and James go on to suggest that vocational tutors have been experiencing demoralisation in recent years (Gleeson and James 2007). We can deduct from the tutors’ comments that there was a sense of this, a sense of acquiescence and being penalised for trying to do more / better for the learners.

Learners on courses prior to CG reforms, such as City & Guilds courses, stated that they found the course a positive experience, enjoyed the process and got on well and could relate their learnt skills to a job. In contrast to this, the training most of the groups under the CG years had delivered was constructed around the demands of the assessments – this would include report writing, time management, use of IT, maths & English inclusion,

communication skills. This was viewed by some as arbitrary and not in keeping with what they wanted to learn on the course.

My interviews with the CG students suggest that there is a tension between assessed skills and student perceptions of workplace usefulness, and this is a key cause of dissatisfaction. Students viewed the majority of the assessments as theoretical; where there were practical opportunities to practise trade skills (other than Hair & Beauty) such opportunities were seen as minimal; as a result, students did not feel equipped to progress to related employment. Some of the learners expressed hostility to their learning and stated that their course was 'useless' and a 'waste of time', expressing the idea that completion was 'for the benefit of a spreadsheet'. They could not relate their classroom learning to any work skills. This dissatisfaction was a common theme among the male-dominated disciplines: IT, Engineering & Construction. Engineering students felt they learned only the basics. They saw practical tasks as small and simple and felt they were not given the opportunity to practise or develop new skills. They perceived an emphasis on knowledge rather than skills acquisition and experienced this as repetitive and lacking any real depth.

I identified that differences in the views of former students now in employment suggest a failure in neoliberal discourse of limitless aspiration and self-improvement (Furling and Cartmel 1997). The views of those in work drew more on their gainful employment experiences; these positive experiences shaped their views more pragmatically than the (then) current students aspirations. This limitation of aspiration reinforces the established pattern of VET leading to lower paid employment (Brunello & Rocco, 2017), and highlights the failure of neoliberal policy to redress social inadequacies.

The employee / student divide was less apparent in the female dominated courses and the experience of the students. There was greater focus on skills acquisition, and a more seamless transition to employment. There was a strong perception among childcare students that the skills developed during work placement had made a significant contribution to the subsequent related employment uptake. These findings suggest that work placements and skills delivery, as well as providing networking opportunities and work experience, offer a valuable preparation for the kinds of problems and difficult

situations that the qualified students often encounter when leaving FE. However, they may also indicate that aspirational targets for female students are lower thus encouraging students to form lower expectations from the outset, resulting in less tension. Female students, while finding employment relatively easily, are transitioning into jobs which are lower status and poorly paid compared to those aspired to by students on male dominated courses.

To put this in a national policy context, the economic growth and widening participation acts; (DfES: 2003; Dearing Report, 1997; Aim Higher Program: 2004) followed the CG move from hands-on vocational training or trade skills delivery in the main. The acts pushed for skills transfer/delivery to happen in Modern Apprenticeships frameworks. However, the CG failed to make provision for the frameworks, thus illustrating the paradox at the heart of England's approach to VET policy. In times of economic recession, the CG intervened directly in VET by introducing initiatives to cope with vast numbers of unemployed (RPA); whilst in times of economic prosperity, government cuts back on funding and exhorts industry to invest in training (Modern Apprenticeships) but does not legislate to make this happen. The CG was far from reflecting the needs of the employers or indeed supporting them to achieve a national vocational training strategy. Reforms were not clearly defined despite the CG endorsing a "gold standard in vocational training" (DfE & BIS, 2013,) and a commitment to apprenticeships as part of that gold standard, a higher apprenticeship was introduced and the government took funding from other programmes to fund these new apprenticeships. There was a lack of safeguards put in place to ensure high quality Apprenticeship schemes or standards and confusion over funding (Richmond & Simons, 2017).

The format of both Childcare and Hair & Beauty courses remained surprisingly unchanged. There is evidence to suggest an indication of gender issues in the research (see Chapter 2), in the literature but not in the student views. There is however much research on STEM and the lack of female representation in the fields and government initiatives to increase the female numbers, but for these two service-based sectors, there is no documentation to suggest why the course format remained unchanged, yet the male populated courses did not. Evidence from curriculum material and interviews showed that Hair & Beauty and Childcare were the only areas unaffected by the reforms or course teaching model delivered. I suggest this might

be attributed to the industries involved, H&B and childcare having fewer large-scale employers thus less industry representation. Further as they are largely feminine fields, they may be perceived as having lower status and hence ignored by the reform this is an indication of 'gendered habitus' as discussed by Reay (1998), Collet et al (2003) and LeDoeuff (2013) and consider whether childcare and hair and beauty are of the more caring and tacit fields ergo given less respect or status than perhaps building of walls. The skills for hairdressers were no more complex than bricklaying yet the Construction courses were the most affected by the reforms in terms of removal of skills training. Further research is therefore required to establish why this pattern exists. The students all developed a broad set of skills however the development of more trade or occupational skills were deemed lacking and the introduction of the new T levels has been designed to address this with work placements as mandatory elements.

In this chapter I have presented key findings resulting from the data in relation to my research questions. I demonstrate the impact of reforms on curriculum design, and how such reforms are perceived and experienced by learners, tutors and employers. I argue that, in attempting to raise the status of VET qualifications through a focus on theoretical and transferrable content that may lead students into HE, courses are perceived as neglecting skills delivery. As well as the impact at the level of classroom delivery, the data reveals ways in which neoliberal maxims are reproduced - or rejected - by learners in their own aspirations.

I have also considered 'skills' as a concept that can be shaped to fit differing agendas; I show how, through the data, 'skills' are differently constructed by employers, by tutors and by CG VET policy reform. I also illustrate ways in which male-orientated and female-orientated courses are differently impacted by neoliberal reforms and suggest that this diversity impacts reflect a wider cultural valuing of skills perceived as belonging to masculine or feminine work domains.

The curriculum document analysis did not identify any gender bias in the course design. The test always refers to learners or students and not any gender. There is no specific information about gender or stereotypes within the exam board documentation or within the FE course documentation. The study had initially been designed to include Catering which had a rich mix of male and female but despite requests, but I was unable to recruit participants in this field; the inclusion of students and tutors may have given an insight into any gender issues or sector issues. More research is required into the gender disparity identified in this study.

9 CONCLUSION

In this final section I review the findings with reference to the original research questions:

- 1 What do the views and experiences of key stakeholders tell us about the impact of the reforms?
- 2 Is there evidence to suggest that any changes in employment outcomes can be attributed to the introduction of the reforms.
- 3 What shape did skills take under the reforms in terms of course delivery?

The purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes of policy reforms on level 3 vocational education within an FEC. This small study at a Northern FEC has examined VET policy reform outcomes for learners on a vocational level 3 vocational programme in the fields of IT, Engineering, Construction, Childcare and Hair & Beauty while under Coalition Government between 2010-2015.

The findings in chapters 5, 6 and 7 followed the research questions and addressed these thematic areas: The impact of the reforms at the chalkface, the importance of assessment methods, the impact on destinations or progressions for learners, the profile of the students on the courses, the pedagogical models post reforms, the awareness of employers. Following is a discussion on these points.

The research explores the context of educational reform by the CG which largely adopted neoliberal educational policies from the Conservative Party (despite the Lib Dem education ministers), but not the previous New Labour government. To allow for WP, my analysis suggests that vocational courses were adapted to adopt a format with less focus on trade skills delivery with the aim of broadening progression options and allowing for progression to HE for vocational students. Through this study I critique the nature and impact of these policy interventions. I find that changes appear to respond to the CGs desire to promote FE and VET within a competing market. Data from interviews indicate that the removal of skills is not something that was desired by employers or learners. I found that while policy is shaped on pedagogical practises there was little evidence to suggest that the tutors agreed with the changes. Tutors saw the changes as a move away

from useful hands-on skills transfer and teaching to a more target chasing generalised format.

The changes to qualifications brought about by the reforms and overarching qualification frameworks were examined in this study in Chapters 2 and 5. I have identified the tensions between the approaches and structures of courses under the QCF and replacement NQF. The DfE identified that there was 'insufficient content regulation' within the VET provision which included assessment strategies (DfE, 2017, p.13). I have argued in this study that while the overall intention was to allow for progression to HE under the WP scheme and provide a more rounded employment skills set, these tensions reflect the conflicts in an unskilled workforce of construction and engineering FE leavers and also poorly prepared learners for HE. The well-being of students is ignored by the policy makers in its drive to supply labour for the national economy. FE is characterised by its ability and history of providing skills and VET to a range of learners from diverse backgrounds (DfE, 2021) and as such is placed for much government and policy intervention. Constant policy reforms also create an unstable curriculum which is subject to many and often rapid changes to respond to government demand. The constant changes then have little time to be evaluated, to be analysed and become questionable in their purpose.

This study highlights the impact of neoliberal thinking on educational reform in terms of influence on policy, central role of individual aspiration, here seen enshrined in the principle that most learners can or should progress into HE. VET changes introduced by the CG could, appear to aim to level up a sector in which traditionally only engineers might progress to university level qualifications, and open this opportunity to all vocational subjects. The more modest local opportunities taken up by most students, and a clear gender gap in the course provision of skills understood as higher-level theoretical, and lower-level hands on both reveal key failings in neoliberal approaches to VET design. Neoliberal principles informing the CG reforms do not, however, provide an adequate rationale explaining why male dominated subjects provide opportunities to progress to HE, and while female-dominated subjects do not. This key finding is an area that warrants further research.

The findings would support that the learners who studied on the vocational pathways from 2010-2015 experienced certain characteristics of outcomes on the BTEC courses that were representative of that period only, examples of this were the constant submission of the same piece of assessment work several times receiving feedback each time. Assessment format changes were rolled out in 2015 to the BTEC level 3 qualifications that addressed this pattern and allowed for only one resubmission of any piece of work. The vocationality and value of the cohorts courses differentiated them from learners before the CG in 2010 and since 2015 when the awarding body made some major changes to the assessment processes. The study investigated whether the nature of the content, delivery, assessment methods and processes were preparing the learners effectively for HE or for their chosen career path as opposed to meeting the neoliberal agenda. In all of the male dominated courses: IT, Engineering and Construction the cohort suffered the effects of wider changes in policy and funding in VET (in terms of removal of trade skills delivery) and a course structure that was moving away from its vocational routes to be more theory based. This illustrates concerns raised in research question 2 – “Is there evidence to suggest that any changes in employment outcomes can be attributed to the introduction of the reforms?” but raises questions about the gender divide. Bates (2006) Skeggs (1997) and Deutscher (2010) identify repeating patterns of gender stereotyping, and these can be seen within this study.

Exploration of curriculum changes (Chapter 5) and students’ perceptions (Chapters 7 and 8) suggest that skills teaching has been eroded, however, it also reveals difficulties in defining skills, which exacerbates their perceived absence. This study recognises the perceptions of the term ‘skill’ and suggests it is problematic and an ambiguous umbrella term, but one that has political traction in the discussion of VET. When addressing research question 3 on skills, there were problems with the terminology relating to skills used by governments and policy makers (achievements, competence, skills) and I suggest that this can be seen to mask the limitations in the skills being delivered to VET learners. This is identified in Chapter 3 which examined the terminology of skills and Chapters 7 and 8 that consider the skills transfer and what shape skills these took. The CG stated that students needed to have the skills to progress to the workplace or HE. My analysis of the curriculum material reveals that the BTECs still endeavoured to wear both hats and fit in with both aspirations. Comments from researchers such as Bridges (1993), De la Harpe

and Radloff (2013), Unwin (2004) and Coffield (2008), and tutors suggest that there may be a shift in perception of skills for industry. Hughes and Mager (2000) write that there is a clear lack of focus surrounding skills debate which is partly due to confusion on the term 'skills' and its use. They stated that 'skills may be specifically vocational, key or generic' (pg 4). More recently, HoC claim that the UK skills system is 'highly fragmented' and failing (HoC, 2018).

Neoliberalism itself is founded on the concept of the adequately skilled and motivated individual adapting themselves for changing employment markets, with the education 'market' evolving to deliver such skills (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). An inability to agree a definition of skills, and to meet student expectations of skills education, suggests a key failure in neoliberal policy changes in VET.

I contend that the policy makers demonstrated a lack of clarity over what they were trying to achieve with VET and how they were going to achieve it, raising the question of whom the reforms were serving. The policies examined in this work reveal a consistent pattern of reforms by different governments. Tackling the skills gap and shortages, improving social mobility, increasing participation, boosting economic growth and addressing the 'parity of esteem' have been a focus of a succession of manifestos, and used to justify why previous reforms had not worked. It is into this landscape that the new T levels were launched.

The BTEC courses were designed to lead to progression to HE and / or employment but also claimed to provide necessary skills for the needs of industry. Learners were expected to take 'rigorous' qualifications that 'enable genuine progression' (DfE, 2012,p.7). The need for policy makers to maintain the 'parity of esteem' did not serve well for the vocational qualifications. The CG did not present new courses but adopted new qualification frameworks or new centrally driven vocational programs.

The dual purpose of the courses raised several tensions between ideologies and educational purposes; this is discussed in section 2.4. The LOs and structures steered the students to develop their general workplace skills as opposed to deepening their theoretical knowledge. However, Hodgen & Marks (2013) argue that high-level thinking

or high level skills are not required for many vocational roles and the relevance was called into question by the learners on the three male-dominated pathways. Interestingly, although the students on childcare complained about learning what they considered as 'dry theory' such as health & safety, they could see the merit in it and seemed to adopt a more mature attitude to the theory that they did not particularly engage with.

I have identified that the BTEC courses in this study struggled with identity, neither truly vocational nor academic, and that the generalisation of content placed them between fully vocational courses (such as Hair & Beauty) and the academic equivalent, the A levels. Supporting this view, Young identifies that academic qualifications and VET have different statuses in Britain which align with inequalities in broader society between mental and manual labour. Young further suggests that attempts to address the 'parity of esteem' will not succeed as education cannot compensate for all of society, the reforms take no account of the nature of what is being taught – construction, bricklaying and cement mixing is an example here and the push to genericise skills alienates the learners from the very thing they are engaged with – again construction learners creating powerpoints which does not connect to laying bricks.(Young, 2008).

Cruel optimism within the context of this study is identified within the promise of successful employment and financial security which are tethered to the areas of FE provision under scrutiny. Aspiration is, as discussed above (p 147) central to the neoliberal vision in terms of wider economic and specifically education policy. Within neoliberalism the individual is responsible for his or her success, which can be achieved through taking advantage of education and training opportunities. Such a vision does not however take into account the abilities of different individuals to benefit from such opportunities. As I discuss in (Chapter 6), employment opportunities for FE learners are often highly localised. 'Cruel optimism' is implied in the encouraging of FE students to aspire to employment for which they are not realistically qualified; this was visible in the IT students who wanted to be games programmers and to an extent, the construction students who wanted to be builders but were left without the skills for employment. This attachment to unattainable futures can be seen to be detrimental to wellbeing, as argued by Berlant (2011) because it creates a sense of failure and dissatisfaction among learners.

A particular failure then of neoliberal education policy under the CG revealed by this study is its failure to recognise local employment conditions or traditional classed cultures of learning in PCET

Continuing the identity dichotomy, I show that the examination boards, qualification frameworks and the then government firmly placed BTECs as vocational courses allowing for progression to HE or employment in that field. Davey and Fuller (2013) identify a number of hybridised qualifications that cross the binary divide between vocational and academic. Ainley & Allen (2010) refer to vocational education as 'education for employability' (p.159). In contrast to this, the vocational sector is seen by some as a stepping stone to HE (Atkins, 2010; O'Shea, Lysaght & Tanner, 2012). I have identified and discussed how the reforms were enacted under the CG (Chapters 2,5 and 7) and highlighted the views on the positionality of the courses from the participants who mostly considered the courses to be theoretical with the exception of Hair & Beauty.

Progressing to HE after their level 3 course can be seen by many as an option which removes the students from progression into the labour market into low paid, temporary menial work. The irony is that research has shown that a significant number of graduates are forced to take the very same work that they were hoping to avoid thus creating greater competition for any vacancy (Cliften et al, 2014; ONS, 2013). Youth unemployment during the Coalition Government coupled with the Social Welfare reforms with its extra ruling on conditionalities on benefits created an environment of 'take what you can get' for students. Accusations that FE funnels young people from diverse backgrounds into low paid, low skilled work is a contrast to how VET is portrayed (Bathmaker, 2013).

In relation to research question 2, labour market policies support the aspects of employability, that individuals should possess the correct skills and knowledge to be employable thus equating to any failure to secure employment being considered a personal deficit as the person does not have the ability to be employed (Green & Henseke, 2014). With the economic climate as it was, workers or students had to compete for any vacancies so employability not only depended on the skills an applicant had, but applicants who lacked skills and any form of work experience, saw their chances of gaining

quality employment significantly reduced. (Shildrick et al, 2012). Austerity is likely to be a continuing factor in shaping educational policy, so an attempt to reflect on changes and consequences is both timely and justifiable in considering future research for policy and practice.

The BTEC courses in this study in the main failed to provide the learners with industry skills training in the fields of IT, Engineering and Construction, which in turn failed to provide for a youth labour market with severely limited employment opportunities for the young thereby decreasing their chances of gaining related employment. I have identified that some of the students did not see the real value of their qualification (Construction and Engineering in particular) but this study has not explored whether there is any linkage to the degree of success to achievement. I did not include examining whether there was the incentive to work hard and achieve higher grades in all of the pathways. I did identify that the older qualifications had a strong emphasis on practising skills and working hard on assessments that did not allow for multiple submissions. There was clearly a perceived value placed on practical work and learning and learners seemed to place value on their courses believing that the skills they learned would be exchangeable for related work. Learners on the IT BTEC learned that their course was not going to qualify them for roles that they aspired to, 'games programmer' being the most common. However, employability is more than just job-focussed skills, it encompasses a range of abilities and attributes. The BTEC did equip the learners with general skills, along with the opportunity to progress to HE. There was overarching consensus on the overall levels of confidence the duration at the FEC gave the learners – all claimed that their course gave them the confidence to apply for work. Whether this can be related to their course or the nature of developing more adult life skills and a more mature outlook is debatable. The learners' comments on the usefulness of skills attained provide some indications of their feelings towards the BTECs and also give a useful insight into how policy was being experienced on the ground level.

My findings did reveal some key benefits of VET not necessarily identified in policy and curricula: FE plays an important role in preparing young adults in their transition to work or HE. I found that FECs' role goes beyond this and helps the students in terms of social and personal growth. The student interviews revealed that the courses and overall

learning experience gave them the confidence to apply for work and this optimism can be partly down to the supportive framework that FECs offer. The students developed more independence in their own learning.

I introduced evidence to show in the interviews and curriculum material analysis in chapter 5 that the courses were assessment driven. Pedagogical methods appeared to be constricted by the content and design of the courses as dictated by the examination board. All of the tutors in the study claimed to have little regard for the changes in curricula model and saw the new format of courses as more theory work and less practical for the students. Interestingly this was not reported by the majority of the senior tutors in the study. It would seem that the more informed they were, the more accepting of the changes they were and displayed an ability to see the 'bigger picture'. Tutors also bemoaned the pressure to get the students through and ensure their success under the centralisation of FECs to OFSTED (AoC, 2015).

By analysing assessment methods, I found that methods of assessment were a prominent issue in for a number of reasons. Mainly, the BTEC curriculum is broad and according to a number of learners, aspects were considered as irrelevant and some of the coursework onerous. The majority of the learners did not address broader influences impacting on the course model and in a number of cases, neither did the tutors. What was missing was an examination of how the courses were promoted from IAG at school through to enrolment advice. It is clear that the courses worth was bolstered in publications from the exam board and from the FEC for recruitment purposes, details of both are available externally.

My findings highlight some serious concerns regarding the assessment models. The high percentage of assessment verbs 'describe and explain' showed a lack of variation and opportunities to both teach and assess student learning. It could be considered that this teaching to test approach led to surface learning only and there was no evidence of deeper learning as expressed in the course specifications and as discussed by Young (2010). To better understand the implications of assessment methods in HE preparation further research is required.

Research question 2 sought to address any reform outcomes in relation to employment. This is a complicated progression path as employment can be so varied. The study has

shown from interviews with employers that certain fields happily take students after their level 3 course – but these are the courses populated with females, childcare and H&B. Both courses according to industry representatives (see chapter 5 on destinations) qualify the learners to a standard where they are ready to step straight into industry. Both courses have deep roots with work experience or experience of work, as in the Hair and Beauty salon based within the FEC. The construction courses were supposed to prepare learners for employment, but the evidence gathered from interviews with construction employers and the curriculum material analysis in chapter 5, the employers lamented the lack of skills and hands-on competences and all stated they would not take on a level 3 college leaver for this reason. There is a dichotomy here regarding aspirations, the neoliberal concept of educational aspirations would indicate that construction college leavers were failing if they did not aspire to HE, however this study evidenced that this lack of educational aspiration was not related to their lack of vocational or employment aspirations. The interview findings suggest that inhibitory factors for particularly the construction students were directly attributed to the lack of skills delivered on their course. All groups of interviewees for the construction courses expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration at the new course structures. Engineering BTECs are supposed to prepare students with the knowledge, understanding and skills to enter the engineering industry. There are however concerns over the suitability of the BTEC course in preparing these learners within this field and learners would need an Apprenticeship placement if they wanted to pursue a career in engineering or a degree.

I have highlighted and discussed the gender divide and diversity of different vocational pathways. While the female dominant pathways were largely unchanged, there was a big shift for the three male-dominated courses in terms of theoretical content and approach. There was no evidence unearthed as to why this gender split occurred or what makes hairdressing a vocation but not a bricklayer. A lack of understanding for the justification is cause for more research. I suggest that childcare and H&B are considered more ‘service’ based and that also the extent of learning or training may be perceived as limited. However, certainly for Beauticians, there are complex procedures and treatments that require knowledge learning and competence testing such as semi-permanent make up which consists of tattooing eyebrows and eyeliner. Treatments for thread veins, tattoo removal, collagen injections, facial fillers etc all required higher level training than level 3

so it is unclear why the distinction has been made between Hair & Beauty and Construction vocations.

Gender trajectories patterns have emerged through this study and the learners on Hair & Beauty courses face educational barriers that the other course learners did not. The model of working-class females in Hair & Beauty roles is at odds with the aspiration aspect of a neoliberal stance that the CG adopted. Reay (2001) suggests that social mobility as only accessible through education is an attempt to disguise or hide social and educational policy agendas. The perception of success in this study with these particular female learners is demonstrated by their attainment on the course and progression to the field for which they have trained. This does not coincide with the government's notions of social mobility but does raise questions on the gender debate such as why these female students could progress straight into industry but some of the males could not. Individualised accounts in this study see a pattern emerging for the H&B learners assessing their own versions of success and ambitions in terms of career aims. This self-responsible behaviour by these learners support Reays' notion of 'cloaking policy trends' (Reay 2001). While none of the H&B interviewees made any reference to class or gendered provision, and while this study did not set out to identify gender stereotypes, through the literature review and findings chapters, the outcomes identify gender differences. I do not propose that all young people should attend HE but an argument emerges that suggests that they should however have the opportunity to and this should not be gender or class specific. Reay states that we maintain a system that polarises educational participants into racial and class-based norms and that a change is needed to combat this (Reay, 2017).

Skeggs suggests that these types of learners form their own value systems which have attributes of respectability and high moral standing (Skeggs, 2004, p.2) Tyler's studies on classification can be attributed to created social types that have been defined and represented within working class women's' public image (Tyler 2008, p.8). Within the study the perceptions from the female H&B learners indicated that they were accepting of their background and futures. Examining QCF documentation evidenced that in 2014/15, females made up 65.3% of achievers in Health, Public Services and Care but only 2% in Construction. These figures support the notion that women earn less than men

because they are in sectors where the wages are lower (TUC,2016). We can see patterns of gender differences in the population of genders on the courses in this study.

However, these gender patterns do not explain the issue of Construction learners and H&B learners, the male-dominated course underwent structure change, removal of practical skills to a more theoretical model and the ability to progress academically whilst H&B remained truly vocational and no changes to allow for progression to HE. It is this classification of Construction versus H&B that is confusing and requires further research. I have highlighted the struggles and issues that tutors face in the ever changing vocational curriculum and their lack of autonomy and pedagogical opportunities. Internal and external agents, such as FE managers and examination boards, shaped tutors' approach whereby they felt pressure to satisfy internal targets: QA verification systems, internal IV systems and maintain their integrity in facilitating the learning. I reveal a teaching to test culture existed and, in some cases, an overloaded curriculum. I also identify the culture of over-submission of assessment work and the consequent pressure on both tutors and students.

Constant modifications to qualifications and qualification structures are seen to be based on a belief that they will be of benefit to students, employers and the economy. Instead of fresh new initiatives which could be based on the lessons of old, findings suggest a position of policy amnesia (Hodgson and Spours, 2007; City and Guilds, 2014; Lum 2015). The reforms and overall lack of stability for VET at level 3 creates a situation of instability of the whole system (City & Guilds, 2014).

From the curriculum material analysis I have demonstrated an over reliance on two basic (assessment) verbs which, while implicit, narrowed the scope for pedagogical practice in their criteria-compliant design. The findings in this study also identified the culture of multiple submissions of a single piece of work until it passes and the pressure on tutors for student achievement. The LO and assessment dominant criteria is discussed throughout this study (Thompson, 2019, Lau, 2016) and how the marketised regime affected pedagogical practices.

In terms of preparing the students for HE Chapter 6 examines the figures for entry into HE, dropout rates at year one by vocational students and briefly looks at the lower degree levels achieved by most vocational student at HE. There is much literature on how prepared these students are academically (Hodgson & Spours, 2010; Gicheva, 2018; Hutchinson et al, 2020; Hurrell et al, 2019; Hapkau, 2016). There is much discussion on the maths skills of BTEC students but sitting exams and essay writing are other issues that appear regularly in terms of under-developed skills. Universities are now developing strategies to put in extra support for these learners.

Since the emphasis at the time of this study was on widening participation, the result was a change in VET curriculum model to a more academic one to fit the university entry requirements. Bathmaker suggests that VET is deeply entrenched in this wider political agenda and has therefore become 'entangled with questions of inclusivity and WP' (Bathmaker, 2013, p.89). Some may perceive this scheme was a move away from professions that were traditionally practical to a more elevated status, but this has been at the cost of practical professional readiness. WP was an approach to address patterns of inequality in the UK and was considered to be the panacea for economic growth and prosperity. Wolf supports the notion that skills and education are key to economic development (Wolf, 2015) however she later suggests that VET in FE were essential to improving skills and not WP (Wolf, 2015; Porter & Simons, 2015).

I have identified in this study that a tension exists between the academic and vocational content of these courses where one value has been compromised over another. Researchers such as Pollard et al reported that qualification learning does not always readily transfer from college to real life and that it often does not reflect employers' needs (DfE, 2017) FEC's have a generic aim to supply a number of skilled workers into the employment market although the mechanisms and external factors vary from one institute to another. Eddington and Eddington (2010) write that a vocational & training system "should be measured at four levels: economy, industry, enterprises and individuals but within the general context of sustainable development" (p.3). Comparing the aspirations of central policy makers to the short-term needs of employees and individuals can cause tension which results in missing the full effectiveness of VET. Neoliberalism is not an adequate framework for understanding all of the education policy

reforms in this study and how these manifested at the chalk face. However, I argue that there is some evidence to support claims that the impacts can be attributed to neoliberalism but some of the changes do not fall within this ideology. Aspects of this study that fall within neoliberal thinking include: student achievement as the metric against which FECs are judged (and payment by result); an individualisation of employment (students have to make themselves adaptable for a changing labour market); and FECs orienting themselves as businesses which need to be competitive in attracting and retaining students. However, some aspects of this study do not fit: employer involvement is much less evident than we would expect, there is evidence that the market rejects the products (employers complain on lack of skilled FE leavers and students find it difficult to get jobs). The differences across the five disciplines seem more connected to their internal nature and their history than to 'the market'.

A focus on developing the VET landscape by the RPA could be seen as a long term strategy for improving outcomes for these young adults (Hodgson and Spours 2011). The Wolf report recommendations were all adopted and a number of qualifications had funding removed. The emphasis was on developing a broad curriculum rather than one with a specific occupational focus; however, I suggest that this may have created a barrier to progression for some students – and in particular those on the engineering and construction courses. There was little progression into HE for Construction and Engineering, Hair & Beauty and Childcare students. However IT can be considered a more wide ranging characterisation of roles due to the fact that most businesses today exist on technology so there are roles for both the support of and the use of IT.

The next sea change in VET is the introduction of the T level qualifications. Fifteen new T-Levels pathways are being rolled out by 2020. Employers have contributed to their design and this input will underpin the T levels and apprenticeship routes. At the time of PhD completion, Pearson's did not have a T-level offering, they were still rolling out the BTEC courses. However, by 2020 vocational qualifications at level 3 and below will have funding removed and are classified as 'poor quality post 16 qualifications' (FEnews, 2019). However, there are critics of the new T Level courses and observers have claimed that they could draw parallels between these new T levels and The Diploma and concern over the structure of a course that was designed to be responsible for delivering students into technical employment or

HE. It didn't take long before problems emerged in terms of the roll out of these new quals, in 2017 it was announced by the DfE (2017) that there would be a delay for their roll out until 2020 and then in early 2018 the full roll out was delayed again until 2023 after bodies such as the CBI and the IFA raised concerns to the government about the capacity for all providers to roll out within the timeframes (Camden, 2018, Allen-Kinross, 2018). The pilot courses were still reported to start in 2020.

All of the courses examined in this study are in the list of courses which have funding removed from 2020. It could be considered that this highlights that the BTEC vocational qualifications struggled with their place in VET as they were neither vocational nor academic and with the creation of the new T levels, the BTEC has lost its identity. The national and policy context that this study operated in changed significantly through the duration of the research which began in September 2012, with data collection formally ending in November 2017 (although the examination of policy and curriculum content have been continued up to PhD thesis completion). The change of government in May 2015 alongside the Comprehensive Spending Review and new bills in local government meant the policy context changed through the time of this study. The study provides a snapshot of a dynamic situation and the analysis took place during the Coalition Government rule.

9.1 My contribution to knowledge and limitations of study.

Through exploring issues discussed in chapter 2 on neoliberalism, class divisions, patterns in education and gender divide, this study has built on the literature around these and other aspects that form educational policy. Examination of the notion of skills, employment markets and curriculum models were analysed in detail to help to understand how the impacts of the reforms under the CG manifested at classroom levels. There is a wealth of research on WP and the educational divide between VET and general education, however this study reviews the syllabus of the level 3 VET provision and offers a key contribution to policy effects and VET and offers a new perspective on how policy informs practice at a macro level.

My thesis contributes to understanding of the nature and impact of VET reforms in terms of the impact of the reforms and the reforms in FE in general. It offers original insights into local stakeholders' experiences and views and puts these into context of curriculum change and wider policy trends. It contributes to on-going debate about what form 'skills' take, and their place and value within vocational education at a time of growing HR expansion and entrenched social divides. The study focussed on one FEC and a range of five curriculum areas and employers and while the sample is illustrative of the local area, it may not reflect practice within other FECs in the UK therefore there is scope for further research.

The research could be expanded by examining the vocational course gender differences; as previously discussed, there was no literature to suggest why H&B courses had no content changes, yet Construction did. There is no suggestion either that one of these skill sets was considered more worthy than the other. This gender difference was an unanticipated finding. Research could be undertaken to encompass a number of FECs within the UK. This might include looking to establish if the patterns found within this one FEC are mirrored across different FECs, or perhaps different disciplines, such as Catering, Public Services, Business. These three fields have much more of a gender mix than the fields studied in this research which were all populated by one gender. My thesis established a baseline of knowledge, skills and experiences of learners on level 3 courses in the five identified fields of study before the introduction of T levels. I hope that the study can contribute to a greater understanding on vocational skills transfer and inform further research into this area.

9.1.1 Implications for policy

Parity of esteem has been on the agenda for many years. This study focusses on the VET provision at level 3 in one FEC. The discussions on the various approaches to what constitutes knowledge and also skills have been on the political agenda historically and was a factor in the policy decisions under the CG. The reforms identified in this study aimed to provide learners with a range of options for progression. This study identified the lack of clarity on knowledge and skills and indicates that class and gender divides are still present within the education system.

Authors such as Illsley (2016) discuss the relationship between FE provision and VET and FEs position as considered at the bottom or lower end of the class system in education. Certainly the coupling of economic policy and education policy is evident (Wright, 2012) and the neoliberal view that learning is good for economic success is a view revealed in this study.

The Examination board course designers and governmental policy makers initiated the course format changes, but these were left at macro level how best to integrate them. Decisions for such policy changes are based on their insights into educational statistics and success rates rather than evaluation of learner satisfaction and a holistic view on whether the designs were fit for purpose.

There is a need for additional research on the longer-term effects of the BTEC format and the impact. This study has a limited understanding of the impacts for vocational FE learners and is based predominantly on qualitative data. A quantitative study on the progress of vocational learners from the 2010 – 2015 period cohort across the UK together with performance in HE may yield a better insight into the long-term effects on a wider basis with more extensive evidence. One concern in the study is the issue of whether the students in the study experienced a greater or lesser degree of choice than other cohorts in different timeframes. The employment and destination data examined the opportunities for employment and also discussed the issues surrounding progression to HE for Vocational students.

In examining the rhetoric and effects of education policy under the CG I have highlighted how the policy changes excluded groups of learners, genders and classes while promoted others. As the issues which policy changes seek to address are fluid coupled with the constantly changing responsibilities of government departments, it is difficult to assess the impact of individual policies on other parts of the wider system. The increase of education leaving age to 18 and the emphasis on a more generalised education permeates the demise of skills taught on the vocational courses which in turn impacts of employment statistics and trends.

9.1.2 Implications for academic understanding of FE/ VET

The narratives collected offer a valuable insight into VET and progression options. I have highlighted that FE has played a major part in WP and in part this has placed FE provision on the radar for policy change, and this is discussed by Gleeson et al (2015). Simmons (2010) identified that FE prioritised education for the employment market dependent on competency-based outcomes for specific vocational settings (i.e Construction, Hair dressing) however I have identified a move away from this with the more generalised vocational course models introduced under the neoliberal approach of the CG. The culture of learning to gain knowledge is not new and Young discusses the definition of vocational knowledge and academic knowledge. The blurry lines of this distinction is revealed in this study when examining the curriculum models of the studied pathways and as far back as 2001 Bloomer identifies a 'softening of subject demarcations' and this notion has been identified in this study.

There are a number of actions the FE could take to address the skills delivery such as changing how the learning is assessed to a more practical method, taking steps to embed practical activities and tasks into the curriculum and for these to co-exist alongside theory but not instead of. To inform learners prior to enrolment the methods used to deliver the course would in part be managing the students expectations.

9.1.3 Implications for practice

Working in a culture where tutors are held directly accountable for pupil failure was identified in the study in Chapters 2,3,5 and 7. Using performance monitoring (Ofsted) the CG produced data that compared the performance of schools and FE against each other.

I revealed the practice of internal and external competition in the interviews with tutors: striving to achieve targets, improving learner and tutor performance against national standards, competing against other providers. Teachers were left to adapt their learning style and delivery of ever-changing curriculum models. Wood et al suggest that if tutors do not fit in the professional role of their peers, they are judged and not seen as valuable

(2016). I suggest that this neoliberal curriculum approach and design can have an effect on tutors identity and autonomy

The commodification of learning or knowledge was reviewed in this study. As Young writes, a reshaped curriculum that does not account for all learners of all abilities created barriers (2008) and certainly for the Construction learners, HE was not an option. Young claims that the government in their policies and the curriculum model change failed to distinguish vocational knowledge from academic knowledge (1998; 2008; 2009; 2011 and 2012). Lack of vocational context can be seen in this study in the construction course, the engineering course and to some extent the IT courses: the lack of opportunity to practise skills, lack of equipment, lack of timetable hours and generalising of assessment verbs / methods as identified in Chapter 5 curriculum analysis. This contextual learning was removed from the syllabus for these courses, but not for the Hair and Beauty which exposed the gender divide in education as identified by McNeil (2010).

The qualifications in this study were not considered fit for purpose by some employers, tutors and students, I propose that some lacked value to the end user. There remains a tension between the needs of the employer and the skills of the FE leavers who are not occupationally trained.

In contrast to this view, Avis identifies that the market forces serve to promote the middle class (1999) and that the emphasis on competition within the market forces and target culture creates 'a labour force that adds value to the productions process' (1999, p.48) and that this competition could disadvantage the important role that FEs play in society. This differentiation between the Construction and Hair and Beauty courses was revealed in Chapter 5, the curriculum analysis. The analysis supports Gerodetti and McNaught-Davies and their stance on options for working class girls (2017). Le Deouff claims that these gender divisions are evident in education (1993). This divide is not included in studies of the under-representation of women in STEM.

9.1.4 Final comments

ON balance, researching the sector in which I worked benefited the study. Because of my role as a tutor, I was able to develop more personal relationships with staff and tutors. I had already developed a sense of trust and this allowed me to ask more questions and probe further in the interviews. I was able to explore the terrain of the study and examine curriculum material first hand. I was able to observe teaching models at the chalkface. This insight allowed me to have a greater understanding of their experiences. My research combines observations from students both on their level 3 program and those that had progressed to employment which brings a rich mix of data to the views in this context.

Early in the research I learned that my understanding of skills transfer and what constituted skills was shared by many interviewed tutors and employers but not all. Certainly all the Engineering, Construction and Hair and Beauty tutors and employers held the belief that skills were a physical competence. However, I did learn from the research and views from others that skills can also mean the more general type, employability and it is these skills that replaced the hands-on ones of the previous courses. Had I been an outsider researching skills it is likely I would not have had pre-conceived ideas or 'baggage'. While at the beginning I was dismissive of these general skills as valuable, I developed as a researcher by listening to the views of others and understanding how they fit in the bigger picture and learned to put my own views to the side.

Despite the limitations described above, this study contributes to the on-going debate about what form 'skills' take and contribute to understanding the impact of the VET reforms at the point of delivery and learning at that time. My review of the literature, together with employment data and curriculum material allowed me to critique policy in VET and the impacts for the participants during the period. While there are a number of studies that have looked at VET and some in particular fields: Plumbing (Reddy, 2014), Home Economics (McSweeney, 2014), Drama / Performing Arts (Barker, 2008) Construction (Johnson, 2012), Science (Hutchinson, 2019) and Public services (George, 2016), but none has looked at a number of pathways in a case study, certainly the fields of Hair & Beauty and IT have little material evidencing research. In this context and for these subjects my research points towards the need for VET policies to adopt a more long-term perspective and stability, the need for vocational to have parity with academic courses, and that a wider range of skills and assessment methods needs embedding. This study also points to the need for students experiencing the full impact of reforms in VET,

whose views are mostly unrepresented in research, to be consulted in reforms in policy and practice.

10 Appendix 1 – Blank Employers consent form

Information Page

Changes to Vocational Education at level 3 under Coalition Government.

Dear Sir/Madam

Tina Baker is currently carrying out a research study on changes to Vocational curriculum and student profiles under the Coalition Government 2010 – 2014. I am writing to ask if you are able to take part in the study.

What would this mean for you

Participation would involve a 30 minute interview at a mutually agreeable location with open and closed questions. These questions will be about the qualifications / experience you had and have from potential employees leaving college. There will be some questions on education changes and course changes and essential criteria for employment with you / your company. The interviews will be audio recorded for reference.

Anonymity

The data that you supply will be stored by code number. Any information that identifies any individual will be stored separately from the data.

Storing and using your data

Data will be stored on a password protected computer and will be encrypted. The data will be kept for 6 months after the completion of the research after which time it will be destroyed. The data may be used for future analysis and shared for research or training purposes, but participants will not be identified individually.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to one year prior to completion of the research.

Information about confidentiality

The data that collected may be used in *anonymous* format in different ways. Please indicate on the consent form attached with a if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

I hope that you will agree to take part. If you have any questions about the project/study that you would like to ask before giving consent or after the data collection, please feel free to contact Paul Wakeling by email (paul.wakeling@york.ac.uk), or the Chair of Ethics Committee via email education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk

Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Tina Baker

11 Appendix 2 – Signed senior tutor consent form

Informed Consent: Policy changes in Vocational Education under Coalition Government

The Researcher : Tina Baker, PhD Student at University of York

My name is Tina Baker, and I am a student at University of York. I am conducting a pilot qualitative research study on changes to Vocational Curriculum and student profiles under the Coalition Government 2010 – 2012.

The Research

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how changes in Further Educational policy under the newly appointed Coalition government affected the learners at York College. The study aims to identify the changes in learner profiles, the delivery of true skills transfer, the move away from traditionally recognised vocational qualifications and the attitudes of the related industries and/or employers. The study's findings will be able to assist other researchers in determining the consequences of such policies and identify any historical patterns.

The Process

Your participation in the study will involve an interview with an estimated length of half an hour. This interview will be digitally or video recorded for later analysis. And a copy of the types up transcript will be made available to you.

Participation will be anonymous and no personal details will be included in the study which allow you to be identified. You may choose to leave the study at any time, and may also request that any data collected from you not be used in the study.

By signing below you agree that you have read and understood the above information, and would be interested in participating in this study.

Contact

If you require further details about the study please contact Paul Wakelin e: paul.wakeling@york.ac.uk
or Chair of the Ethics Committee Emma Marsden e : emma.marsden@york.ac.uk

Signed (name): _____ date: _____

KC Clancy 12/6/14

Appendix 3 – Signed consent form - tutor

**Policy changes in Vocational Education under Coalition Government
Consent Form**

Please initial each box if you are happy to take part in this research.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above named research project and I understand that this will involve me taking part as described above.

I understand that the purpose of the research is to research changes to Vocational education and student profiles under Coalition Government.

I understand that data will be stored securely on a password protected computer and encrypted and only the researcher will have access to any identifiable data. I understand that any students or staffs identity will be protected by use of a code/pseudonym

I understand that student data will not be identifiable and the data may be used

in publications that are mainly read by university academics

in presentations that are mainly read by university academics

in publications that are mainly read by the public

in presentations that are mainly read by the public

freely available online

I understand that data will be kept for 6 months after the research completion after which it will be destroyed.

I understand that ^{results in the thesis} data could be used for future analysis or other purposes

I understand that I can withdraw my data at any point during data collection and up to a year before completion of research.

Participant signature *[Signature]* Date 21 June 2016

Researcher signature _____ Date _____

12 Appendix 4 – SME Builders transcript – part coded

Steve Gunn Building Contractors Ltd – a limited company.

How many employee's do you have?

Eight

How many 16-19yr olds do you have now and how many 16-19yr old employed yearly?

I have none at the minute, and would take on possibly two a year.

Is that to start an apprenticeship?

Yeah – I prefer them if they have already started it because they will be a bit more use but rather than coming straight from school.

If not, or you have stopped employing 16-19yr olds, can you please explain why?

I cant get the apprentices – there isn't any .

So previously then, how did you get apprentices? Approach colleges? The scheme?

I have usually dealt with Bishop Burton, they , I would ring Jeremy at Bishop Burton and ask him and occasionally they would send someone to us or ring me and say there is a lad looking for a start, but usually I chase them.

How many 16-19yr olds did you employ up to and including 2010? 2010 to present?

15 years I have been going so a couple a year,

So 2001 then? Two per year

And 2010 to now?

Two in total?

Yeah

And is that because you cant get them?

Yes

Have you heard of City & Guilds and BTEC qualifications?

City and Guilds – I mean that's what I did, in brickwork, (so what do they have now?) BTEC – 'cos the papers they have now, it says they have passed the course and what can I say? They dont know enough about it.

(So – do the students that come to you now – have they got any hands on experience?)

Some have, some haven't got a clue, some don't even know which way to hold a sweeping brush. They have to start at the bottom and they are clueless.

(So – the ones that have got experience, is that through their education provider or have they gone out and done that off their own back?)

Yeah worked somewhere else before me yeah, I have had a couple of lads who have come in their 3rd year when they have been doing an extra year, so they are not as green, they know what's going on and they have had a go....

...it's nothing like when I did it, its four and a half years and you didn't get a trowel till you finished that and you got tret like crap for the next two years before anybody thought you were any good really. Its not like that now.

It's not helping 'cos they are coming on and think they want full money and they are 18yrs old and they want a grown mans wage and they don't know anything about the job but they have been told that they are qualified and that's what they can get

Which qualifications would you consider as essential for employment in your sector and which desirable?

As far as I am aware, the BTEC or whatever qualification they have now but its only about two years isn't it?

(Yes it is – but there is a difference between desirable and essential)

Do they still do advanced levels and what-have-you? When I was on you did City & Guilds for I think 3 years then you could do advanced brickwork which was another year then you could do another thing..

(that's all at full cost)

Right, you see where I was at (the dolies) they would have another class for men who were maybe thirty from maybe 16 and they would get an extra tenner ET = employment training it was called but an extra tenner, thats the ET to work alongside us but they would be like grown men who were doing it topping up their dole money with a tenner and stuff like that.

(So – you take them green and do you then put them on an apprenticeship?)

No, they come with that qualification and start at the bottom and see if they are any good – yeah..

...its difficult to know, you want have people who don't know what they are doing cos they are going to make a mess and its my name, its all about the reputation.

Has either of the above qualifications influenced your decision to recruit FE leavers?

Experience really, experience and a really good CV.

To be honest I steer away from school leavers because of insurance, but college leavers are ok.

They all seem to be doing the BTECs at all the colleges, I cant get insurance for anybody under 18, they are not allowed to use any plant or machinery so basically they are just stood looking... I wouldn't want to be paying someone. I wouldn't mind if they were coming for nothing to get a bit of on-site learning and watching yeah but I cant let them go above 4 meters and stuff like that, its too dangerous and they wouldn't be insured.

Please indicate whether the young people you employ(ed) are / were on:

- **You do apprenticeship – yep**
- **and you do people who are fully qualified and with experience, what about a training program other than an apprenticeship?**
- **No no. I have never been asked you see, by anybody. You cant even get hold of the colleges like I said the (college in study) one. Jackie was trying basically all afternoon last week trying to get through to the construction. I tried to put an advert in the Job Centre and that was even harder!**

Would you be willing to be contacted by telephone if necessary? n/a

Extra Info

You had your City & Guilds and were time served but that doesn't seem to have been replaced and nobody...

Everybody has to be shouted at by some miserable old man in a tie at work, they still wore bib and brace and a tie in my day – miserable old bastards.

So you would not take on someone who has got a degree in say, Site Management would you?

No they would be over qualified for my, working for me really.

Also do you find that the more qualified they are the less likely they are to hold a trowel?

Yeah I have had lads who have done degrees before, not in bricklaying or building but I had one lad who worked for me, he came as an apprentice who had done sports science at University. He did have a 30 grand debt though, which I had to deduct from

his wages, but he didnt stay long, too much hard work and I think the debt was crippling him, all the money coming out of his wages. We had this one lad who I Its like a vicious circle but the other lads that dot pay their council tax, I have to take that off them every week but that's their own stupid fault isn't it? I get high court letters you know from Humber Court Bailiffs and there are two lads at the minute I have to deduct every f**ing month – it's a right pain. And then they moan at me – its not my fault is it? I have to take it, it's the law. Pay your pole tax, council tax whatever it is.

So you have a problem in recruitment overall?

Yeah yeah.

Job Centre is hard...

I know it probably doesn't count now but one of the rules you had used to be sign a thing to say that it had to be, you could only advertise with them if it was advertised EU wide, which weren't really any good round here – its no good. I did a have a Polish kid that worked for us but he lives near Hull. He was a good hard worker and just wanted to earn like the British.

13 Appendix 5 – Team leader engineering interview transcript

Apprenticeships

Funded by company, like Nestle, they don't care about age because they fund it themselves anyway. That didn't make any difference to our full time apprenticeships because they are Company funded rather than Government funded anyway. But in terms of adult provision in the evening, that all went.

Do you know what year that was?

2010 when the Coalition came in. We saw all of the evening provision went, and there was quite a lot of evening class provision, particularly in motor vehicle for example.

Ask to run through the questions:

Role in 2012-2012?

Team Leader

Years teaching in the Division?

As (study FEC) College, 5 years, as 6th form and (study FEC) College, 30 years

What qualifications do you teach now?

BTeC L3, PEL – Performing and General Operations L2, Diploma in Engineering

Technology L3 EAL (old Sempta skills group)

What did you teach under New Labour (pre 2010)? When they brought in a myraid of new qualifications, and did you have to embrace any of the new Quals that Blairs lot brought in?

I was teaching mainly A levels at that time, and so they changed the A levels to vocational A levels.

And did you feel that the Vocational A levels allowed for that skills transfer? Or was it more about talking about it?

It was more talking about it. The actual skills went right out of the window

That is exactly my point.

Which exam boards did you teach under?

The old London Board.

Which exam board do you teach under now?

EdExcel and EAL.

Were the Diplomas or Certificates recognised by employers in Industry as desirable or essential for progression into the Industry?

They knew what it meant, it had currency value, they knew what we were talking about, and they don't now.

That's exactly my point. I don't think that the BTECs have as much weighting as the proper skills transfer vocational quals.

As far as I am concerned BTEC's, is that it means absolutely nothing in terms of a skills qualification. It means something in the terms that it shows that they can cope with that level of qualification, but in actual skills for outside in the workplace, its pretty meaningless I think. And in fact, all the pastor schools have gone, you can do a Level 3 in engineering having never been in a workshop – what's that about?

Do you have a direct relationship with local employers or industry?

Yes.

What do you remember of the changes when the Coalition were elected – the NQF to QCF changes?

In real terms in the changes (to the written work) to the qualification, from NQF to QCF, there were no changes, they just changed the name. The actual course, the actual unit content, apart from half a dozen words and some was basically the same.

So in that sense businesses got confused because they did not know what the difference was, but of course then the assessment changed, because it was the number of units, whereas before it was a total number of points that people get,

then it was the number of units so you could not transfer points from one unit to another .

That's why they have done it isn't it?

Yes

What do you remember were the driving forces behind the changes / delivery of the qualifications?

Can't remember – probably budgetary – you just kind of go along with it don't you?

The Government comes out with this and you follow it.

Do you recall a marked change in learner profile?

I think it has changed latterly, I don't think it changed straight away. I think we have now got, shall we say, less able on the course who wouldn't have even been entertained before.

Do you remember if industry agents or local employers:

Were informed of the changes?

I don't think they were I think if you talk to them now, most people still think it's what they remember really.

Had any issues with the changes of qualification?

Yes it all got very confused really and we ended up with watered down units. I don't think the units are particularly meaningful. We have got something like 48 units to choose from get 18 from. You can choose some absolutely bizarre units to get your qualification that bear no relation to the title of the qualification.

The desirable / essential criteria changed as a result of policy change?

Yes I think it did. Because it went more from people with skills from industry to people who could teach ore academic units. What I mean by that is that if you take

mechanical principles for example, working out of all the theory behind it, but with no practical to it, so they cannot fix an engine but know the background of it.

Whereas before, you would get an engineer in who you knew he knew how to set sheet metal etc but wasn't interested in the academic side of it, but now you need an academic.

What was the age range of learners prior to and post the 2010-2012 period?

We have actually got, or we had a lot of students that were 19. But the way the funding has gone, we have some students who are 19 during the first year of the course, because the courses are taught in to one year blocks, they cannot get funding to do year two.

What, roughly, was the related employment uptake?

We feel (line manager and me) very strongly that our BTeC Engineering had no hands-on experience and that was not in the spirit of engineering. So we actually offered a lower Level 2 Performing Engineering Operations alongside the Level 3, they are actually studying for two qualifications, so they DO get hands on skills, but not as part of the BTeC as it is a completely separate qualification. When they leave us, they will have the BTeC level 3 and the Performance Engineering Operations Level 2.

Is a recognised qualification in Industry?

It is, in fact it is mandatory for a apprenticeship, some of the units are. And depending upon which pathway, electrical or mechanical depends on which PEO units they do. Also the Level 3 Diploma, and this is the anomaly about it, The Level 3 in Engineering Tech is like we used to teach, it all practical skills based, in fact only 25% of it is theory.

The uptake on this one is because we have an entry level qualification of C's in Maths & English in this one, and if they haven't got C's in maths & English they go through The Diploma of Engineering and Technology and that is also is a qualifying qualification for an apprenticeship, it is on the framework. So that's completely practical, all hands on. A very good qualification for people going out to work.

Did you find that you had less 19+ learners on courses due to funding, about the same or more?

Did you find that more learners stayed on due to lack of employment

Without a doubt. The Diploma in Engineering Tech we have run at 12 places for the last 4 years, this year we have got 31 or something – doubled. There might be two reasons behind that, it might be because of the dole, but it also may be because they didn't get the C's in Maths and English.

Do they then have to take Maths and English or Functional Skills along side it?

Yes.

So – just tell me again – either for an apprenticeship or for a role in Engineering for a job, there are qualifications which employers hold with respect, are you still teaching those?

Yes – I think we are except that employers have to top up because they are not getting the skills. For instance, Nestle for example will send them for an extra year that they pay for to do extra. So they do mechanical, then they for electrical because they want dual qualified people and if you think about it, if they do 2years of mechanical and they are over 19 by then and therefore they can't get entry to a Level 3 and they can't afford a Level 3 so Nestle pay for them to come for another two years to do another of the qualifications.

In your 30 years, have you seen this going around and around?

Oh yes – you get dizzy with it.

So they will drop learners – adult learners – then they will re-introduce so do you think that when the next party comes in they will say ‘no, actually education should be free for everybody’?”

I think they would like to do that, I think it will depend on the budgetary constraints doesn't it.

In the past five years then, would you say that this change in the qualification and the watering down was the main factors in learner profile and also employment uptake? Do you have any idea what sort of related uptake your guys on the BTEC have? Is it quite weak?

A lot on the extended Diploma will apply for University, its probably around 50%.

So what about the guys who want an apprenticeship or who want to go out and get a job?

About a third of the remainder will get an apprenticeship and the rest will go for a job. And by apprenticeship, I would put the Armed Services in there as well. Quite a lot of interest in RAF lately.

There are two sorts of employer profiles really. People like Nestle and people like Unipart. Really want well qualified people. They will look at people on the BTEC level 3 because they will want to send them on foundations degrees etc, so they are looking for management personnel. But those people also need to work on the shop floor in the first instance. So they won't push them forward for foundation degree unless they know that they are capable people. So they are on the shop floor and at the moment I don't think we are meeting the skills that are needed for the shop floor. And then there is the other employer that just want people, they are not looking for progression, they are not looking for foundation degrees, they are just quite happy that they can come and work.

So are these guys, if we are not providing the skills for them to go one the shop floor, what is happening to them?

Well, we have a meeting next week with Nestle to see what we can do to alter their upskilling. They ought to know how to fit taper bushes to gears and my argument is ‘well they should know that’ the problem is when college moved premises, all that equipment got ditched and we got no new equipment. We are going to lose all our apprentices, they are going to Selby, they have got a brand new workshop which is absolutely brilliant – state of the art everything. We have already lost Lambert engineering – they are going straight to them. (Top Secret) but they are not sending their apprentices here. We are not up to date enough with the kit.

Do they not give you any budget for new equipment?

They have us money for two new lathes last year, manual lathes, but we need CNC. They have got to invest in the infrastructure here, and they are not. I think there are two ways it will go between you and me, one way is that they are going to throw

money at it and go all out and bring in new businesses and say 'we can do this, this and this' or they will say Engineering costs too much, we will abandon it.

Which way do you think it's going to go?

I think they are going to abandon it. It'll end up with a BTeC where you don't need a workshop.

Do you think you will lose staff?

Yes, and I think that it will lose credibility.

Another soft option other than A levels as a route into university?

To be fair they don't need a BTeC really do they? I think we have also lost innovation too because all through my teaching career, we have won competitions such as Young Engineer of Britain and things like that, because we have had students who have come up with innovative ideas, and then made them. And that has gone.

Why do you think that is?

Because it isn't part of the syllabus any more, and you haven't time to do it, if it is not part of the syllabus.

Do you think they could heighten the profile of the students in terms of competitions, they might throw some more funding? But which comes first? The chicken or the egg?

Innovation was good, because you have got people doing things and working and coming up with projects and sorting it all out, ok you have some people in all walks of life that are just going through the motions but you got some people that just came out with some brilliant ideas, got them patented. I am not saying this happens every year, but it carries them forward. There was some excitement in it all....and now it's just 'you're all going to make this now'.... It started perhaps 15 years ago really, with the amount of contact hours you got, they upped our teaching loads up a lot of this stuff used to go on in your dinner times and where ever, but as they erode any hours you are reluctant to do anything that is extra curricular' and there is no time in the students timetable.

14 Appendix 6 – Ethical consent front page



Education Ethics Committee

Ethical Issues Audit Form

This questionnaire should be completed for each research study that you carry out as part of your degree. Once completed, please email this form to your supervisor. You should then discuss the form fully with your supervisor, who should approve the completed form. **You must not collect your data until you have had this form approved by your supervisor (and possibly others - your supervisor will guide you).**

Surname / Family Name:	Baker
First Name / Given Name:	Tina
Programme:	PhD
Supervisor (of this research study):	Paul Wakeling
Topic (or area) of the proposed research study:	
Educational policy changes affecting vocational education 2010-20142 Ethics approval already granted for staff interviews at place of work prior to Pilot study.	
Where the research will be conducted:	
In (study FEC) College and in / around Yorkshire	
Methods that will be used to collect data:	
Questionnaire – closed and open questions, interviews (semi-structured) video or audio recorded Surve	
If you will be using human participants, how will you recruit them?	
Colleagues at work, students at work, former students via word-of-mouth and social media platform, employers through staff and word of mouth or through the students now in employment.	

All supervisors, please read *Ethical Approval Procedures: Students*.

Taught programme supervisors. Note: If the study involves children, vulnerable participants, sensitive topics, or an intervention into normal educational practice, this form must also be approved by the programme leader (or Programme Director if the supervisor is also the Programme Leader)

Research student supervisors. The application is a joint one by the research student and supervisor(s). It should be submitted to the TAP member for initial approval and then to the Higher Degrees Administrator who will seek a second opinion from a designated member of Education Ethics Committee.

All students: forms may also require review by the full Ethics Committee (see below).

First approval: by the supervisor of the research study (**taught students**); or TAP member (**research students**)(after reviewing the form):

Please select one of the following options.

I believe that this study, as planned, meets normal ethical standards. I have checked that any informed consent form a) addresses the points as listed in this document, and b) uses appropriate language for the intended audience(s).	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am unsure if this study, as planned, meets normal ethical standards	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe that this study, as planned, does not meet normal ethical standards and requires some modification	<input type="checkbox"/>

Supervisor/TAP member's Name (please type):	
Date:	Click here to enter a date.

15 Appendix 7 – Curriculum Material examination

15.1.1 Computing / information technology / digital technology

The IT/Computing division delivered A levels and vocational courses. The Edexcel Level 3 Diploma in IT was delivered before, during and after the reforms but the framework changed and later the assessment measures became more stringent. The older NQF format did not allow for progression academically with University credits thus funding was removed. The C&G course was not replaced and the division and FEC were not able to offer a practical based course due to lack of funding. The table 9 summarises the characteristics of the courses before and after funding changes.

	Before funding changes	After changes
Qualification	BTEC National Diploma in IT City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Systems Support	BTEC National Diploma in IT – software development or Networking
Framework	Mapped to NOS	NQF
UCAS credits	No tariff credits	Yes – translatable points

Table 9 IT & Computing awarding body changes

15.1.1.1 C&G Diploma Level 3 Diploma in IT Systems and Principles - Systems Support

City and Guilds NQF model of the IT Diplomas were wholly vocational models. The C&G courses within the FEC were designed to train or skill learners by assessing taught practical skills but with a small related amount of knowledge / theory and a majority of competence assessment. Each pathway fell within a chosen pathway or industry sector such as IT Networking, Brick Laying. The funding strategy allowed unemployed and 19+ learners to up-skill and re-skill and was aimed at learners ages 16-64. City and Guilds is a brand entrenched in vocational history and recognised in industry. The qualification framework allowed for multiple retakes of differing assessments if a unit is not passed by a student therefore success rates in terms of attainment were always very high. The qualification was designed for learners wishing to pursue a career in ‘installing and supporting ICT systems’ and those wishing to progress a career in the ICT industry. More specifically some of the aims were to:

- Meet the needs of candidates who work or want to work as a systems support professional in the ICT sector
- Allow candidates to learn, develop and practise the skills required for the employment and/or career progression in the sector
- Serve as technical certificate as part of the Advanced Apprenticeship framework

(C&G, 2007, p.9)

The C&G qualification consisted of one core unit and four optional, some of which were professional units which gave the learner a dual qualification. The two professional pathways offered within the optional units were Cisco and Microsoft. To be able to deliver units from either of those two pathways, the FEC either had to be a Microsoft Centre or a Cisco Centre. The FEC was a Microsoft Academy with professionally trained Microsoft qualified tutor delivering the course therefore the Microsoft units as opposed to Cisco were offered by the FEC. Of this Diploma model, three pathways were offered by the FEC: one core and four optional C&G practical units, all assessed by activity and resulting in a C&G Level 3 Advanced Diploma. The Desktop Support pathway which consisted of one core and two optional (Practical) and two Microsoft Professional units qualifying the learner as a Microsoft Certified Desk Top Support Technician (MCDST) as well as the C&G Advanced Diploma and finally the third option, this was for Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator (MCSA), one core and four Professional units qualifying the learner as MCSA – as well as C&G Level 3 Advanced Diploma in ICT. The learners took the professional exams within the FEC (once the FEC had the correct software to support the on-line exam certified) and they could take the exam once free of charge if they failed they had to pay for the exam as external candidates. The same professional qualifications if taken elsewhere by training providers etc would cost well over a thousand pounds thus making the City & Guilds courses popular. The Microsoft certifications alone are valuable and sought after in industry.

Table 10 demonstrates the three pathways offered by the FEC and how the unit combination was made up. Any units with a 70 prefix were professional units,

assessed by external exam / practical demonstration through a virtual environment.

C&G strand	MCDST& C&G	MCSA& C&G
502 Customer Support Provision	502 Customer Support Provision	502 - Customer Support Provision
503 – Installing hardware and software	505 – Testing ICT systems	70-270 – Installing, Configuring and Administering Windows XP Professional
504 - Installing and upgrading systems	510 – Maintain ICT Equipment and Systems	70-290 – managing and Maintaining a Windows Server 2003 Environment
505 – Testing ICT systems	511 – Implement an ICT systems security policy	70-291 – Implementing, Managing and Maintaining a Windows Server 2003 Network Infrastructure
511 – Implement an ICT systems security policy	70-271 Supporting Users and Troubleshooting Microsoft XP Operating Systems	70-293 – Planning and Maintaining a Microsoft Server 2003 Network Infrastructure
	70-272 Supporting users and Troubleshooting Desktop Applications on Microsoft XP Operating systems	

Table 10 IT & computing units

This model of C&G Diploma was a hardware or networking engineering course that skilled the learners and qualified them to do a specific job:

- Meet the needs of candidates who work or want to work as a systems support professional in the ICT sector
- Allow candidates to learn, develop and practise the skills required for the employment and/or career progression in the sector

City & Guilds, (2007 p.7)

The pathways were not software based *per se*, no coding was taught, no software expertise taught other than Microsoft Products and these were complex in nature. The format of the hardware and networking courses were hands-on, building, fixing, diagnosing, connecting, replacing etc. The structure of the Microsoft units was for the learner to learn target operating systems and environments and be able to administer and support them. The professional elements of the course to take privately would cost in excess of £2,000. Due to

the professional qualification elements and cost elsewhere, the course was full every year as the C&G course was funded by the Government at that time.

15.1.1.2 BTEC (Extended) National Diploma in IT 2010 – 2016

The format discussed examines the model delivered from 2010-2016. The Extended Diploma IT model consisted of nine units per year. A one-year 90-credit Diploma was offered to some on a one-year pathway or the Extended Diploma of 180 credits over two years which was the normal route for a level 3 student on a BTEC. Each unit is awarded ten Guided Learning Hours (GLH) thus offering learners a 90-credit or 180-credit Diploma. It is interesting that in their 2011 Course Specification Guide, Pearson Edexcel state;

These BTEC qualifications are designed to provide much of the underpinning knowledge and understanding for the National Occupational Standards (NOS), as well as developing practical skills in preparation for work and possible achievement of NVQs. NOS form the basis of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). **The qualifications in this specification do not purport to deliver occupational competence in the sector, which should be demonstrated in a work context**

(Pearson Course Specification Guide,2011.p.2)

I have chosen to highlight the statement from the exam board which clearly emphasis that the BTEC course was more general and less employment role specific. This suggests that the course formats are not shaped to allow for the delivery of core or practical skills to a competent level, but allows for a more general rounded delivery allowing for wider progression opportunities. Further, it is evident from identifying the assessment criteria and content models that developing such 'practical skills' was not a great emphasis in the design of the units and allowed for a very small percentage of the practical or core skills assessment type.

The BTEC qualifications in the 2011 specification have been developed in the IT sector to:

- give education and training for IT employees
- give IT employees opportunities to achieve a nationally recognised level 3 vocationally-specific qualification
- give full-time learners the opportunity to enter employment in the IT sector or to progress to vocational qualifications such as the Edexcel BTEC Higher Nationals in Computing and Systems Development

- **give learners the opportunity to develop a range of skills and techniques, personal skills and attributes essential for successful performance in working life.**

(Pearson Course Specification Guide ,2011.p.5, emphasis added)

I have highlighted the last point from the exam board documentation to enforce the point that BTEC Diplomas were more generic and offered the opportunity to develop a wide range of employment skills. The above two bold quotes are in direct contradiction of each other within the same published documentation, in one hand the exam board claim to meet National Occupation Standards (NOS), giving learners the skills and knowledge for work, yet they also state that they do not claim to deliver the means for occupational competence within the sector. Here, I examine the exam board documentation and assessment criteria in order to support the statement “...give learners the opportunity to develop a range of skills and techniques, personal skills and attributes essentials for successful performance in working life.” (ibid).The Learning outcomes (LOs) Pearson’s claim “state exactly what a learner should know, understand or be able to do as a result of completing the unit” (ibid, p.47). This suggests that the delivery models allowed for very little scope for development of core practical skills and even less opportunity to practise them. However, the BTEC Diplomas allowed for a wide range of more general skills to be developed which could be transferred into many employment roles and also that by not narrowly defining a particular role or career in its design, the options for the learning in terms of employment were wide and not restrictive as the C&G were.

EdExcel Pearsons BTEC (Extended) Diploma in IT (Software Design & Development) assessment material consists of 216 verbs (types of assessment method) for assessment in the two year course for its pathway. However, one might assume a software development pathway would be extensively assessed via practical activity – in this case programming / coding, but a mere 18% of all assessment methods are practical, or involve a practical task being assessed. Over the two year program, non-practical, or rather soft skill/theory assessed methods number 176, a total of 81%. Of these 176 (81.5%) use ‘explain’ as an assessment method – see table 2.

15.1.1.3 IT – Software Development & Design BTEC and C&G

	LO's	Assessed via practical/core skill	% core of whole unit	Theory assessed LO's	Explain / describe	% explain
BTEC	216	40	18%	176	57	32%
C&G	20	12	60%	8	1	5%

Table 11 IT & computing assessment verbs

15.1.2 CONSTRUCTION

The construction division delivered C&G and IVQ courses prior to the reforms. The BTEC was the level 3 offering after the reforms as funding had been removed. Table 13 outlines the characteristics of these courses. Similar in structure the courses came under different frameworks and the majority of the practical assessed elements were removed.

	Before funding changes	After changes
Qualification	City & Guilds Level 3 Technician Diploma (up to 2011) IVQ	BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Construction
Framework	NQF	QCF
UCAS credits	No	Yes

Table 12 C&G Construction LO's

15.1.2.1 City & Guilds Level 3 Technician Diploma (up to 2011) IVQ

In the C&G course specification for centres, City & Guilds IVQs in Construction:Level3 IVQ Technician Diploma in Construction, referring to the Diploma at Level 3, C&G state “We stress [discussing guided learning hours] that these figures are only a guideline and that we award certificates and diplomas for gaining and showing skills by whatever mode of study, and not for periods of time in study” (C&G 2011p.9).This statement enforces the approach taken by C&G on their vocational courses, allowing learners to process role-specific theory and practice competences. This highlights the underpinning ethos of the C&G course in that skills transfer and practical assessment are a priority. Further, C&G state that the Diploma is awarded upon 720 GLH and C&G point out that “you should avoid teaching theory alone” (p15). However, they also state on the same page that “we assume that you will include core skills, such as numeracy, communication, working with people and organisation and planning throughout the teaching program” (ibid) which is in contrast to other exam

board documentation in this chapter (such as BTEC for all disciplines) where core skills are said to be more of the trade skills. C&G refer to these trade skills as ‘practical skills’ and ‘practical competences’ and these are measured on each unit within the pathway. Further, they add “the end of each unit contains practical assessments which deal with the practical components [mentioned earlier]. Candidates must carry out the practical assessments” (pg8).

The course specification does not detail the GLH for each unit but rather it is the responsibility of the centre to ensure each unit is delivered and assessed within the timeframe. The course specification states “The Theory Only route continues to be available as an unaccredited qualification” (p6) which lends weight to the very crux of City & Guilds qualifications in terms of occupational competence. Units for the Technician Construction Diploma cover:

- Safety at work
- Mathematics and drawing
- Communications and information technology
- Timber Vocations
- Trowel Vocations
- Painting and Decorating
- Plumbing
- Refrigeration and Air Conditioning
- Electrical Installation
- Construction Technician Practice
- Construction Mathematics
- Technical Science
- Technical Drawing
- Construction Technology

The Diploma from C&G exam board comprised nine mandatory units and four optional. The Level 3 Diploma is designed to contain more specific theory (and practise) enabling a learner to specialise, work independently or supervise others.

	LO's	Learning Outcomes	
		Practice	Knowledge
Mandatory			
Construction Mathematics	81	15	66
Science & materials	36	8	28
Mechanics 2	27	15	12
Drawing techniques	36	17	19
Site surveying 2	51	19	32

Construction technology 2	67	14	53
Resource Management 2	23	9	14
Environmental Science	54	9	45
Construction technology	35	10	25
Building Services	31	7	24
Optional			
Measurement	15	7	8
Designing for Construction	21	8	13
Structural mechanics	23	12	11

Table 13 C&G Construction LO's

Each of the mandatory units are assessed on both a practical element and an exam. The exams are a mix of multiple-choice and written papers. While the theoretical knowledge learning outcomes outnumber the practical in terms of amount, each unit's theory or knowledge content is assessed by exam as opposed to assignments during each unit. The theory is also assessed as an ongoing process as it is required in order to undertake the practical elements. An example of this is:

Environmental Science unit, practical learning outcome no 31.57- 31.59 require the learner to demonstrate their understanding of sound in terms of reflection and absorption. The theory required to do this is embedded in the knowledge components no's 31.73 – 31.79 (see Figure 7)

Practical competences

The candidate must be able to do the following:

Illumination

- 31.55 Identify the components of daylight factors and calculate daylight factors from simple plans and elevations using an appropriate method.
- 31.56 Design artificial lighting requirements for an office or showroom.

Sound

- 31.57 Carry out practical exercises involving the use of a sound level meter and produce diagrams of sound paths showing reflection and absorption in enclosed structures.
- 31.58 Investigate and recommend ways in which sound can be controlled at source, in transit and at reception.
- 31.59 Investigate problems of sound transmission and reverberation in enclosed structures and determine the reverberation time of a lecture hall or theatre using Sabine's formula.

Thermal studies

- 31.60 Calculate the flow of heat energy through a composite structure.
- 31.61 Calculate heat losses/gains for an enclosure and propose procedures to minimise heat loss/gain.
- 31.62 Carry out practical exercises using a psychrometric chart to identify risks of condensation.

Figure 7 Construction environmental science competences

Knowledge requirements

The instructor must ensure the candidate is able to:

Sound

- 31.73 Determine the total sound level caused by the combination of two sounds.
Sound level: dB
- 31.74 Determine the sound insulation of a composite partition.
Composite: wall, door, window, gap
Insulation: sound reduction index, transmission factors
- 31.75 Explain the inverse square law of sound attenuation and state that a doubling of distance leads to an attenuation of 6 dB.

Figure 8 Construction environmental science knowledge

The design of the C&G Construction Diploma is that all knowledge is applied to a competence or practical activity, this is demonstrated in the LO's in Figures 7, and 8. The LO's in figure 9 are met by learners theoretically demonstrating their understanding of a concept. A two hour exam at the end of each unit is how knowledge is assessed in contrast to providing written material for assignments throughout each unit to demonstrate understanding.

31.76 Explain the purpose of sound level meter weighting dB(A).

31.77 Describe methods of control for airborne and structure borne sound.

Controls: mass, discontinuity, resilient layers, isolation, soft floor coverings

31.78 Differentiate between sound absorption and sound insulation.

31.79 Describe the use of diagrams to indicate paths of sound within an enclosure showing reflection and absorption and the best positions of acoustic materials to give a desired acoustic behaviour for the enclosure.

Diagrams: layout planning, sound paths, constructional details, position (reflectors, absorbers)

Figure 9 Construction environmental science demonstrate knowledge

As identified, there is evidence throughout all of the documents from C&G that there is an emphasis on practical work and skills delivery and supported documentation for the recording of progress in learning the practical elements for each unit – in figure 9 . Figure 10 is an example of the exam boards document for recording practical competences which must all be achieved by the end of the unit and signed off by the assessor. These activities incorporate theoretical knowledge for the units which must be demonstrated to the assessor by the learner to complete the unit.

Practical competences

The candidate must be able to do the following:

- 31.1 Compare and recommend types of construction for specific low rise buildings taking into account the available alternatives.
- 31.2 State the considerations to be made during design and construction of building works as a result of established legislation relating to building works.
- 31.3 Compare the properties and lifespan of a range of basic building materials for a specific type of low rise building.
- 31.4 State the safety, health and welfare considerations for site personnel, building user, general public and adjacent properties.
- 31.5 Develop economic design solutions for specific low rise buildings.
- 31.6 Develop logical and economic approaches to the sequence of construction operations.
- 31.7 Illustrate, by means of annotated and dimensioned drawings and sketches, their understanding of the knowledge requirements of the unit.
- 31.8 Prepare lists of materials, components, and sequences of operations illustrating their understanding of the knowledge requirements of the unit.
- 31.9 Prepare site visit reports giving details of site investigation, soil investigation and archive research for an existing green field site and a town centre site.

This is to confirm that the candidate has successfully completed the above tasks:

Candidate signature

Candidate name (please print)

Instructor signature

Instructor name (please print)

Completion date

Figure 10 Construction environmental science competence evidence sheet

15.1.2.2 BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Construction

BTEC in their Construction Level 3 Diploma specification (2010) claim that their qualifications are designed “to provide highly specialist, work related qualifications in a range of vocational sectors...giving learners the knowledge, understanding and skills that they need to prepare for employment” (p2). They go on to say that the qualifications “provide much of the underpinning knowledge and understanding for the NOS” (p.10). The specification states that the units do not map directly onto NOS unlike the C&G course.

The course specification documentation also lists accreditation to the Sector Skills Council (SSC) and claims that the BTEC was a “highly respected route” (p.8) for employment in the sector or for further study. Alongside this information the exam board states that the program enables learners to “develop a substantial common core of knowledge” (p8), and later a “wide range of knowledge, understanding and the skills required for direct progression” (to HE and employment) (p.8). There is scant evidence of practical assessments and more emphasis on knowledge delivery. The language is generic in the course documentation and does not offer prospective learners a clear idea on the exact content of the course. Pages 3-6 in the BTEC specification give the reader no idea that the course offers very little in terms of opportunities to learn and practise practical and competence skills. The same generic text appears in the course specification (p.4) for Construction as other BTEC level 3 Diploma routes such as IT.

This qualification broadens and expands the specialist work-related focus of the Pearson BTEC Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma and encompasses the essential skills, knowledge and understanding needed to gain confidence and progression.

Pearson (2010,p4)

There is discussion in the specification on progression from the BTEC Level 3 course in terms of education and succession onto an apprenticeship in Construction. The rationale for the course is broad in terms of general progression routes and does not state that the course qualifies a learner to go straight into construction employment, instead states that it contributes to the knowledge and understanding of principles in construction. The specification

further states that the course is designed to provide the “underpinning knowledge and understanding for the NOS” (p.6) and states that it allows for the development of practical skills “ in preparation for work and possible achievement of NVQs” (p.6) . No further reference is made to any practical skills and the specification goes on to state;

The qualifications in this specification do not purport to deliver occupational competence in the sector, which should be demonstrated in a work context (p.6)

Table 16 details each unit of the course and the learning outcomes, with each assessment criteria verb / method included.

Construction	title	LO's	Core skills / practical assessed LO's	Theory assessed Learning outcomes
Unit 1	Health & Safety in the built environment	11		11 – describe5, explain2, discuss1, review1, evaluate, justify, select, carry out
Unit 2	Domestic construction technology	10		10 – compare2, describe, explain4, analyse, asses, justify
Unit 3	Mathematics for the build environment	10		10 – use7, explain3, apply, carry out, demonstrate
Unit 4	Construction Science and materials	8		Describe2, produce2, analyse, state, interpret
Unit 5	Industry & commercial construction technologies	9		8 – describe3, explain3, compare, evaluate
Unit 6	Building technology in construction	10		10 – describe2, explain4, analyse2, justify2
Unit 7	Project Management in Construction & the built environment	12	2 – produce, create	11 – describe, identify, discuss2, explain2, compare2, evaluate
Unit 8	Architecture design & planning	13	5 – produce3, apply, extract,	8 – describe3, explain, interpret, compare2, evaluate

Unit 10	Site Surveying	10		10 – explain ² , describe, review, examine, plan, recommend, discuss, design, evaluate, compare
Unit 15	Building surveying in construction	11		11 – describe, discuss, explain ² , propose, justify, evaluate, Identify
Unit 16	Business management technology	10		10 – explain ⁵ , specify ² , distinguish, evaluate, justify
Unit 17	Building regulations	9	4 – create ² , test, implement	13 – explain, design , perform, include, , import, export, discuss, evaluate
Unit 27	Building surveying	11	3 – carry out, produce , perform	8 – explain ³ , describe, discuss, select, use, justify,
Unit 29	Civil Engineering technology	11		11 – Describe ³ , produce, explain, compare ² , relate, justify
Unit 33	Building Services technology	9	3 - produce	6 – explain ² , discuss, analyse, establish, evaluate
Unit 44	Conversion and Adaptation of buildings	11	3 – prepare ² , produce	8 – explain, describe, outline, assess, compare, evaluate ²
Unit 47	Measurement, tendering & estimation	11	1 - produce	10 – describe ⁵ , explain ⁴ , justify, analyse, evaluate
Unit 54	ICT for Construction and Built environment	12	3 – use, create ²	10 - describe ³ , discuss ² , evaluate, justify

Table 14 BTEC construction assessment verbs

Using unit 6 as an example, the specification then goes on to detail suggested assignment and format for the unit and as what seems to be typical for the Diplomas of this time from Pearsons, the emphasis is on the written documentation See figure 11

Where verbs are listed in the theoretical column which can be interpreted as practical, examples from Table 14 being ‘design’ and ‘perform’, further clarification was sought from the tutors. In these instances, and for the other courses, the assessment verb was mapped to a theoretical scenario and the

learners were required to explain their understanding of the concept or the steps required.

<p>Assignment 1: Site Investigations, Foundation Design and Substructure</p> <p>Explain the principles of superstructure design and describe the methods used to construct all elements of a superstructure – whole-class teaching</p> <p>Explain the selection of suitable materials and techniques for use in the construction of the superstructure for low-rise domestic and commercial buildings</p> <p>Explain types of internal and external finishes available and methods of application for the superstructure</p> <p>Class exercise in producing fully annotated section drawings to a recognised scale using typical dimensions, showing elements of the superstructure for a low-rise domestic building and for a low-rise commercial building – individual work</p> <p>Construction site visit relevant to the above</p>
<p>Assignment 2: Superstructure</p> <p>Explain the implications of environmental issues, such as waste and sustainable construction, and legislative constraints both before and during the construction of the substructure and superstructure – whole-class teaching</p> <p>Responsibilities and issues affecting health and safety</p> <p>Examples of types of legislation, eg Building Regulations, Health and Safety at Work Act and Construction Design and Management Regulations</p> <p>Risk assessments – whole-class demonstration followed by individual work</p> <p>Learner activity to carry out risk assessment for a given element of the substructure and superstructure</p> <p>Management of Health and Safety Regulations, PUWER, COSHH, PPE, RIDDOR</p> <p>Group work to investigate infrastructure requirements to support the construction process</p> <p>Explain the plant and equipment required, including safety equipment, for the construction of the substructure and superstructure</p>
<p>Assignment 3: Legislation, Environmental Issues and Infrastructure</p> <p>Review of unit and assignment feedback</p>

Figure 11 BTEC construction unit specification

If we compare the two course models using the course specifications, learning outcomes and unit content for each pathway, it is clear that the outcomes are assessed in an entirely different way by C&G and that there is more emphasis on skills practice and competence. Documented examples of this include the previously detailed statements in the C&G course guide ‘you should avoid teaching theory alone’ (p15). C&G are very clear on their definitions of core skills and make the differentiation “we assume that you will include core skills, such as numeracy, communication, working with people and organisation and planning throughout the teaching program” (p.15) which is in contrast to other exam board documentation in this chapter (such as BTEC for all disciplines) where core skills are said to be more of the trade skills. C&G refer to trade skills as ‘practical skills’ and ‘practical competences’ and these are measured on each

unit within the pathway. Further, they add “the end of each unit contains practical assessments which deal with the practical components...”. (p.8). C&G provide a more focussed progression options for the learners however these pathways are more limiting and narrow than the BTEC and provide a less broad underpinning knowledge base of the sector.

15.1.2.3 Construction BTEC& C&G

	LO's	Assessed via practical/core skill	% core of whole unit	Theory assessed LO's	<i>Explain /describe</i>	% explain
BTEC	180	20	11%	160	72	45%
C&G	500	150	30%	350	m/c exam	m/c exam

Table 16 Engineering awarding body changes m/c = multiple choice
 Of a total of 180 learning outcomes that are assessed on the BTEC Construction two year Diploma only 20 are practical (see Table 416). On the BTEC pathway a total of 11% of tasks or learning outcomes were assessed on a practical basis which is 19 percent lower than the figure for the C&G course that the BTEC replaced at this FEC. It could be considered that for a construction vocational course this figure is low as the expectation would be for a large proportion of the learning to be practical. Surprisingly the overall percentage of practical assessment was low for both course profiles compared to the other courses examined, for instance, IT under C&G had 60% competence assessments. If we examine the unit Construction Technology 2, there are 67 LO's of which 14 come under the practical competence section, the other 53 LO's are listed under the knowledge section. Further reading of specification and unit description outline however indicates that there is a vast amount of practical knowledge required in order to meet the knowledge criteria, not information that can be looked up on the internet. The knowledge elements are clearly designed to test the learner on skills AND theoretical knowledge.

Further, 45% of the BTEC assessment methods/verbs were *describe* and *explain* and were assessed by written reports and presentations as opposed to the C&G assessments whose theory was assessed by multiple choice question (m/c) papers and also assessed the knowledge content as part of the practical or

competence LOs. Multiple choice summative assessment format may suit those who are less literate or less able to write expanses of text to explain their understanding of something but it also is constrictive in terms of developing written skills, demonstrating a clear understanding of a concept and the ability to put thoughts and ideas across to others. These are all important skills in employment and life. The BTEC however was less narrowly defined in terms of career progression and provided opportunities for learners to progress onto a wider range of options, employment within a wider construction sector, HE, HNC or other degree course. Alternatively, the C&G Diploma is well recognised in industry and prepared learners for the world of work within that construction sector. It is evident from reading all of the unit outlines and assessment criteria that the C&G pathway provided more opportunity for competence / skills development than the BTEC.

The construction BTEC served to perpetuate the country’s chronic lack of skilled workers. In 2019 C&G reported that 87% of employers were struggling to get hold of skilled workers and the CITB reporting a 230,000 shortfall in 2018 (C&G, 2019, CITB, 2018). The CITB further state that more than 203,500 students are taking ‘dead end’ construction courses that leave them with no job (CITB, 2018

15.1.3 ENGINEERING

	Before funding changes	After changes
Qualification	C&G Level 3 Technician Diploma IVQ (International Vocational Qualifications)	BTEC Level 3 Extended diploma in Engineering
Framework	NVQ / IVQ	QCF
UCAS credits	No	Yes

Table 17 Engineering awarding body changes

15.1.3.1 EAL

EMTA Awards Limited (EAL), established in 1964, are an awards body for vocational qualifications in engineering and construction sectors. The course fitted under the QCF framework. Their level 3 Mechanical Engineering Diploma focused on practical skills and knowledge with the understanding that the

learner will gain both practical skills and experience of the workplace on the duration of the course. The specification makes no reference to skills other than the practical skills assessed on the course and a section at the back of the specification where references are made to Functional skills (as required under the QCF framework). The qualification covers the fundamentals of mechanical engineering practices and is assessed via centre-marked (internal) assessments and an external exam. The internal assessments test the skills and knowledge of the learners. EAL Level 3 Diploma units are mapped directly to NOS.

A portfolio is populated containing evidence showing learners' achievements against learning outcome and EAL (2010) state:

Assessment of practical skills: The practical skills for this qualification can be assessed by the completion of an observation report sheet by the assessor and where relevant any evidence produced during the activity which will need to be attached to the observation report sheet and be referenced accordingly by the assessor. Any evidence produced during the activity must clearly show the learners contribution to the activity being carried out. (p.13)

EAL	LO's	Learning Outcomes	
Mandatory		Practice	Knowledge
Engineering & environmental H&S	4		4
Engineering organisational efficiency &	4		4
Mechanical Engineering principles	4		4
Optional			
CAD technical	7	5	7
CNC programming / machining	7	4	7
Tool making // presswork / extrusion	6	6	6
Engineering design & process	4	4	4
Advanced mechanical engineering processes	4	4	4

Table 18 EAL LO assessment methods

The mandatory knowledge units are assessed via externally-marked on-screen exams, the content of which are indicated in table 18. The application of

knowledge, particularly the Health & Safety aspects are assessed throughout the course in the practical units.

Exam Specification		
Number of questions: 40 Time allowed: 60 mins Pass mark: 60% (not graded)		
LO	LO Title	N° of Questions/sub groups covering each learning outcome
1.1	Understand Health and Safety Roles and Responsibilities	6
1.2	Understand the Application of Health & Safety in the Engineering Environment	5
1.3	Understand the Safe Moving and Storing of Materials	5
1.4	Understand Environmental Management	5
2.1	Understand Production Activities	5
2.2	Understand Application of Quality Control and Quality Assurance	6
2.3	Understand Organisational Improvement Techniques and Competitiveness	5
2.4	Understand Personnel Rights and Responsibilities within an Organisation	3

Figure 12. EAL exam specification example,

The practical/competence assessed learning outcomes are structured in a uniform way for each unit stating why the learner is going to undertake the exercise, what is needed to carry out the exercise and how to approach and undertake the exercise. Figure 13 is an example using unit 6 (CAD technical). Learners build up a portfolio of work which is both internally assessed and externally verified (p.13) and assessors must maintain assessment and feedback records for all learning. The course specification guide also goes on to state that “Internal assessments test the practical skills and knowledge of the learners within the units and to a very limited extent within the common units” (p13) thus highlighting that the mandatory units are knowledge and theory based.

Below is EAL’s documentation for Unit 6 within the Engineering course. The unit is assessed on the learners ability to produce Computer Aided Design (CAD) designs. The first document – figure 13 gives an overview of the unit, diagram Y is EAL’s assessors checklist for the unit, the assessment is undertaken on a

formative basis as the unit progresses allowing the learners to build their skills in CAD software.

Unit 6 Learner instructions - producing complex 2D CAD drawings

Internal assessment 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7

WHY are we doing this?

- To assess the ability of you to meet the practical and knowledge requirements of the outcomes listed within the unit.

WHAT do we need?

- Computer workstation
- Suitable CAD/modelling software application
- Data storage medium/disk space
- Task/Instruction sheet indicating outcomes to be assessed
- BS/ISO information sheets where appropriate
- Sketching/rough working paper
- Calculator
- On-line plotter/printer

HOW do we make a start?

Observe health and safety procedures at all times.

1. Loading and configuring

- Log into the computer system
- Locate and load the CAD software application to be used
- Open a new drawing, name and save in accordance with instructions on task sheet
- Set drawing parameters to be appropriate for the task
- Set drawing aids to be appropriate for the task

Figure 13 EAL unit 6 specification

Unit 6 Assessor checklist - producing complex 2D CAD drawings
Internal assessment 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7

Learner name:		Learner no:		
Date:		Attempt no:		
Did the learner...		Decision		Assessor Comments
		Pass	Fail	
CAD Drawing Assessment				
Log into and load CAD software				
Set drawing limits and datum/origin to suit task				
Set and use appropriate drawing aids to suit the task				
Set and use drawing layers if applicable				
Use commands and menus to create geometry required by the task				
Modify existing geometry where necessary using appropriate methods				
Manipulate existing geometry when required using appropriate methods				
Comply with recognised drawing standards and conventions				
Dimension the drawing to meet the requirements of the task				
Add suitable text to meet the requirements of the task				
Use suitable screen display controls to aid the drawing process				
Save the CAD data to the correct storage area and in a format in accordance with the task				
Obtain a hard copy of the drawing by outputting the Cad data to suitably configured peripheral device				
Assessor Signature				
Pass Mark (delete as appropriate)		Assessment Pass/Fail		
Date of re-assessment				

Figure 14 EAL evidence sheet

The Pass or Fail status is assessed by the tutor who would sign off each unit once he has witnessed the learners' ability to meet all of the criteria. These skills are assessed in an on-going formative style allowing the learners skill base to build up through the duration of that unit. A portfolio of evidence is created for each learner showing progression of skills and knowledge.

15.1.3.2 BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Engineering

The BTEC Level 3 Extended diploma in Engineering is a 180 credit two year course delivered from 2011 to 2016 within the FEC and this particular format fitted into the QCF framework. While this format of vocational Level 3 in Engineering does not map directly to NOS (as with their BTEC in Construction), Pearson (2010) state their Edexcel BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Engineering that “BTEC Nationals provide much of the underpinning knowledge and understanding for the National Occupational Standards for the sector”(p.4). And later “the vocational focus of each qualification is provided through the specialist units”.(p.11). BTEC state that many of their units have ‘strong links’ to the requirements of Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA). Pearson’s are clear that their overall aim is to promote progression for the learners and this can be in employment or HE. The exam board makes clear distinction between “development of practical and technical skills” and “application of generic skills” (p13).

The specification which was the format for delivery 2010-2016 discusses Grading Domains and states that three grading criteria for each unit is graded in relation to those domains for Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (p. 31).

On the Engineering BTEC pathway delivered within the FEC there was a total of 210 learning outcome assessment criteria over the two years. Of all of those assessment types, 202 were assessed via written evidence in the format of reports, powerpoints or posters which equates to 96% of all assessed learning outcomes. While there is no doubt that some of the skills required to be an engineer are gained via theory delivery and there is much technical design work to be practised, this format does not allow for this and only eight practical assessment methods are included throughout the two-year course.

Engineering BTEC	Unit title	LO's	Core skills / practical assessed LO's	Theory assessed Learning outcomes
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Unit 1	Health & safety in the Engineering workplace	13		13- explain5, describe4, justify, carry out, suggest, Determine, use,
Unit 2	Communications for Engineering Technicians	12		16- use3, evaluate4, justify, use3, communicate2, communicate, interpret produce
Unit 3	Engineering Project	16		16 –prepare5, use2, outline, monitor, maintain, present2, evaluate2, manage, check
Unit 4	Mathematics for Engineering Technicians	14		14 – all maths problems
Unit 5	Mechanical Principles & Applications	15		15 – all mechanics questions / problems
Unit 6	Electrical & Electronic Principles	16	8 - use	8- describe3, evaluate3, analyse, calculate
Unit 8	Engineering design	12		12- describe3, explain3, produce, use, extract, evaluate2, interpret
Unit 12	Applications of Mechanical Systems in Engineering	13		13 – describe9, justify2, compare2
Unit 13	Principles and Applications of Fluid Mechanics	16		16 – explain5, calculate2, determine8, investigate
Unit 15	Electro, Pneumatic & Hydraulic Systems & Devices	13		13- explain3, describe2, produce2, carry out2, evaluate, use2, list
Unit 16	Engineering Drawing for Technicians	11		11 – explain2, describe, create, produce4, prepare, interpret, evaluate
Unit 17	Computer Aided Drafting	12		12 - explain3, describe2, prouce3, interpret, construct, justify, evaluate
Unit 18	Advances Mechanical Principles and Applications	13		13 – determine9, compare3, evaluate
Unit 22	Fabrication Processes and Technology	11		11- explain2, describe4, interpret, produce, identify2, evaluate
Unit 26	Applications of Computer Numerical Control in Engineering	11	2 – manufacture, use	9 - explain2, describe, define, interpret, use, produce, define, compare/describe, evaluate

Unit 34	Electronic Circuit Design and Manufacture	12		12- explain4, describe4, use, apply, design, suggest,
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Table 19 BTEC LO assessment methods

Table 19 shows that the unit combination allows for very little practical skill assessment and practise.

Pearsons (2010) advise that the centres should “enable learners to produce evidence in a variety of different forms, including written reports, graphs and posters along with projects, performance observation and time constrained assessments” (p19). What they do not state is the very high proportion of written assessed work versus competence or skill based assessments.

15.1.3.3 Engineering BTEC and EAL

	LO's	Assessed via practical/ core skill	% core of whole unit	Theory assessed LO's	<i>Explain / describe For EAL understand</i>	<i>% explain understand</i>
BTEC	210	8	4%	202	65	32%
EAL	46	25	54%	46	45	97%

Table 20 Engineering both assessment verbs

On the BTEC pathway we see that a high 96% of assessment types were assessed via theory of which 32% were assessment verbs ‘explain and describe’ (see table 22). EAL assesses via practical activity on 54% of the LO’s however the figure for theory assessment is misleading as the verb used to assess the LO’s on 99% of the units is *understand*. The learners understanding of a concept is assessed by a learning or applied activity despite the assessment material grading on a learners’ understanding of a concept.

EAL’s first three mandatory units; Health & safety in the Engineering workplace, Communications for Engineering Technicians and Engineering Project are assessed via on-line exam papers and do not allow for any practical assessment. These three units account for 12 LO’s out of 46, 26% of the total. While we might expect a higher percentage of learning outcomes assessed via practical assessment, these three mandatory units and their theoretical exams represent a quarter of the theoretically assessed unit learning outcomes. This the slightly skews the results as the research overall compares the LO’s assessments in

terms of theory versus practical assessment in the sense of written theoretical work.

On the EAL pathway the learners’ understanding of a concept is also assessed by practical demonstration in the optional units thus meaning that the units are assessed via practice and knowledge, so of the seven units that can be assessed practically, 34 LO’s, 97% can be assessed by demonstrating understanding as well as writing their understanding of a concept. It is therefore not a straightforward comparison in assessment types as EAL allow for understanding to be demonstrated as well as written for assessment. It is clear however that the language and structure of the EAL pathway allow for a more competence-based learning experience.

15.1.4 CHILDCARE

	Before funding changes	After changes
Qualification	EdExcel BTEC level 3 National Diploma in Children’s Care, learning and Development	NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and education
Framework	Mapped to NOS	NCFE
UCAS credits	No tariff credits	Yes – translatable points

Table 21 Childcare awarding body changes

15.1.4.1 BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Children’s Care, Learning and Development

BTEC National Level 3 Diploma in Childcare, Learning and development was run in the FEC until the funding changes under the Coalition Government and the CACHE course replaced it. The BTEC specification (2011) states that the BTEC National is designed to “relate to the NOS” (p9) within the sector which form the basis of NVQ’s, and more importantly state “BTEC Nationals do not purport to deliver occupational competence in the sector, which should be demonstrated in a work context” but state that the qualification adds to the underpinning knowledge.(p.4) They make no particular reference to skills other than referring to Functional Skills. Pearson also explain that some of the learning outcomes for the Diploma relate to ‘some’ aspects of NOS.

Skills in childcare include; planning and preparation, personal skills, communication, problem-solving, the ability to work with others, organisational skills and recording kills.

Core mandatory units include:

- Positive relationships for Children’s Care, Learning and Development
- Positive environments for Children’s Care, Learning and Developments
- Promoting Children’s Development
- Reflecting on and Developing Practise for Children aged 0-8
- Safeguarding Children’s Rights
- Children’s Learning Activities and Play

Childcare	title	LO's	Core skills / practical assessed LO's	Theory assessed Learning outcomes
Unit 1	Positive relationships for Children’s Care, Learning and Development	9		9 – explain4, describe4, evaluate
Unit 2	Positive Environments for Children’s Care, Learning and development	7		7 – describe3, 1 use, explain2, evaluate
Unit 3	Promoting Children’s Development	11		11 – describe4, explain2, evaluate, interpret2
Unit 4	Reflecting on and developing Practice for children aged 0-8	15	100 hrs practical	8 – describe3, explain, compare, analyse, interpret2, implement, review produce
Unit 5	Safeguarding Children	11		11 – describe6, explain2, evaluate2, compare
Unit 6	Promoting Children’s Rights	11		11 – describe3, explain5, identify, analyse2
Unit 7	Children’s Learning Activities and Play	12		12 – describe4, explain3, evaluate2, analyse, set up, implement
Unit 8	Research Methodology for Children’s Care, Learning and Development	13		13 – describe, carry out, present, discuss3, justify, review, analyse2
Unit 9	Promoting Healthy Development and Living for Children and their families	9		9 - explain3, describe3, outline, evaluate2
Unit 10	Promoting wellbeing and resilience in Children	9		9 - describe3, explain3, evaluate3
Unit 11	Diet and nutrition for Children	9		9 – describe5, explain2, plan, produce, evaluate, analyse
Unit 12	Physical Activities for children	13		13 – describe4, explain4, evaluate3, plan, implement
Unit 15	Managing an Early Years Playwork environment	12		12 – describe4, identify2, evaluate2, develop

Unit 17	Supporting Children's Numeracy skills	12		12 – describe ⁴ , explain, compare, evaluate ² , analyse, develop ²
Unit 18	Supporting Children's Literary Skills	12		12 – describe ² , develop ² , identify ² , explain, compare, implement ² , evaluate ²
Unit 27	Meeting Additional Requirements for Children's Care, Learning and Development	14		14 – describe ⁷ , explain ⁵ , evaluate ²

Table 22 BTEC childcare LOs and units

The BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Childcare had a total of 167 assessed learning outcomes, of these only 8 were practical / competence assessments. The course heavily used the describe / explain combination, of the 167 assessed learning outcomes 58.6% were assessed on those two verbs / methods alone. The course was designed, according to Pearsons, to be as creative as possible and encourage much assessment of theory on work placements and indeed discusses the work experience as a pivotal focus of the course design. Learners were required to create a professional development portfolio of their work which contributed to passing the course (p.10). Unit 4 (see table 23) which was a core unit, required 800 hours of work experience to be completed where the learners could be assessed on their ability to put theories into practise, the units central focus is reflection and learners are required to reflect on their own experience in the workplace (p.59).The course was heavily theory based and did not fit directly with either the QCF or the NQF frameworks thus funding was withdrawn.

Unit 4 Grading Criteria

Grading criteria					
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:		To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:		To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	
P1	Describe own adherence to codes of practice for each placement setting	M1	Compare policies and practices at different placements and settings	D1	Use the observations and interpretations to make recommendations for further action with respect to the skills and
P2	Observe and identify the physical, social,	M2			

P3	emotional, cognitive and communication needs and skills of children in each age range and in four different settings	M3	Interpret the observations undertaken in relation to children's skills and needs	D2	needs of the child / children concerned
P4	Observe and identify the individual needs of children with additional needs	M4	Explain the importance of different care routines to the child / children and the organisation / settings	D3	Evaluate each activity in terms of its effectiveness in promoting childrens development
P5	Describe four routines within each placement setting, including own role	M5	Analyse each activity and suggest how each could be improved to improve the child / children's learning and understanding		Evaluate own effectiveness in each placement
P6	Plan, consult on, prepare and implement five activities for a child / group of children to promote specific areas of development within each placement setting		Produce a personal development plan and explain how it will potentially support own development		
	Review own performance on each of the work placements and identify areas for further self development				
	Describe the role of continuing professional development for workers in the Childrens Care, Learning and Development				

Table 23 – BTEC childcare grading criteria

Figure 15 shows the assessment of the practical Unit 4, Reflecting on and Developing Practice for children aged 0-8 years. Learners are given a Professional Practise logbook which evidences learners' progress and "should

contain evidence such as placement reports, reflective accounts / diary, observations, witness testimonials and personal accounts of practice” (p.65). “20 observations are required, 16 planned routines and 20 activities” (p.65). Many of the units can be cross mapped to those of the NVQ Level 3 in Playwork, Children’s Workforce Development Council induction standards, Health and Safety. The spec also lists the NOS units that can be directly mapped to by the BTEC units. The unit points are not translatable to UCAS tariff points but a level 3 Diploma may allow learners to progress to a Level 4 Diploma or HNC within the same field of Childcare.

An example template for assignment / assessment is provided for each unit within the specification. For Unit 7 ‘Children’s Learning Activities and Play’ BTEC provide the following in Figure 15.

Two assignments could be used as the basis of assessment of this unit.

The first could be based on P1, P2, P3, M1, M2, M3 and D1.

For P1 learners should refer to the major theories of learning and describe different ways in which children learn. For M1 this can be extended into an explanation, using examples from work placements to illustrate the explanation. D1 then requires learners to use the examples from work placements to evaluate the theories of learning already described. Learners should compare them and consider their strengths and weaknesses, using their observations in the workplace to reinforce the arguments.

P2 requires learners to describe the potential value of play in the development of children. They should also use examples they have observed to help with their description. If these examples are used with best effect to help learners explain the potential value of play, learners will also achieve M2.

P3 requires learners to consider the role of the adult in all aspects of the provision and implementation of play and learning activities for children. Again, examples from the workplace should be drawn upon and can be used to help learners achieve M3, for which they have to examine the role of the adult in detail and explain this role.

A second assignment should be used as the basis of assessment of P4, P5, P6, M4 and D2. This assignment will be based on activities in workplace settings, involving learners in both observations and the planning and implementing of activities. Evidence could include written accounts, photographs, witness testimonials and evaluation sheets. For D2 learners need to refer back to the major theories of learning and consider the strengths and weaknesses of the two learning activities and the two play situations in terms of the proposed outcomes and the development and learning of the children.

Figure 15 -Level 3 National Diploma in Children’s care, Learning and Development Specification (2007) p.105

While the assessments require the learners to draw from experience, the unit which could be assessed via observation and witness statements is compromised from a variety of assessment verbs for written work.

15.1.4.2 CACHE

In the Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Early Education specification, (2017) the exam board make it clear that there are two types of learning outcomes: knowledge and skills. The former “is to be learned while the latter can be performed” (p7). The exam board write that competence / skills-based learning outcomes within the CACHE course map directly to NOS. The course is comprised of nine mandatory units, three optional units, a short Q&A paper and a research project. It also includes a 750 hour work placement training unit (unit 9).

The specification states:

Throughout the qualifications you will be expected to participate in a professional practice in a variety of settings in order to apply what you have learnt in a practical environment. This will take an additional 750 recommended practical training hours and will be assessed when you reach unit 9. You will need to evidence your practical training through Practice Evidence Records, Practice Evidence Record Diary and Professional Development Profiles which will show your learning from units 2-8.(p. 13)

The course specification goes on to detail the age ranges that the learner is to have experience of working with, and also that learners have a work placement throughout the course to link the theory to work based practise (p.12).

The course specification identifies clearly the difference between the knowledge-based learning outcomes and the skills/competence based learning outcomes. The Diploma consists of 15 mandatory units and learners must also pass an Effective Practice Study and an Extended Assessment which is externally set and marked. Practice Evidence Records (PERs), Practice Evidence Record Diary (PERDs) and Professional Development Profiles (PDPs) are required for the learners to evidence the practical elements of units 2,3,4,5,6,7 and 8.

The mandatory units for the Diploma are:

- Child development from
- in Early Years
- Professional Practice conception years
- Children’s health and well-being
- Providing safe environments for children
- Child Health
- Play and learning
- Understanding children’s additional needs

- Observation, assessment and planning
- Professional Practice Portfolio 1
- Supporting emergent literacy
- Supporting emergent mathematics
- Preparing for School readiness
- International perspectives
- Reflective practise for professional development
- Professional partnerships Portfolio 2

Types of assessment

Award	Certificate	Unit 1	An introduction to working with children	Assessment task
		Unit 2	Development from conception to age 16 years	Assessment task
		Unit 3	Supporting children	Assessment task
		Unit 4	Keeping children safe	Assessment task
		Unit 5	The principles underpinning the role of the practitioner working with children	Assessment task
	Diploma	External assessment; short answer test based on a seen case study		
		Unit 6	Promoting a healthy environment for children	Assessment task (portfolio)
		Unit 7	Play and learning in children's education	Assessment task (portfolio)
		Unit 8	Caring for children	Assessment task (portfolio)
		Unit 9	Development of professional skills within children's education	Practice Evidence Records Practice Evidence Record Diary Professional Development Profiles
		Units 10 - 21	3 Optional units	Assessment tasks
		External assessment; research task		

Figure 16 from the exam board specification for the Level 3 course details the units covered on all of the three pathways for the CACHE childcare qualification; Award, Certificate and Diploma. Many of the units are assessed via task based / observation evidence which is included in the learner portfolios. The wording is ambiguous in that 'Assessment task' is listed as assessment type for most of the units by these tasks in most cases are in fact written reports or exam papers. Where the type states 'portfolio' the learner will be assessed while in work placement.

The CACHE grades are directly translatable into UCAS tariff points for HE progression to nursing or teaching for example. The assessment methods are recommended within the specification and these vary allowing for a range of learning styles and needs of learners. These include:

- Direct observation
- Professional discussion
- Expert witness
- Learners own work
- Learner log
- Planned activity
- Learner observation
- Portfolio of evidence
- Recognition of prior learning
- Reflection
- Written work
- Scenario or case study
- Task
- Oral Q&A

15.1.4.3 Childcare BTEC & CACHE

	LO's	Assessed via practical/ core skill	% core of whole unit	Theory assessed LO's	<i>Explain / describe</i>	% <i>explain & describe</i>
BTEC	167	8	4.8%	159	93	58.6%
CACHE	52 106 assessed outcomes	1	.94%	105	34	32.4%

Table 24 Childcare both assessment verbs

Comparison of the two course models was more difficult than other courses such as IT, Engineering and Construction as the BTEC assessment methods and learning outcomes fit within an assessment model which was widely used across many fields and simple to establish whether LO's were assessed theoretically or practically. The CACHE format however was not easily comparable therefore a

time consuming analysis of each assessment type for each LO within each unit had to be undertaken to be able to identify the assessment method.

The progression routes on the BTEC taught until 2011 were not under any of the qualification frameworks, the units could be mapped to NOS which in turn could be used towards an NVQ. The policy changes meant that courses which did not allow for progression to HE which meant the funding was removed.

It is clear that the range of assessment methods on the CACHE is much broader than those employed by Pearson for the BTEC. This is significant because in contrast to the previous three fields; IT, Construction and Engineering, the move from BTEC to CACHE provided the learners with a more practical, work-based learning style as opposed to a written summative assessment model. This pathway allowed for a variety of progression routes. The work experience placement on the course gave the learners valuable skills and experience for seeking employment within the field. The knowledge components a sound spring board for HE/ HNC / further learning or specialism.

15.1.5 HAIR & BEAUTY

	Before funding changes	After changes
Qualification	VCTC Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Treatments VTCT Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing	BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Hairdressing
Framework	RQF – map to NOS	QCF
UCAS credits	None	Yes

Table 25 H&B awarding body changes

One division within the college is called Hair & Beauty. However these are two different disciplines. Qualifying to be a hairdresser entails learning the skills in: cutting and colouring, perming, blow-drying, styling working with extensions. The beauty elements are broader and encompass: nail art, manicures & pedicures, massages, waxing, beauty treatments, skin care, dermabrasion, make-up artistry and holistic therapies. This research looks at both fields for the sake of the analysis and makes no distinction between them in terms of how they were examined. The BTEC exam board does not combine the fields in their qualifications and thus more documentation was analysed for both specialisms, prior to / during and the replacement qualifications. The C&G offered courses

which combined the two specialisms within one qualification and examples of their courses included:

- Shampoo and Conditioning
- Hair Plaiting
- Create an Image using Colour for the Hair and Beauty Sector
- Skin Care Entry
- Hand Care Entry
- Styling Women's Hair
- Styling Men's Hair
- Plaiting and Twisting Hair
- Basic Make-up Application
- Themed Face Painting
- Nail Art Application
- Providing Basic Manicure Treatment
- Providing Basic Pedicure Treatment
- Colour Hair using Temporary Colour
- Create a Hair and Beauty Image

Under the C&G the pathways all had to undertake the mandatory units; Introduction to the hair and beauty sector and Presenting a professional image in a Salon. The optional units were then selected according to which pathway the learner selected. At the FEC the combination of the two fields was not offered, maintaining a clear distinction between the two professions. Industry makes a clear definition between the two fields, and a qualification for one does not make a learner qualified for the other.

Unlike Engineering or Construction, the units for the different pathways were less broad in terms of content and variance. Once a learner had passed the units in manicures, gel nails and acrylics they were considered qualified in that specialism and could either go into employment or undertake more units in other beauty therapy specialisms such as massage or waxing in order to gain the full level 3 Diploma.

The NOS for hairdressing sets out three set requirements:

- Performance requirements – what the learners must do
- Range – what they must cover
- Essential knowledge and understanding – what they must know.

Further the Hairdressing and Beauty Industry Authority (HABIA) specify a number of areas of essential knowledge and understanding that must be assessed via written questions. The other non-specified units or knowledge and understanding that is not assessed via written questions can be assessed by oral questioning, portfolio evidence or other means (Ofqual, 2012.p.7).

15.1.5.1 C&G NVQ Hairdressing Level 3 Diploma

In their Specification for the level 3 Diploma in hairdressing (2010) C&G state:

These qualifications are based on the National Occupational Standards (NOS). They are job-ready qualifications which require learners to demonstrate in the workplace the skills and knowledge required in the hair industry. (p.8)

The C&G Diploma requires that the learner must complete a portfolio of evidence (logbook) for each unit with the essential knowledge and understanding requirements met (p.26). The specification goes on to discuss the variety of assessment measures which largely centres on observations and can be evidenced by:

- Objects created or repaired
- Work diaries
- Photos of finished work
- Documents produced during the normal course of work activity
- Reflective accounts
- Work produced prior to starting the qualification and presented for assessment of prior experience and learning (APEL)

Figure 17 lists the units to be taken in the Level 3 Diploma, including the 4 mandatory units;

The Level 3 NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing.

A minimum of 58 credits is required to achieve the Level 3 in Hairdressing, all mandatory units must be achieved which is 21 credits and a minimum of 37 credits from the optional units.

City & Guilds unit number	Title	NOS unit number	Credits
Mandatory units			
036	Monitor procedures to safely control work operations	G22	4
020	Promote additional services or products to clients	G18	6
037	Provide hairdressing consultation services	G21	3
038	Creatively cut hair using a combination of techniques	GH16	8
A minimum of 37 credits are required from the optional units, only 1 optional unit may be chosen from optional group 2. All optional units may be chosen from optional group 1.			
Optional Group 1			
039	Colour hair using a variety of techniques	GH17	12
040	Provide colour correction services	GH18	13
041	Creatively style and dress hair	GH19	4
042	Creatively dress long hair	GH20	5
043	Develop and enhance your creative hairdressing skills	GH21	5
044	Create a variety of permed effects	GH22	8
045	Provide creative hair extension services	GH23	8
The following two units must be taken together:			
059	Provide specialist consultation services for hair and scalp conditions	GH24	5
060	Provide specialist hair and scalp treatments	GH25	7
Optional Group 2			
046	Contribute to the financial effectiveness of the business	G11	4
047	Support client service improvements	G19	5
048	Contribute to the planning and implementation of promotional activities	H32	5

Figure 17

Units are assessed on what a learner must be able to do and what they must understand. C&G highlight that there are Mandatory (E4) and non-Mandatory (E3) knowledge assessments and emphasise what is critical knowledge for each unit. Critical knowledge is assessed via externally set assessments. All E3 knowledge is set in the learner's logbook along with details how it will be assessed. C&G produce on-line tests and paper tests to cover all learning

Below, Figure 18 is the learning content for unit 22 (perming hair). They do not have Learning Outcomes /Assessment outcomes but instead have knowledge that is assessed and is either mandatory or not.

<p>Unit GH22: Create a variety of permed effects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what is contact dermatitis and how to avoid contracting it whilst carrying out perming services • why it is important to use personal protective equipment • the importance of questioning clients to establish any contra-indications to the perming service • why it is important to record client responses to questioning • the legal significance of client questioning and of recording the client's responses • the types and purposes of tests used for perming services • when and how tests should be carried out and the expected results • how the results of tests can influence the perming service • potential consequences of failing to test • the courses of action to take in the event of adverse reactions to tests • why it is important to record test results • the effects of perming products and neutralisers on the molecular structure of the hair • how hair that has been sensitised from previous treatments and heat damage reacts to the application of perming products • when to use different types and strengths of perming products • how the chemical composition of perming products varies and how this affects your choice for use on different hair types • the effect of pre-perm and post-perm treatments on the hair structure • how temperature affects the achievement of the permed effects • why heat should not be used on sensitised hair • the importance and effects of restoring the hair's pH balance after the perming process • why the accurate timing and thorough rinsing of products is necessary • types and causes of problems that can occur during the perming and neutralising processes for the hair type on which you are working and how to rectify them
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Figure 18

There is sparse documentation on the format of the test papers, what practice papers are available on the internet are password protected and despite liaising with tutors within that Hair & Beauty division at the college, these legacy paper passwords were not available.

15.1.5.2 BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Hairdressing

According to the qualification specification Edexcel Level 3 NVQ Diplomas in Hairdressing, the 2010 format of the course claimed to be a "job-ready" qualification (p.9) for those going into the profession. The course was designed to allow for the learning of salon management skills, consultation skills and health & safety as well as the 'specialist' hair dressing skills (p.4). Here the exam board make a distinction between skills essential to the work place and core or

specialist skills pertinent to that trade or job. Progression from the level 3 in Hairdressing was to Foundation degrees in Salon Management. Consisting of four core mandatory units and a number of optional units totalling the required credit amount, the units are aimed at giving the learners as much hands-on skill practice as possible in the Salon at the FEC.

Pearsons' claim that the qualification prepared the learners for work and also gave "the opportunity to develop practical capability in Level 3 beauty therapy skills" (p.10) and "specialise in valued skills in the sector" (p.10). The progression routes within the course specification were much more decisive and the language less generic including areas within the beauty industry progression could result in. In this specification we see the statement;

BTEC National are QCF Level 3 qualifications designed to "provide highly specialist work-related qualifications in a range of vocational sectors" (p.8). As the specification in Hairdressing is quite specific in its use of language, this statement seems fitting. However, it is the same statement that is used in the BTEC Engineering specification, the Construction specification and the IT specification. In the Childcare specification however the word 'highly' is removed, this may indicate an oversight or it might be an indication of how generalised the exam board consider that qualification to be.

On the BTEC Hairdressing course learners must collate evidence which proves that they have met the required assessment outcomes including:

- Direct observations of the learners' performance by their assessor
- Outcomes from oral or written questioning
- Products of the learners' work
- Personal statements and / or reflective accounts
- Outcomes from simulation where permitted
- Professional discussion
- Assignment, project / case studies
- Authentic statements / witness testimony
- Expert witness testimony
- Reflective accounts
- Evidence of recognised prior learning

Evidence of Health & Safety for example can be used across units and once the knowledge meets the assessment outcomes, the specification states that it does not need to be re-assessed each unit but referred to from the unit assessed in. The qualification is made up of a minimum of 58 credits under QCF which consist of 4 mandatory units worth 21 of the credits. The learners then choose between two groups of optional units although in reality these are already determined by the H&B division in the FEC. The units are also permissible to be used under any other Level 3 course under the NVQ Diploma in Hairdressing qualification structure.

Unit format

Each unit in this specification contains the following sections.

Unit title:				
The unit title is accredited on the QCF and this form of words will appear on the learner's Notification of Performance (NOP).				
Unit code:				
This is the unit owner's reference number for the specified unit.				
Unit reference number:				
This code is a unique reference number for the unit.				
QCF level:				
All units and qualifications within the QCF have a level assigned to them, which represents the level of achievement. There are nine levels of achievement, from Entry level to level 8. The level of the unit has been informed by the QCF level descriptors and, where appropriate, the NOS and/or other sector/professional.				
Credit value:				
All units have a credit value. The minimum credit value is one, and credits can only be awarded in whole numbers. Learners will be awarded credits when they achieve the unit.				
Guided learning hours:				
A notional measure of the substance of a qualification. It includes an estimate of the time that might be allocated to direct teaching or instruction, together with other structured learning time, such as directed assignments, assessments on the job or supported individual study and practice. It excludes learner-initiated private study.				
Unit summary:				
This provides a summary of the purpose of the unit.				
Assessment requirements/evidence requirements:				
The assessment/evidence requirements are determined by the SSC. Learners must provide evidence for each of the requirements stated in this section.				
Assessment methodology:				
This provides a summary of the assessment methodology to be used for the unit.				
Learning outcomes:	Assessment criteria:	Evidence type:	Portfolio reference:	Date:
			The learner should use this box to indicate where the evidence can be obtained eg portfolio page number.	The learner should give the date when the evidence has been provided.
Learning outcomes state exactly what a learner should know, understand or be able to do as a result of completing a unit.		The assessment criteria of a unit specify the standard a learner is expected to meet to demonstrate that a learning outcome, or a set of learning outcomes, has been achieved.		Learners must reference the type of evidence they have and where it is available for quality assurance purposes. The learner can enter the relevant key and a reference. Alternatively, the learner and/or centre can devise their own referencing system.

figure 19 BTEC assessment evidence sheet

Figure 19 details the assessment records for the units and allows for a mixture of evidence types.

HABIA, the sector skills body in the hairdressing industry require that all assessments were written papers and that all essential knowledge and understanding through these assessments. Also each awarding body (exam board) in hairdressing includes in its units the requirement for mandatory written questions in line with HABIA's criteria (Ofqual, 2012).

When Ofqual inspected the qualifications in 2012 of the five examination board providers for the hairdressing Diploma, C&G was the most popular and BTEC came fifth in terms of student numbers (p.5).

15.1.5.3 VTCT Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy

The Vocational Training and Charitable Trust (VTCT) vocational Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy is designed to “develop learners’ skills in beauty therapy and enable learners to provide treatment to customers” (p.2). The VTCT Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy Treatments specification refers to skills as those practised by a beauty therapist and makes reference to the more general skills where it states “...you will develop a sound knowledge of health & safety, client care and communication” (p.2) but does not categorise these skills under any name. All units are directly mappable to NOS and were under the Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF). The qualification was supported and approved by the (HABIA) which is the industry standard (p.2). The qualification is designed to allow learners to progress straight into employment or to a Level 4 VTCT course.

The Level 3 Diploma was made up of six mandatory units totalling 42 credits and a number of optional units totalling 16 credits. Each unit has a different credit value (see figure 20)

Optional units - 16 (minimum) credits				
VTCT unit code	Ofqual unit reference	Unit title	Credit value	GLH
UV30425	Y/601/3558	Provide massage using pre-blended aromatherapy oils	7	65
UV30474	Y/601/4452	Provide electrical epilation	11	88
UV30426	D/601/3562	Apply individual permanent lashes	4	38
UV30427	R/601/3560	Intimate waxing for male clients	4	37
UV30428	Y/601/3561	Intimate waxing for female clients	4	37
UV30451	R/601/4465	Provide self tanning	3	25
UV30432	M/601/3565	Nail enhancements and advanced hand and nail art techniques	7	60
UV30459	A/601/4461	IT and data handling in the hair and beauty sector	5	41
UV30449	A/601/5500	Contribute to the effective running of business	3	30
UV30574	D/601/4095	Provide Indian head massage	6	49
UV30430	K/601/5329	Apply micro dermabrasion	4	39
UV30475	H/601/4454	Apply stone therapy massage	9	75
UV30433	F/601/3568	Explore technological developments within the hair beauty and associated areas	7	60

Figure 20 VTCT units for course guide

Assessment

The units are assessed internally and questions papers assessed externally. Learners are required to collate a portfolio of evidence to show knowledge and understanding of the theoretical aspects of the course. This evidence can be:

- Observed work
- Witness statements
- Audio-visual media
- Evidence of prior learning or attainment
- Written questions
- Oral questions
- Assignments
- Case Studies

For unit X Monitor and maintain health and safety practise in the salon there are two LOs. The evidence requirements include the environment whereby the learner demonstrates practice, simulation, observation, knowledge

(assignments, case studies, reflective accounts) tutor guidance and / or an external paper. Evidence is recorded as shown in figures 21 and 22.

Outcome 1	
Be able to carry out a risk assessment	
You can:	Portfolio reference / Assessor initials*
b. State the reason for carrying out risk assessments	
c. Describe the procedures for carrying out a risk assessment	
d. Describe when risk assessments should be carried out	
e. Outline necessary actions to take following a risk assessment	

* Assessor initials to be inserted if orally questioned.

Requirements highlighted in white are assessed in the external paper.

Figure 21 VTCT portfolio evidence sheet

Outcome 2	
Be able to monitor health and safety in the salon	
You can:	Portfolio reference / Assessor initials*
b. Outline the health and safety support that should be provided to staff	
c. Outline procedures for dealing with different types of security breaches	
d. Explain the need for insurance	

* Assessor initials to be inserted if orally questioned.

Requirements highlighted in white are assessed in the external paper.

Figure 22 VTCT observation sheet

15.1.5.4 BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy QCF (2010)

The BTEC National Specification Diploma in Beauty Therapy details pages dedicated to "Personal, Learning and thinking skills, mostly referring to enquiry, creativity, reflection, team working, self-management and being an effective participant "(pp.29-32). These skills are then mapped to the Grading Domains. Delivered from 2011, this format of the 120 credit Diploma consisted of 12

Mandatory units and a selection of 28 possible optional units adding up to optional unit total of 88 credits. Of the 12 mandatory units, four are knowledge based and eight competence-based. Of the 28 optional units, 16 are knowledge based. Unlike other sector specifications in which the measure of competence are vague, the Beauty course specification states:

The BTEC Nationals in Beauty Therapy Techniques / Beauty Therapy are intended to give learners the opportunity to gain and develop practical capability in Level 3 beauty therapy skills, including providing facial and body electrotherapy treatments and body massage. (p4)

They further state that practical or competence units are mapped directly to NOS for the industry.

15.1.5.5 H&B BTEC & VTCT / C&G

	LO's	Assessed via practical/ core skill	% core of whole unit	Theory assessed LO's	<i>Explain / describe</i>	% <i>explain & describe</i>
BTEC Hair	505	196	39%	309	170	55%
C&G Hair	216	47	21%	169	131	78% all verbs
BTEC Beauty	451	136	30%	315	152	48%
VTCT Beauty	249	79	32%	170	147	86.5%

Table 25 H&B both assessment verbs

A wide range of skills are assessed on the H&B courses and teachers use a wide range of methods to develop those skills. Technical skills required for the role such as cutting hair, waxing or massage are deeply embedded into the curriculum of all formats of the courses in this division. All of the courses also allow for the development of wider skills such as salon management, communication skills, commercial awareness and theory that underpins the

practical skill such as maths for treatment values, salon costs etc thus improving numeracy and literacy is strongly embedded in all course formats

The table of results for Beauty shows that there is little difference in the percentage of practical skills assessed on the replacement BTEC from the preceding VTVC course, a mere 2% less. More noteworthy the BTEC in Hairdressing has 18% more practically assessed LO's than the one it replaced by C&G.

There is a balance of practical experience of salon duties, reception skills, communication and customer care on all formats of the courses. The competences or skills for the role such as beauty treatments or haircuts represent a lower percentage of assessment methods. However, on these courses the students are expected to practise their skills until they have reached a level or a standard by which they are assessed. These practical sessions for skills practise take up a considerable portion of the hours on their course. Assessment on the softer skills are an ongoing process on the formats used and most not a summative assessment at the end of a unit.

16 Appendix 8 – Pilot Study

17 PILOT STUDY

A preliminary collection of data was conducted in a Pilot Study. This sample used five tutor interviews for the whole research and equated to one senior member of staff from each represented division within the FEC. This was therefore a third within the five areas for my overall sample.

The plan was for face to face semi-structured interviews. This method was valuable to my research as I was able to glean extra information that I had not considered previously. The practical considerations were minimal as I am employed within the FEC in the study, so it was merely a case of finding a compatible time in each of our timetables for a 30 minute discussion interview. These interviews were then transcribed and analysed with thematic evidence identified where possible.

My pilot process led me to modify my questions and approach. The reflective transcription process revealed that some responses were 'guided' and that as the researcher, I was too involved in the material and offered my opinion at times, often drawing comparisons with their experiences. This reflective process has allowed me the opportunity to discuss with my supervisor and create a more formal approach to future interviews. Cresswell comments that the qualitative researcher must systematically reflect on who he or she is in the inquiry and be sensitive to his or her 'personal biography'.

This introspection and acknowledgement of biases, value or interests (or reflexivity) typifies qualitative research today. The personal-self becomes inseparable from the researcher-self. Cresswell (2003, p.182).

Further, Etherington suggests that being a reflexive researcher was concerned with being aware of what influences our research area and participants (Etherington, 2004). Recognising my own impact, understanding my own beliefs and assumptions and reflecting on these has been identified as vital by a number of researchers such as Wilkinson & Kitzinger (1996). My position in comparison to the participants in relation to class, ethnicity, gender, age and ability cannot be ignored alongside the context of the interviews (Wilkinson & Kitzinger). IN a vast majority of the staff interviews, the respondents were known to me, the benefit of this being that I could identify the potential interviewees who could contribute the most to my study.

The pilot study identified these key points for me:

- They were easy to conduct in terms of practical arrangements and a familiarity with the interviewee.
- Most took longer than expected as they each had extra information to offer, also as a result of open-ended questions as opposed to closed questions.
- Most confirmed my theories on course structure changes, however the female based courses, such as child care and hairdressing, were less affected by policy changes.
- The pilot study impacted on me in terms of the depth of my understanding of my key knowledge area, that some more traditional industries, such as Engineering and Construction, were much more affected by the policy changes.
- The pilot study revealed that my initial thesis questions were perhaps not what I initially sought to answer

- That I had a tendency to have a bias in the dialogue, at times almost persuasive which needs to be addressed prior to the main investigation.
- That the whole research process evolves and is a learning process from start to finish.

On reflection, necessary changes that I need to employ would be more closed questions and a more objective stance or approach. Merriam (1998, p75) suggests that pilot interviews are 'crucial' as a means of trying out questions. The members of staff interviewed were representative of vocational Level 3 Diploma provision and areas running gender specific courses were included. The interviews were for the most part, recorded either by video or audio. These interviews were then transcribed after at least a fortnight had lapsed. This timed interval was to remove any bias / interpretations / presumptions due to any inferences and assumptions at the time of the interview on the, the validity of the data, but not too long so that any context nuance was lost.

In light of any findings or changes from stage one, any modifications to research strategy or interview techniques will be made at this point. Any subsequent interviews will be conducted including the changes if any. All transcripts will be typed up into Word format and audio / video files saved.

Evidencing research questions	Interview staff	Interview employers	Interview learners	Skills analysis	Curriculum material analysis	Destination data	Unemployment data
Q1		X		X	X	X	X
Q2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Q3	X	X	X				

PILOT STUDY

Abstract

This report describes the process of qualitative data collection from a small sample of stake holders within the scope of my thesis, and the outcome of this activity. The aim is to establish whether there is a basis for further investigation and analysis.

Introduction

The research will investigate Vocational Education for 16+ learners in a Further Education college, more specifically courses with direct links to related employment within their particular field. Any changes to student profiles and accessibility to the vocational courses will be investigated as well as examining the introduction of the changes brought about by Policy and Funding changes laid out by Gove under the Coalition Government and related information supplied to linked industry on those changes to certification. The main study will use both qualitative study into the experiences of students, FE facilitators and local employers. Quantitative data will be introduced to examine student progression and changes, if any, into employment into a related field industry.

For the purpose of this pilot study, a total of five case studies were chosen. All five studies were interviews with Senior Management of Divisions within the FEC. The Divisions offer vocational courses of a more traditional or historical vocational nature, examples such as Engineering, Construction and Hair & Beauty. The five case studies were chosen for their experience of delivery at this level (L2 to L4) and commitment and experience into delivering vocational education as well as the teachers own perceptions from a historic point of view and their ability to review changes over time and provide a historic perspective. The study will move away from one particular genre (Computing) and look at a cross section of genres across the college, each of which having an established historic relationship with employers / industry.

The study will also provide an overview of new policies in terms of access to education or training for 19+ learners. The identity of the FEC and all Heads of Divisions will remain anonymous.

Purpose and scope

The Coalition Government changed the funding strategies for vocational education provision in 2010 in Post Compulsory Education (PCE) which had allowed for the provision of competence-based qualifications, and instead the funding supported a move back to more academically-based vocational courses. The focus of the full research and thesis will be upon the development and delivery of this change of vocational model.

The purpose of this pilot study is to sample a small section of stakeholders to identify if a foundation for research for my subject area in changes to Vocational Education under the Coalition Government 2010-2012 warrants further investigation. A cross section of vocational specialisms will be considered in order that it can be determined whether the policy changes affected provision college wide and within one particular specialism. Using a sub-set of specialisms' or a qualitative sample, a determination of trend may or may not be established. This will then be expanded on in the full research proposal in terms of widening the scope.

Aims and objectives

The pilot study research is to gain insight into how changes in Further Education policy under the then newly-appointed Coalition Government affected the learners at one northern further education college. The study aimed to identify the changes in learner profiles, the delivery of traditional skills transfer, the move away from traditionally recognised vocational qualifications and the attitudes of the related industries and / or employers. The study's findings will be able to assist other researchers in determining the consequences of such policies and identify any historical patterns. My aims for the pilot study are therefore:

- To establish the assessment in vocational courses structure within the particular FEC of different vocational specialism's both pre and post coalition election in 2010
- To discuss interviewees' perceptions of changes in student profile
- To establish what the College's perception of the changes to qualification / routes were
- To examine whether employers were made aware of changes to recognised qualifications
- To establish whether the uptake in related employment was affected by the above.
- To find common characteristics among all vocational specialisms within the FEC's staff

Mapping the pilot study aims to the research question

The questions for the teaching participants were designed to understand their perceptions of the changes that were happening within 2010-2012 (time of pilot study) in terms of employment opportunities and uptake of their students both prior to and during the timeframe (RQ1). Understanding their experiences of the impact of the reforms which directly relates to RQ3 was essential so that dialogue could be opened about student profile changes, course/model changes, pedagogical changes. This included the loss of funding for 19+ learners and the impacts at classroom level. RQ3 was in part addressed as the exploration of skills delivery occurred, the type of skills, the teachers' perceptions of skills and the teachers understanding of what employers were seeking in terms of skills.

Teacher Interview Questions

Interviews to be constructed under a semi-structured approach allowing interviewee to discuss issues freely and introduce other content.

Name _____ role _____

Role in College

1. Role in 2012-2012
2. Years teaching in the Division
3. What qualifications do you teach now?
4. What did you teach under the previous Government prior to 2010)?
5. Which exam boards did you teach under at that time?
6. Which exam board do you teach under now?

Qualification structure

7. Were the Diplomas or Certificates recognised by employers in Industry as desirable or essential for progression into the Industry?
8. What do you remember were the driving forces behind the changes / delivery of the qualifications?

Industrial / employee relations

9. Do you have a direct relationship with local employers or industry?
10. Do you remember if industry agents or local employers:
 - a. Were informed of the changes?

- b. Had any issues with the changes of qualification?
- c. The desirable / essential criteria changed as a result of policy change?

11. What do you remember of the changes when the Coalition were elected – the NQF to QCF changes?

Learner Profiles

- 12. Do you recall a marked change in learner profile? If so, what was the change?
- 13. What was the age range of learners prior to and post the 2010-2012 period?
- 14. Did you find that you had less 19+ learners on courses due to finding, about the same or more?
- 15. Did you find that more learners stayed on due to lack of employment opportunities?
- 16. What, roughly, was the related employment uptake?

The way that the questions were organised were in a logical grouping addressing areas of interest for the study and for answering the main research questions.

Teachers pilot interview sample

interviewee	dept	role	gender
A	Construction	Senior tutor	Male
B	Engineering	Team Leader	Male
C	Motor Vehicle	Team Leader	Male
D	Hair & Beauty	Senior tutor	Female
E	Child Care	Team Leader	female

Summarised findings of pilot study

The main groups of responses drawn from the interview data are as follows:

1. What did you teach under New Labour (pre 2010)?
 - i. BTec
 - ii. C&G
 - iii. PEO
 - iv. Mix
2. Which exam board do you teach under now?
 - i. BTec
 - ii. C&G
 - iii. PEO
 - iv. Mix
3. Were the Diplomas or Certificates recognised by employers in Industry as desirable or essential for progression into the Industry?
 - i. Yes

- ii. No
- 4. Do you have a direct relationship with local employers or industry?
 - i. Yes No
- 5. What do you remember were the driving forces behind the changes / delivery of the qualifications?
 - i. Funding
 - ii. Exam boards
 - iii. Both other
- 6. Do you recall a marked change in learner profile?
 - i. Lost adults
 - ii. Adults reduced
 - iii. More adults
 - iv. none
- 7. Do you remember if industry agents or local employers were informed of the changes?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
- 8. What was the age range of learners prior to and post the 2010-2012 period?
 - i. 16-18
 - ii. 19+
 - iii. 19-50
- 9. What, roughly, was the related employment uptake?
 - i. >50%
 - ii. None
 - iii. Apprenticeship
 - iv. >50%
- 10. Did you find that you had less 19+ learners on courses due to finding, about the same or more?
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No

After the interviews it was evident that some answers were yes / no and could be grouped and others shared the same answer, so where applicable, these questions were used to form the statistical chart and indicate that in the sample utilised, there was a common theme. The responses were grouped into lists in order that a statistical model could be created.

Pilot Interview summaries

What qualifications do you teach now?

All interviewees teach BTEC, C&G specialists and subject specialist qualifications such as CACHE – child care, POE – Engineering, Construction awards. There were common exam boards between them and also specialist qualifications related to their particular industry.

What did you teach under New Labour (pre 2010)?

All qualifications at all levels were taught previously as learner profile was in bigger range, HNC,EAL, NVQ, OCR, BTEC, NNEB

Which exam boards did you teach under?

BTEC (Edexcel) City & Guilds, EAL, NNEB, old London Board

Which exam board do you teach under now?

NNEB now CACHE, PEO, VRQ, BTEC, C&G

Were the Diplomas or Certificates recognised by employers in Industry as desirable or essential for progression into the Industry?

Some vocations such as childcare, electrical engineering, and construction were reliant on traditional quals, other industries were reliant on good applicants to train up such as Nestle who fund their own engineering apprenticeship schemes. Hair & Beauty do not specify any qualification, but construction, engineering & motor vehicle plus childcare had established recognised quals.

Do you have a direct relationship with local employers or industry?

Each of the candidates confirmed they and their division had established and historic relations with respective employers / industry, mostly on a local basis but some National Industries. There was a marked difference in the responses for the typically male fields, although this may be because the employers tended to be National Companies as opposed to small local employee's.

What do you remember of the changes when the Coalition were elected – the NQF to QCF changes?

All candidates remembered the change as pivotal move from NQF (points earned from units to QCF (unit credits which were transferrable).

What do you remember were the driving forces behind the changes / delivery of the qualifications?

All the candidates recall funding as the major lever in changes to qualification structure and delivery. One felt that the rich mix on exam boards was a contributory factor.

Do you recall a marked change in learner profile?

All candidates agreed that they had lost the majority, if not all 19+ learners on their courses. Lack of funding on the pathways was cited by all as a cause of this change. The engineering Dept candidate stated that learners who would have traditionally turned away for the vocational courses, were now being accepted and having to do basic maths & English alongside. The more traditionally female courses have seen a massive reduction in 19+ due to funding implications on the learners.

Do you remember if industry agents or local employers:

Were informed of the changes?

All of the candidates remember that none of their industry contacts were informed about changes to qualification. The CITB were made aware of funding changes and the grants available for construction apprenticeships at a later date (Construction Dept). Engineering *claimed that some of the businesses became confused over how qualifications were awarded.*

Had any issues with the changes of qualification?

In particular the Engineering Dept – the move to the BTEC L3 diploma meant that no skills transfer took place as there was no assessment for this in the units. As employers wanted young apprentices & employees to have shop floor experience, the Division had to roll out the L2 PEO (Performance engineering Operation) which was true hands on to support the level3 BTEC in order to meet industry / employers needs. Also, the Employers felt that the new qualifications had been watered down and were not meaningful. Construction particularly had feedback from industry that the new qualifications were not fit for purpose and lay some of the blame at the FE door not understanding Government policy & funding changes. In Hair & Beauty, the employers just wanted the learners as young as possible in order that the minimum wage could be paid and a two year BTEC course did not provide for this.

The desirable / essential criteria changed as a result of policy change?

In most cases the candidates reported that the pre-employment skills were not the finished article from the new shape Diplomas. The move to more academic units meant, in particular for Engineering, that for Mechanical Principles, the electrical components were left out and the learners could only write about working on machinery as opposed to fixing it. Hair & Beauty, Child Care and Motor Vehicles all stated that the criteria from employers had not changed; they wanted the same characteristics and skills.

It might be of worth noting here that the latter 3 dealt with SME's or small establishments as opposed to Construction and Engineering whose employers are all large nationwide employers.

What was the age range of learners prior to and post the 2010-2012 period?

All agreed that prior to the policy and funding changes, the learners ranged from 16-35/50. After the policy changes all divisions experienced a growth in the uptake for 16 yr old learners on their courses and a down turn in 19+ learners to the point that they were not represented on the profiles at all currently.

What, roughly, was the related employment uptake?

This varied from one division to another, but between 50% and 80% were the reported figures. This included the uptake of related apprenticeships. This figure also included those continuing in the field but on a related work funded qualification.

Did you find that you had less 19+ learners on courses due to funding, about the same or more?

All divisions saw a dramatic drop in 19+ learners. Even if a learner signed up for a 2 year Diploma when they were 18, they would still have to fund the second year. There were inventive methods to try and get round these funding issues, such as signing learners onto extended diplomas, guaranteeing them a second year free upon successful completion of the first year, but this was frowned upon then stopped. In construction, the 19+ learners had to fund themselves in part with the employer paying the other half. Some indentured apprenticeships remained in Construction which required employer commitment to the apprentice in terms of support and payment, which is a top up for the educational part of the syllabus.

Pilot study discussions

Despite the small sample size this small pilot study was useful to me in planning future research work. On the positive side, I was able to identify a common theme throughout the disciplines within the College. I was also able to establish that there were a number of differences, the two major ones I identified were:

- Industry / employers expectations in terms of qualification structure between large and small organisations
- Some subject specific courses from non-national exam boards remain unaltered and still received funding such as Child Care, Motor Vehicle.

These differences were considered in the main study and included in the main discussion. Vocational courses for larger companies in traditionally male dominated disciplines such as Engineering appeared (according to the teachers perspective) to be more adaptable to suit employers needs.

I elected to interview the Heads of Division or Team Leaders as these staff members would have more of a broad overview of the courses delivered within each discipline. By creating a structured questionnaire, I could revert to point when dialogue went off topic. Contrarily, I was able to glean much extra information from informal chat that took place after or before the interviews. As the summary of the study followed well after the first interview, I was able to reflect back in detail to each interview as I had created video recordings or digital audio recordings of most interviews, having obtained permission prior to the recording.

The process was harder than I anticipated as the busy diaries of some staff made making an appointment difficult, allowing for the fact that a 20 minute interview with me was low on their priority list. However, the positive side to this process has been that I have an established working relationship with the interviewees which meant that they felt more comfortable discussing wider or deeper issues with me than they would have a stranger. This however, did mean the interviews went off course slightly at times, but this was beneficial in terms of extra information discovery. Most interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes and I was able to get all the required information in that time and write notes. Each participant behaved as I expected. When the consent forms were given out, some appeared to be reluctant and claimed to have no knowledge of policy strategies or politics, but once it was explained that we were discussing qualification changes within their division, they were immediately placated and happy to answer

questions. A conclusion to this revelation may be that the interviewee's may have a reluctance to embrace or acknowledge Governmental policy changes per se, but that when given context, each was able to relate how the changes affected them both in their role and also in their work load. Data to reflect the employment status in the 2010-2012 (the time of the pilot study) was relatively easy to find on Government or official website. Larger industries or specifically more specifically more traditional industries were easier to find data on such as Engineering and Construction. Progression from Education into Health & Beauty routes and Child care has thus far proved fruitless giving an uneven gender bias.

The effectiveness of the data-gathering instrument I tested was positive. However, on a bigger scale, and with non-familiar subjects, the questionnaires would have to be more specific and the interviews more structured.

Questionnaire rational for main study for learners

My core questionnaire questions for the learners was designed to investigate whether they felt that the skills learnt on their vocational course were valuable or essential in procuring related employment. This, I felt was the most important part of the research for the learners. Related to this was the question to the Employers in terms of what skills were / are essential for employment roles, both then and now. These questions were important to address in terms of my understanding of the subjective realities of both my learners and the employers.

Other questions I have developed to address the full context of the course format change.

- Did your vocational course directly contribute to your related employment success?
- Did you obtain valuable related skills on your course?
- Did you obtain other more general skills as opposed to trade skills?
- Did your course offer the opportunity to learn and practise new skills?
- Did your course relate to the required skills in a job role?
- Did your course have a positive effect on your prospective employment?
- Did the skills learnt on your course give you the confidence to apply for related job roles?
- Did the course contribute to your success in a work role?
- Would you recommend your course to other people wanting the same career?

These questions addressed the understanding of the student experiences on their level 3 course. There is a strong emphasis on employment and skills in the design. Understanding how the students differentiate between soft skills and core skills was

essential and being able to understand how they made that definition as this would shape the results of the main study. The design also addressed the concept of related employment and what part they felt their course contributed to it.

Conclusion to pilot study

The organisation of data collection in terms of time was considered as it was a factor in the pilot study. While access to staff and students was not an issue, finding time within working hours was, so this was considered when designing the timeframe for the main study. Many of the teachers did not have 30 minutes to spare in their working day and it was important that the participants did not feel rushed as this may affect the conversation flow in the interviews. A long timeframe was devised for employer interviews as these had to take place outside on my own full-time teaching hours but within business hours for the employers and meetings were therefore organised on half term breaks.

When the pilot study commenced and in the early stages of this research, a focus on 19+ learners was also included and a research question addressing the progression options for this group and the withdrawal of funding and lack of employment opportunities was designed but it became evident through the pilot study that many of the considerations for the 19+ learners were not going to fit under the boundaries of this research. The considerations included funding strategies for 19+ learners, Adult apprenticeships, loans for Access courses, bridging courses for industry sectors i.e. Construction, and required adult loans for these qualifications. As the research is primarily concerned with level 3 learners and their progression, after the pilot study ended, I decided to give this group consideration within the main research as this was certainly a factor in student group profile changes and thus a consequence of policy reforms.

While completing my pilot study was no guarantee of the success of my main study as it was based on small numbers, it was useful in terms of understating the issues of undertaking interviews, data capture and timeliness. I decided to include the participants in the pilot study in the main study as I did not change the questions or the method of recording the interviews. Leon, David, Kraemwr (2011) discuss the importance of pilot studies and how the feasibility of approach can be used in the larger

scale study., however I was aware that this pilot study was not a guarantee of success for the main study. While some theorists argue that pilot studies are not necessary for use in the main study (Holloway, 1997 p121) other argue that the pilot study provides the researcher with 'a clear definition and focus of the study' Frankland and Bloor (1999, p.154) which can help the researcher for the main study.

18 GLOSSARY

ACM Association for Computing Machinery

AoC Association of Colleges

APPG All-Party Parliamentary Group

AVCE Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education

BCC British Chamber of Commerce

BIS Business Innovation and Skills

BTEC Business and Technology Education Certificate

CBI Confederation of British Industry

CCNA Cisco Certified Network Administrator

CEDEFOP European Centre for Development of Vocational Training

CG Coalition Government

C&G City & Guilds

CIPD Construction

CITB Construction Industry Training Board

DfE Department of Education

DfEE Department for

DfES Department for Education and Skills

DfSF Department for Schools and Families

EAL EMTA Awards Ltd

EMA Education Maintenance Allowance

ERA Educational Recording Agency

ESECT Enhancement Student Employability Co-ordination Scheme

EV External Verification

FE Further Education

FEC Further Education College

FECA Further Education

FEFC Further Education Funding Council

GCE General Certificate of Education

GCSE General certificate Secondary Education

GLH Guided Learning Hours

H&B Hair and Beauty

HE Higher Education

HEI Higher Education Institutes

HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council for England

HTML Hyper Text Mark-up Language

IEEE Institute of electrical and Electronic Engineers

IFS Institute for Fiscal Studies

IT Information Technology

ITC Information, Technology & Communications

IV Internal Verification

KPMG Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler

KS4 Key stage 4

LEA Local Education Authority

LO Learning Outcome

LSC Learning Skills Council

LSIS Learning and Skills Improvements Service

LSDA Learning and Skills Development Agency

MCSA Microsoft Certified Systems Administrator

NAS National Apprenticeship Service

NCF National Commissioning Framework

NEETs Not in Education, Employment or Training

NICHE National Committee Enquiry into Higher Education

NOS National Occupational Standards

NQF National Qualifications Framework

NVQ National Vocational Qualification

OCR Oxford & Cambridge

OFSTED Office for Standards in Education,

OECD Organisation for the Economic Cooperation and Development

PPT Participation, Progression and Transition

QCF Qualifications Credit Framework

PCET Post Compulsory Education & Training

RPA Raising of Participation Age

RQF Regulated Qualifications Framework

SFA Skills Funding Agency

SC Skills Council

SFA Skills Funding Agency

SLN Student Learner Number

SME Small to Medium Enterprise

STEM Science Technology Engineering & Maths

TQT Total Qualification Time

VET Vocational Education and Training

WBL Work Based Learning

WP Widening Participation

YPLA Young Peoples Learning Agency

YTS Youth Training Scheme

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