Work-based and work-related learning in Higher National Certificates and Diplomas in Scotland and Foundation Degrees in England: A Comparative Study

Final Report

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Section 1   Introduction

This final report draws on findings from the four stages of a comparative study[1] of Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (HNC/Ds) in Scotland and Foundation Degrees (FDs) in England that was undertaken jointly by researchers in the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRLL) at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) and the Open University (OU). The overall study has examined and explored the following issues: the demand drivers and how far they differ in both countries; the differing policy and funding frameworks in place in Scotland and England; the different types of provision which have emerged and the roles of different stakeholders in shaping this provision; the consequences of these models for the experiences of the learners involved; and progression of students into further study or employment.

1.1.   Background and context of the study

Scotland and England now have systems of short-cycle, work-related higher education (HE) which differ from each other in important respects. Short-cycle, work-related higher education refers to HE provision which has a particular emphasis on preparing people for the world of work, is focused on intermediate level skills and occupations rather than the higher professional level occupations, and is shorter in duration than the traditional undergraduate bachelors degree. In Scotland, HNC/Ds (requiring the equivalent of one or two years of full-time study respectively) continue to provide the main framework for work of this kind, while in England there has been a decisive move away from this provision towards FDs (requiring the equivalent of two years of full-time study). The divergence in policy and in practice between Scotland and England provides the opportunity for a comparative study of these two systems which can contribute to our understanding of both. Given the high level of interest which there has been in recent years on the role of HE in the development of vocationally relevant skills and employability, and the related issue of skills utilization, it is hoped that a study of this kind can make a useful contribution to discussions regarding the development of policy and provision.

1.2   Stages of the research and structure of the report

The research was undertaken in four distinct stages. In **Stage 1** we explored recent policy development with respect to higher national (HN) and foundation degree (FD) provision and the types of national frameworks which exist in both countries (Gallacher et al, 2006). This paper discussed the consequences of these differing frameworks for the development of guidelines which influence the structure of provision. It also highlighted the funding issues for both the institutions and learners. These issues are summarized in Section 2.

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[1] The study was funded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), Universities UK and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA).

Stage 2 explored the ways in which these national policy frameworks helped to shape provision at a programme level, and the differing ways in which national policy is implemented at a local level. The research in this stage of the study attempted to provide an analysis of the factors and drivers which have shaped the development of higher nationals (HNs) and FDs; to examine the nature, extent and intended role of work-based learning (WBL) or work-related learning (WRL) within and across these programmes; and to consider the ways in which employers have become involved (see Ingram et al, 2006; Reeve et al, 2007). This analysis is summarized in Section 3.

Stage 3 of the project examined in greater depth the extent and the nature of the WBL and WRL which students undertook in six case studies programmes. It also explored the experiences of stakeholders (e.g. employers, college staff, sector skills councils (SSCs) and other relevant agencies) in participating in this provision. These issues are discussed in Section 4.

Stage 4 focused on the transition of students into employment and/or further study after completing their HN or FD. In particular, in Section 5 we discuss the evidence from both our own and national studies regarding the use which students make of these qualifications, whether in the labour market or in HE, and the opportunities for progression which are open to them.

Section 6 of the report aims to provide a concise summary of the main conclusions which have emerged from our study, and considers some implications for the development of policy and provision in this area. It can be read as a stand alone summary of the report.

Section 2   Policy Context

The national policy framework for short-cycle vocational HE has developed in markedly different ways in England and Scotland post 2000. In England a new policy framework has been established which has encouraged the development of FDs as alternatives to HNC/Ds. In Scotland there has been no major policy shift of this kind; instead there has been continued reliance on HNs in Scotland, and a more limited review and modernization programme for these qualifications. The differences with respect to these qualifications can be seen as one aspect of wider differences in the development of skills strategies. In this section we will briefly consider some of these differences in the national policy context, and their implications for the development of national patterns of provision. This will then help identify some of the issues which we wish to explore in our comparative analysis of the implementation of these policies, and their implications for learners.

2.1   The establishment of FDs in England since 2000

The emergence of FDs in England was associated with a growing concern about a perceived skills deficit at the intermediate (associate professional and technical) level, and a related concern to remedy perceived deficiencies in existing courses and qualifications at these levels (DfEE, 2000; Blunkett, 2001). There was a perception that HNs, having lost their employer roots, now lacked support from employers. They were also perceived as having failed to develop new awards in growth areas such as information technology (IT), media, design and hospitality. However alongside these concerns, relating to skills deficits, there were other policy objectives which focused on increasing and widening participation in HE, and helping ensure that HE provision was more flexible, and provided opportunities for a wider range of people including those in work. Associated with this was an expectation that new qualifications should also be of a style and quality which would provide people with the opportunities for progression to honours courses in universities. It can therefore be seen that the policies lying behind these qualifications sought to address a range of agendas, and it may be suggested that there are possible conflicts associated with the aims of creating qualifications which are more employer-led, but which also ensure opportunities for progression to honours degrees.

These different agendas have been reflected in the guidelines which have been established in the years since 2000 to shape the development of these qualifications. These guidelines have been codified in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Benchmark (QAA, 2004) which outlines the key and 'defining' characteristics of FDs. Firstly the importance of *work-based learning* (WBL) is emphasized: 'Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation Degrees and their design' (QAA, 2004, p.4). While it is emphasized that WBL should be a central feature of these programmes, it is also recognized that it can take many forms, and will be different for those part-time students in employment, and for those who are full-time students.

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However the contribution of this to the students' learning experiences is seen as being crucially important. A related theme in ensuring the vocational relevance of these programmes is the idea of *employer involvement*. The Benchmark emphasizes the importance of ensuring that employers are fully involved in the design and regular review of programmes. Where possible they should also be involved in the delivery, assessment, and the monitoring of students, particularly in the workplace. A third theme is the one of *partnership.* It is emphasized that partnerships between employers, universities, colleges and SSCs are vital in providing programmes that are relevant, valid and responsive to the needs of learners and employers.

The importance of *accessibility* is also emphasized. FDs are intended to increase access and widen participation into HE. The opportunities to 'earn and learn' through WBL, and the valuable role of further education (FE) colleges in these respects is recognized. Associated with this is the idea of *flexibility*. It is suggested that flexibility should be central to many aspects of FDs; this includes full-time, part-time, distance, work-based and web-based learning opportunities and flexible progression routes. These two characteristics are linked to another element which is defined as a key characteristic of FDs, which is that they should provide opportunities for *articulation and progression.* It is suggested that FDs should be designed to make a valuable contribution to lifelong learning through providing arrangements for progression to honours degrees. They should also provide access routes for people with other qualifications, e.g. apprenticeships, and include arrangements for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). While this emphasis on providing progression to honours degrees creates valuable opportunities for the students, it also raises an issue of possible conflict between the more academic demands of honours degree programmes, and the strong emphasis on vocationality and WBL in FDs. This potential tension is not clearly addressed in the Benchmark, or the wider policy literature.

The tension between vocationally focused and employer-led qualifications and the need to safeguard the standards of 'degree' level qualifications is also reflected in the arrangements which have been put in place for the validation and quality assurance of the FDs. The initial arrangements for validation were that only those institutions with existing degree awarding powers could award these qualifications. This established the central role of the universities in the development of FDs. This has also meant the QAA has a key role in monitoring and maintaining quality within FDs. However it has also been suggested that it would be helpful if a wider range of bodies had the power to validate FDs, particularly by the FD Taskforce established by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to review the development of FDs (DfES, 2004). As a result there have been moves to allow greater flexibility in the arrangements for the validation of FDs. In particular the Further Education and Training Act 2007 has granted FE colleges the power to apply for the right to award FDs, although it seems likely that only a limited number of colleges will be awarded these powers.

Overall then it can be seen that the policy framework in England has encouraged the creation of new vocationally focused qualifications with a considerable emphasis on WBL and employer involvement. However it has also created the potential for some tension, particularly through the emphasis on providing progression to honours degrees, and the central role given to universities in the development of these programmes as the validating agents.

2.2   Developments with respect to HNs in Scotland

The recent history of policy development with respect to these types of qualifications has been very different in Scotland. In contrast to England there has been an absence of a strong policy steer for change. HN programmes have continued to enjoy a relatively high level of support from the devolved government, and there has been no pressure from that quarter to replace them with any alternative provision. However there was recognition that there was a need to update and rationalize these programmes. The HN Modernization Project was established to achieve these objectives and became fully operational in 2003. This has been a five-year programme, overseen by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which was designed to review all HNs by 2008. The aim of this programme was that HNs should be modernized to 'ensure that these key qualifications remain fit for purpose and provide the Scottish economy with relevant labour market skills' (SQA, 2007). Three key objectives have been identified for this project:

- rationalization – to reduce duplication and inefficiency and reduce units and awards by 50%;
- improvement of quality and consistency and ensure that all HNs are of similar quality – to introduce Graded Units to provide an integrated and graded assessment of knowledge and skills;
- to reduce the assessment burden.

An additional objective of this project has been to strengthen links with National Occupational Standards (NOS).

It can therefore be seen that this review and modernization project had more limited objectives than the FD reforms. It was essentially designed to rationalize and update what was there. It did not set out to undertake a critical review of HNs, of the kind associated with the introduction of FDs in England, because the political impetus for this did not exist in Scotland.

Associated with this review we can also note that the frameworks and principles which have shaped the development of HNs in Scotland in recent years have been rather different from those which shaped FDs in England. HNs have continued to be developed and validated as *national qualifications* under the auspices of SQA. However there are now three types of HNC/Ds. *Consortium* developments are developed by SQA involving staff from a number of colleges or other SQA centres across the country, and will be delivered in many colleges. *Specialist collaborative* developments involve staff from a

limited number of colleges in developing and delivering the HNC/Ds, while *specialist single centre* developments are developed by single colleges to meet niche markets. All of these awards are made up of HN units which are validated by SQA. It can be seen than that while the development and validation of HNs is part of a national programme under the auspices of SQA there is some scope for developments to meet more specialist or local needs. However most students are enrolled on the consortium programmes which have been developed at a national level.

As part of the review and modernization programme SQA developed *design principles* which all design teams should 'adhere to' when reviewing HNC/Ds or developing new awards (SQA, 2005). The document which outlines the design principles refers to the role of HNs in supporting '….technician, technologist and first line manager occupations for over 75 years, including progression in professional qualifications and other HE awards.' There is also reference to the 'more recent' developments in which '…some HNs have been specifically designed to support progression from Modern Apprenticeships and to degrees' (SQA, 2005). The design principles have been developed to ensure that the new or revised programmes will 'continue serving these occupations' (SQA, 2005). It is therefore clear that these programmes continue to be focused on these intermediate level occupations, although their role in enabling progression from and to other qualifications is also recognized.

However while these overall objectives are identified, the design principles are far less prescriptive than the QAA Benchmark for FDs with respect to issues such as WBL, employer involvement in delivery and assessment, and progression to degree level study. The ways in which the design principles are prescriptive is in creating a structure for the development of all HNC/Ds as national qualifications (although as we have noted some may be specialist awards). They specify the level which units should be at on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and the number of SCQF credit points which should be included. The size of the 'mandatory' sections in each programme is specified, and the role of Graded Units which are designed '…to assess the candidate's ability to integrate and apply the knowledge and/or skills gained in the individual HN Units' is also outlined. There is also reference to the place of Core Skills in all programmes.

The importance of involving employers in the development of these programmes is recognized, but in a rather different way from the role outlined in the QAA Benchmark. Teams developing HNCs and HNDs are required to conduct market research among employers, and also among potential candidates, to ensure that there is demand for the qualification. The specification for panel membership emphasizes the role of employer interests in the process, and at least one panel member must be an 'industrialist'. The market research which supports the case for validation is expected to be examined at the validation and the industrialist(s) on the panel are given the role of determining whether "the proposed qualification meets the short, medium, and longer term education and training needs of employers in the targeted sectors" and whether

'successful candidates are likely to obtain employment in those sectors at an appropriate level' (SQA, 2003, p.11). While this gives employers a clearly defined role it is not the more extensive one of involvement in developing programmes, and where possible delivery and assessment, which is outlined in the FD Benchmark. This does not exclude employer involvement in these ways, and indeed there is clearly evidence of their involvement in a variety of ways, as we shall discuss below. However the defined expectations at a policy level are clearly different.

Expectations with regard to WBL or WRL also differ considerably from FDs. There is no explicit reference to the role of WBL or WRL in the guidelines for the development of HNs. The guide to developing HN units does state that 'candidates who have access to a suitable workplace can base their assessment work on a suitable situation drawn from their place of work' (SQA, 2006, p.23). However there is no clearly expressed expectation that WBL or WRL will be a key part of these programmes. Once more it can be noted that WBL or WRL is included in many programmes, and we will discuss this below, but the formal expectations are quite different between the HNs and FDs. However it should also be noted that while the guidelines say little about WBL or WRL, the importance of developing Core Skills is emphasized strongly in many parts of the guidance regarding the development of HNs, and in the design principles it is noted that students should have the opportunity to develop all five Core Skills (communications; numeracy; IT; problem solving; working with others) in all HNC/D programmes (SQA, 2005).

The issue of progression to degree level study is another area where we can note significant differences in the guidelines which shape HNs and FDs. The possibility of enabling progression to degrees is noted in the introduction to the design principles. The validation guide for panel members also recognizes enabling progression within the SCQF as an example of a general aim for a higher national certificate (HNC) or higher national diploma (HND), and it is recognized that progression within a particular subject area could be a specific aim for a programme (SQA, 2003). However the issue of enabling progression to degree level studies has not been recognized by SQA as a key role for these qualifications and, although a significant number of students now do use these as transitional qualifications, it is their role as vocational qualifications which continue to be emphasized. By contrast, we have noted that the QAA Benchmark emphasizes the importance of progression to honours degrees as a key characteristic of FDs.

2.3   Development of FD and HN provision since 2000

An initial indication of the impact of these national frameworks can be seen from the data on patterns of participation and progression. Once more interesting differences between Scotland and England can be observed.

In England there has been rapid growth in the numbers of students registering for FDs since 2001 as illustrated in Table 1 below. This growth of numbers in FDs in England is of course associated with the political initiative to encourage expansion of this type of provision, and an associated decline in numbers registered on HNCs or HNDs. There have also been funding incentives to encourage this growth. Table 1 also shows that the majority of students continue to be full-time students.

Table 1   Students on FDs by year and mode of study

Academic year	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Percentage full-time
2001-02	2260	1740	3995[2]	57%
2007-08	24440	16005	40445	60%

Source: HEFCE, 2008

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) data also shows that FD students are taught in both higher education institutions (HEIs) and colleges. In 2005-06, 44% of entrants were taught wholly or partly in HEIs, while 56% were taught wholly in colleges. It is notable that the majority of part-time entrants (55%) were registered and taught in HEIs, while the majority of full-time entrants (63%) were taught in colleges. Almost all colleges, which are not 6th form colleges, provide FDs (91% in 2005-06). A large number of post-92 universities (85%) run FDs, while a smaller, although still significant number of pre-92 institutions (44%) run these programmes (HEFCE, 2008).

The FD programmes now cover most disciplines and involve many major public and private employer organizations, though there is a certain amount of clustering. Almost half of all programmes are in three areas - business, education and computing (48% of entrants in 2005-06). As expected, they are attracting a wide range of students with varied entry qualifications. It is estimated that around one third of entrants had A level or equivalent qualifications, while another 17% had HE level qualifications. Over two thirds (65%) are mature entrants (aged 21 or over). In 2005-06 the majority of entrants (57%) were female, a gender difference which was even more pronounced among part-time students, where 66% of entrants were female (HEFCE, 2008).

In contrast to the growth of FDs, there has been evidence of fluctuation in the level of participation in HNC/Ds in Scotland in the period since 2001-02. During the 1990s numbers participating in these programmes leading to these qualifications more than doubled. This was particularly associated with significant growth in students taking full-time HNDs. However since 2000, there has been fluctuation in numbers participating in these programmes in the colleges, particularly among students on part-time HNCs. Nevertheless there has been an overall increase in entrants to these programmes with SQA over this period as Table 2 on page 13 illustrates.

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[2] In HEFCE's presentation of statistics they state that they have rounded students numbers to the nearest five, hence not all totals may add up as presented. This is also the case with some of the figures detailed in Table 4 on page 51 of the report.

Table 2   Entrants to HNCs and HNDs

Academic Year	HNC	HND	All HNC/Ds
2001-02	16,802	11,874	28,676
2007-08	17,879	14,056	31,935

Source: SQA, 2008

A major difference between HNC/Ds in Scotland and FDs in England is that the HNs are almost exclusively delivered through colleges, with only very limited provision in HEIs[3]. Although there is a wide range of subjects represented within the HNs those with the highest student numbers are computing, business administration, education and childcare and social care, areas where the FDs also recruit strongly. HN programmes attract students from a wider range of social backgrounds. Around two thirds are over 21 at time of entry, only around 15% have three Highers which is the minimum requirement for entrance to a degree through 'traditional' routes, and around 40% are residents in areas within the two most deprived quintiles of the Scottish population. In all of these respects they are significantly different from entrants to undergraduate degree courses in universities (Gallacher, 2006).

2.4   Conclusions

The development of FDs in England in the period since 2000 has been based on a perceived need for a radical restructuring of vocational HE for occupations at associate professional or technician level. By contrast, in Scotland, there has not been a similar perceived need for radical change. Instead there has been a more limited process of evolutionary change through a review and modernization of the existing SQA led HNC/D suite of qualifications. Associated with this there are apparently some important differences in the guidelines for the development of qualifications between the two countries. In England we have seen a strong and explicit emphasis on the need for WBL in all FDs. In Scotland this has not been emphasized in the same way, but there has been a very clear emphasis on the importance of including opportunities to develop core skills in all of the programmes.

There are also differences with respect to the role of employers in the development and delivery of these programmes. In FDs it has been made clear that employers are expected to be involved, not just in the development of the programmes, but also in their delivery and assessment. In Scotland, while the need for consultation with employers in the development of programmes is emphasized, and they are also given an important role at the validation stage, there is not the same explicit emphasis on involvement in delivery and assessment.

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[3] Two HEIs in Scotland have a significant number of HNC/D students. One is the UHI Millenium Institute, which provides higher education for the Highlands and Islands, and is made up of a federation of the colleges within this area. The second is the University of the West of Scotland, which was created through a merger of Bell College and the University of Paisley. Bell College had a significant number of HNC/D students. There is very little HN provision in any of the other universities or HEIs in Scotland.

A further difference is with respect to the opportunities for progression to degree level study. It is perhaps slightly paradoxical that while FDs are presented as employer-led qualifications, there is also an explicit requirement to create opportunities for progression to honours degrees. By contrast, while opportunity for progression to degree level study is recognized as a possible outcome for HNC/Ds, it is not emphasized as a required objective. Associated with this, when the role of HEIs in the development, validation and delivery of programmes is considered, it can be seen to be a much more central one in England than in Scotland.

We shall now consider the ways in which these differing national frameworks shape and influence the development and delivery of these programmes, and the experiences of students.

Section 3 How are these divergent policies reflected within implementation?

In this section we will move from policy intentions to the experience of programme organizers, and other stakeholders, as they established or redesigned actual provision. Drawing on data from 38 programmes we will outline briefly the drivers for establishing provision, the nature and extent of WBL and WRL that was found, and within that the nature of employer engagement with the programmes. Both clear differences and striking similarities emerge between the HNs and FDs. A number of factors are highlighted as important in mediating the divergent national policies, and producing areas of convergence.

3.1 Data gathering

For this initial empirical stage of our research we sought to include a range of programmes which were, as far as possible, representative of the wider HN and FD field. Thus in Scotland, where HNs are national programmes, we selected our sample from across the whole country. Given the local or regional nature of most FD provision, it was appropriate to identify two contrasting regions from which to draw our sample. We included examples from some of the most popular subject areas, and from emerging areas. The final sample included both HN and FD programmes from the Agriculture and Land-Based sector; Art and Design; Computing; Early Education and Child Care; Engineering; Fashion/Beauty; Hospitality/Travel and Tourism; and Sport and Leisure. In order to include some bespoke FDs in our sample we also included two programmes within the area of Management which were offered nationally by distance learning. As other researchers in this field have noted, see for example Sheehan (2006), there is considerable fluidity in the FDs being offered by institutions, with some advertised courses actually running and others not recruiting enough students to operate. This had some effect on the research sample which was eventually obtained.

Data has been generated through a series of one-to-one interviews with key individuals involved in the development and delivery of HN and FD programmes. In England, this usually meant the programme organizer, who may be working within an FE college or within the validating university. In the end, interviews were obtained for 16 different FD programmes in England including examples within all of the subject areas identified above. In Scotland, interviews were obtained for 22 programmes. Here as well as interviewing programme organizers, we were also able to interview those within SQA who had responsibility for the modernization of those HNs in the 8 subject areas selected. Therefore, in total, 30 interviews were obtained from HN programme organizers and developers. All of the interviews took place during the period 2006-07.

3.2 Complexities of WBL and WRL

An immediate issue in seeking to research the nature of the WBL and WRL which has been established within HNs and FDs is the variety and complexity of definitions. A number of commentators have pointed to the variety of terms in use, and the difficulties of pinning down categories (Brennan and Little et al, 2006; Connor and MacFarlane, 2007). Learning may be located in the workplace, college or university, may be experiential, project based or relatively formal, may be assessed or not, and may involve different types of knowledge and skills. However this complexity is not really recognized or explored in the policies shaping HN or FD provision. For example, the QAA Benchmark for FDs refers to students learning both in the institution and the workplace (2004, p.5) and to the 'successful application' in the workplace of knowledge and skills (2004, p.8). So here we see a clear steer towards locating a proportion of the learning, interestingly the amount remains unspecified, within the workplace. It also appears to construct the workplace as receiving rather than generating knowledge. The Benchmark outlines a number of different forms that WBL can take (2004, p.5) including utilizing the full-time or part-time work of the student, placements, and 'real work environments'. The latter are not delineated but the implication here is that they may be located in the institution.

What appears to have emerged in the programmes we have studied is a wide range of different activities which are all associated with attempting to give students opportunities to learn *in* the workplace, or engage in learning which will be *relevant* to work, and will help prepare them for it. Programme organizers are themselves sometimes unclear about how to describe and categorize these learning experiences, in particular what 'counts' as work-*based* learning and, in the case of FDs, to what extent college-based work-*related* learning is acceptable. Some FD programme organizers suggested that certain forms of WBL are viewed in policy terms and by the field as more valuable than WRL. Examples are provided below to unsettle such assumptions. Instead what emerges is a variety of approaches which are tailored to the sometimes difficult conditions of each sector. At best, innovative approaches to both WRL and WBL are found which can be seen as creative responses to the challenges of establishing such learning opportunities.

3.3 Drivers: responding to national or local needs

In our interviews with programme organizers we explored the reasons for developing or re-developing their FD/HN programme. We found a number of examples in both England and Scotland of programme organizers responding to national skills gaps. For example one FD in Fashion positioned itself as meeting the national need for pattern cutting and garment construction skills as identified by a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) report. In a similar way, in Scotland changes in the field of broadcasting have led to the redevelopment of HNs to focus on new technology and increasing demand for freelance workers. In the early years sector both English and Scottish

providers were quick to respond to new national policies. Although these policies differed in important respects, both aimed at increasing opportunities for staff to gain formal qualifications. In addition, in the early years sector in England an extensive package of financial and other support helped to stimulate the market amongst students.

Where the data from the two countries diverges is in the extent to which programme organizers were responding to local or regional needs. As we have indicated above most HN provision is organized at a national level through large consortia. Although smaller specialist collaborative developments and specialist single centre developments were included in our sample, it did not appear that these were responding to local labour markets, but to the need for specialist provision which was really national, e.g. veterinary nursing. There was however evidence that some colleges were seeking to tailor nationally designed programmes to local markets at the stage of implementation. In contrast there were a number of examples of FD programmes which focused on local needs. For example, research by one university identified a shortage in marine skills in the local area which contributed to the 'requirement' for a relevant FD in Engineering. Similarly, a specialist FD in the hospitality/travel and tourism sector was established to fill a perceived local gap in provision of this type. The importance of tailoring the programme to fit the region, as opposed to a 'London view' of the industry, was stressed by the programme organizer.

Whilst some institutions appear to have drawn on systematic research into the local market, others appear to be using more informal methods to check out their assumptions about needs through discussions with existing employer contacts. We found slightly more examples of the latter approach than the former, which may of course reflect the resources available to colleges to undertake this form of market analysis work. Even where robust market intelligence is obtained by colleges they may still be subject to changes in organizational policy. For example one programme organizer for an FD in Engineering explained why their FD had not recruited in the fourth year of the programme.

> *Some companies in the area have gone out of business or moved their entire operations offshore, and that obviously has knock on effects into some of the supplier companies in the supply chain.* (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Engineering)

Despite previously operating with small cohorts of 14 students, in this year they were unable to run having received only 2 applications. Unsurprisingly this interviewee pointed to the 'short shelf life' of these local developments. Another FD in Chemical Engineering has also failed to recruit to its full-time FD although it was able to run the course on a part-time basis. These difficulties were reported during a period of growth, 2006-07, both for the economy and HE. These issues are likely to become even more acute as we enter a period of recession, and restricted HE growth.

As we have seen, FD policy encourages partnership between providers and employers, including the establishment of bespoke programmes which focus on the needs of a particular organization. Within the regions we studied and at the point of selection (2006) there were few examples of such provision. Nevertheless we were able to include some examples of bespoke FDs within our sample. These included one FD in Business developed for one of the armed services and delivered on a national basis by distance learning. Interestingly, although developed to enhance recruitment and retention within one service, the programme was opened up to other armed services and then to private companies. Similarly we included an FD developed for an emergency service, also delivered using distance learning approaches.

3.4 Approaches to WBL and WRL

Firstly, we will establish the range of approaches to WBL and WRL which were highlighted by programme organizers, and then explore the reasons for similarities and differences which emerged between the two frameworks.

3.4.1 Extensive WBL experiences, including placements

Programmes in both Scotland and England which lead to, or are linked with, professional awards were found to include significant periods of learning within an appropriate workplace, supported in part by workplace staff. Thus the Early Years and Veterinary Nursing programmes in both England and Scotland include learning in the work setting as a significant proportion of the programme. This type of WBL is shaped to a significant extent by existing frameworks for professional training including the requirements of professional bodies or regulators (Edmond et al, 2005). In the case of an FD in Veterinary Nursing, for example, 70 weeks are required in practice.

The ways in which this work experience is deployed within the programme varies considerably. For example in one part-time FD in Early Years all students need to be in employment before starting the programme and modules which utilize learning from their existing work comprise at least 30% of the programme. In contrast full-time students on an HNC in Early Years are offered a 14 week placement (about 39% of the HNC year). Placements are secured by the course, usually within a relatively large organization, and a suitable work-based 'placement supervisor' is identified for students. Students need to demonstrate, in the workplace, learning outcomes which are associated with preceding theoretical units; a process described by the programme organizer as 'pulling together' theory and practice.

3.4.2 Short student-led placements

In other subject areas we found examples of shorter placements, for example within HNs in the engineering, hospitality and sports sectors and within FDs in, again, sports and hospitality. The length of these 'short placements' varied considerably from a few days undertaken at intervals during the programme to a period of consecutive weeks. In

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some FDs considerable proportions of the programme (e.g. 20% for one FD in Sport) could be built up in this way.

Several programme organizers, from both the HN and FD sample, reported that securing placements could be difficult and time consuming. Connor and Little (2005) refer to this as a wider problem, and point to the financial disincentive for employers since hosting placements may incur costs for supervision, mentoring, coaching and perhaps assessment.

> *As companies increasingly look to run lean operations, such costs cannot easily be absorbed for their own workforce, let alone for students outside the company coming in on work placements.* (Connor and Little, 2005, p.63)

In responding to these problems some programmes in our sample felt that student numbers must remain modest in order to limit the demand for placements. For example one full-time FD in Hospitality aimed for a cohort of 15 to ensure that they were able to find placements for all the students. By contrast staff on an HND in Travel and Tourism reported that they had given up on the idea of having placements because of the difficulties associated with finding suitable ones for the larger number of students (40) involved. Another response observed within both HNs and FDs was to require students to arrange placements for themselves. For example, students on an HND in Sport and Leisure are supported by college staff in finding their own placements, and students within one full-time FD in Fashion gain credit for the search as part of their assessment. Whatever the source of the placement, it appears that programme organizers are wary of placing too many demands on employers in terms of student support or assessment. For example placement reports where utilized tend to be brief and framed in terms of 'feedback' (this issue is explored in greater depth in Section 4).

3.4.3   College-based WBL environments

Some programme organizers identified the college or university as a suitable work environment. In part this simply reflected their position as a large local employer able to offer relevant work, for example in web-site development in the case of one computing FD. In other cases this took the form of a particular facility created to support teaching and learning. For example fully functioning training restaurants, located within the college but serving members of the public, which are being used for WBL can be found within both HN and FD Hospitality courses. In another FD in Hospitality students were required to plan and undertake music events on campus aimed at students and other young people. This provided exposure to planning, budgeting, marketing and managing an event. In these examples the college is facilitating the process of students engaging in 'real work' with a commercial purpose.

3.4.4   College-based WRL environments

Other programmes have identified key aspects of the relevant industry and created opportunities for students to experience these through different means, such as through exposure to particular events or via simulations. For example one HND in Travel

and Tourism has created a simulation of a fully equipped airline cabin to provide access to an environment that would otherwise not be available to an untrained student. In another example an FD in Computing aimed at full-time students is establishing a virtual company with a web presence. Students have to communicate with the virtual company as if it were a real company, meeting deadlines and producing finished work. Such an environment might be a helpful introduction to the role of a multi-media consultant responding to clients. Students are then able to go further and set up their own embryonic company as an alternative WBL context, indeed at the point of our interview several students had already set up a web design company and gained several commercial contracts. Thus, in this case, distinctions between simulated WRL and real commercial WBL become difficult to maintain.

It could be argued that college-based WBL and WRL provides an efficient means of accessing the content of key work tasks, whilst facilitating guidance and support for focused learning. What is missing, however, is an opportunity for students to learn about the wider culture of that industry and of particular external workplaces. While these in-house opportunities are found within both frameworks it appears that it is within the FD sample that particularly innovative formats are emerging.

3.4.5 WRL Projects – including 'industry-led projects'
Many programmes across both frameworks include substantial project work, which is designed by staff to relate to problems or issues in the relevant industry. However a number of FD programmes sought the input of industry professionals in designing, setting and providing feedback on projects. One programme organizer for an FD in Engineering described the students as 'really getting their teeth into' an 'industrial-standard project', suggesting that the employer involvement here resulted in a qualitatively different learning experience, despite most of the work taking place in college. This view is echoed by another programme organizer for a part-time FD in Chemical Engineering who emphasizes the importance of using projects that stem from real problems in the industry that are 'not contrived'. In this programme the majority of the first year curriculum is organized around large industry-led projects. Students work in teams to devise appropriate solutions to real problems facing the industrial partners. The knowledge required for each case study is identified by students and then this is delivered through taught sessions in the college. It is by undertaking a number of case studies with different foci that students cover the required first year curriculum.

Similarly, each year the programme organizer for an FD in Art and Design approaches a leading industry professional to set a project which includes designing and constructing a garment. The professional visits students on campus, and may host visits to the workplace. Again this relatively targeted approach at securing employer involvement is seen as producing a significant effect on the way students view the work.

> They do have that sense of 'this is for [leading employer]' […] and they treat
> it very, very seriously in terms of the way that they handle the project. They

gain an awful lot from meeting these people, and actually hearing things first hand. (Programme organizer, full-time FD in Art and Design)

Again students are expected to be working, as much as possible, to the standards of the industry and in this case to begin to develop the ability to 'read the handwriting' of the design company and crucially to adapt their own style to it.

3.4.6   Staff from industry

A number of programme organizers from both the FD and HN sample highlighted the important role that staff from industry have in promoting WRL within the programme. In some cases this takes the form of guest lectures which contextualize current themes, for example within one FD in Hospitality managers are invited in from local organizations to explain how marketing is approached in their particular venue. In some cases the input from industry is over a longer term, with industry staff teaching or co-teaching particular modules. For example in one FD in Fashion an expert from industry is involved in co-teaching sessions which take place in her organization, whereas on the HNC in Fashion staff from industry are employed part-time by the college.

> *Some of these ones, they'll work for* [name of organization]*, and then they'll have part-time status with me here at* [name of college] *and then on top of that you'll also find that they're doing fashion shoots. So its building this individual that's not the normal 9-5 job, the expectation of the employment is they're doing bits from here there and everywhere because that's the nature of the industry that they're going in to.* (Programme organizer, full-time HNC in Fashion)

Programme organizers suggest that such staff have additional credibility with students, a perception that was confirmed by some students within our subsequent interviews. The additional contact that such a dual role provides, with opportunities for more informal contact, enables staff to begin to convey the requirements and culture of the workplace.

3.4.7   No WRL or WBL opportunities

Finally it appears that in some Scottish HNs, particularly those which are not preparing students for any particular occupational area, there is no explicit WBL or WRL element in the programme. For example the HN in Computing currently has no WRL or WBL, although it was reported that there might be an optional module in 'work experience' in the future. They do however provide opportunities for students to obtain industry-based qualifications as part of the taught programme.

3.5   Comparing WBL and WRL opportunities on HNs and FDs

The above provides some indication of the variety of approaches to WBL and WRL that we found within each framework. It also points to significant areas of overlap between them. As we have seen, WBL, via placements or using the students' own workplace, feature within both HNs and FDs samples. We also found examples in both countries

where colleges have set up WBL or WRL opportunities for students on campus, and brought in staff from industry to support teaching and learning. However the existence of this overlap sits alongside a clear difference in the extent to which WBL and WRL is a significant feature of the two frameworks. Put simply, we found more examples of WBL within the FD sample, and greater use of multiple forms of WBL and WRL within individual FD programmes than was the case within HNs. And as we have noted above some HNs have no WRL or WBL at all. Some of the reasons for these areas of similarity and divergence emerge from our interviews with programme organizers.

3.5.1 The importance of the sector

Programme organizers are of course developing vocational programmes which are aimed at a particular sector. While as we have seen above the drivers for programmes may differ, and the extent to which national or local skill needs are emphasized may vary, each development remains situated in the culture and collective experience of their sector. The data that we were able to gather suggests that the culture of the sector was operating in a similar way in each country and this is a key factor in producing similarity between programmes.

In the case of professional programmes this can provide a context which is highly supportive of learning in the workplace. Firstly, key players such as professional and regulatory bodies place demands on providers for WBL.

> The hours and the times, the numbers of weeks the students have to do are laid down as a RCVS [Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons] requirement, rather than us saying that you have to go out for seventy weeks.
> (Programme organizer, full-time FD in Veterinary Nursing)

Secondly, expectations about what constitutes appropriate support for learners draw on existing approaches to professional learning. In the above case the RCVS professional body has a role in approving the 'training practices' where veterinary students undertake their WBL. In others, such as one FD in Engineering, it was staff from within the development team, who were themselves members of the relevant professional bodies, who implemented professional norms by drawing on their own experiences and understandings.

In contrast in the computing, fashion or sports sectors, or the developing multimedia sector, there is neither a significant tradition of placements for external students nor an extensive experience of supporting the vocational learning of internal staff. The pressures of the sector shape the nature of the employer engagement, with shorter WRL inputs being found in these sectors, for example through the setting of industry projects (in an number of FDs) or participation of (paid) photographers on a day shoot (the HNC in Fashion). Constraints on time and existing work practices appear to limit engagement in mentoring support or providing feedback. These findings mirror research by Sheehan (2006) on the practices of new FDs in the hospitality sector which suggest that, given the lack of time and demanding shift patterns which are typical of the sector,

attempting to engage employers here in assessment would be unsuccessful, and counterproductive. These sentiments are echoed by one of our interviewees from the new multimedia sector.

> *I think it is, you know, a bit of a myth that you're going to have all these employers involved in assessment and writing assignments and what have you.* (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Multimedia)

In this context it is unsurprising that in these sectors in both countries we see greater reliance on college-based WRL. However, also in these sectors the existing pattern of part-time or self-employment also provides an opportunity for staff who are currently working in the industry to become part-time employees of the college or university. As we have seen these staff represent a rich source of WRL for students.

3.5.2 Reaching employers – difficulties acting on both countries

In this section we will explore further the extent to which programme organizers in both countries encounter difficulties, or not, in securing employer involvement in WBL or WRL. Again it appears that the structure and the organization of the *sector* is important in influencing processes of engagement. In some professional sectors strong regional networks promote ongoing engagement between colleges, universities and local employers.

> *We sit within the* [name of region] *Childcare partnership, [...] because we're a multi campus college, we also have a member of staff on the [neighbouring region] partnership and [...] you know that's the forum for all the employers, the training agencies, not just colleges.* (Programme organizer, full-time HNC in Early Years)

These networks typically have a remit which goes beyond the HN/FD level which might therefore lead to a multiplicity of agreements between employers and providers. Although in England the arrangements for the child care sector differ, strong regional partnerships also facilitate links between colleges and employers. In one region a system of 'link tutors' was already in place to promote good practice in the sector. Staff developing a part-time FD in Early Years in this region were able to secure these 'linked tutors' as mentors for any WBL students who could not find a mentor in their own setting. While these networks are particularly strong in the area of child care they can also be found in other professional areas. For example one FD in Engineering drew on a regional network of chemical engineering employers to involve initially 20/30 employers in their market research, of which 10 became more actively engaged in providing feedback on course design. These professional or sector-focused networks appear to have regional or local roots which are independent of the particular FD or HN development.

Notwithstanding the support that such networks can provide, staff working on these professional programmes still reported that maintaining links with employers and renewing these links as managers move on was a very time consuming business,

echoing the research of Hillier (2008) on a range of public sector FDs. And despite working in long term partnership with major employers they might still be subject to short term policy changes. For example one Scottish college was working with a local council education department to develop a part-time version of its full-time HNC for employees. However with three months notice the employer's policy changed to supporting employees through the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) Level 3 in Child Care. Although the college was able to pick up the work of assessing these students its intended part-time HNC has yet to run.

Outside of these well structured and supported sectors the difficulties of reaching employers and securing their engagement was a major theme of our interviews. In some cases programme organizers capitalized on existing links with employers, developed through previous teaching activity. For example some FD development teams were able to call on employers who were involved in a previous HND. However in many cases they reported that it was necessary to fall back onto their own personal and professional networks. As one put it,

> *...because I've worked in this sector for a long time as had X, then we knew a lot of people and called in favours.* (Programme organizer, full-time FD in Hospitality)

Another programme organizer from the fashion sector outlined the time she devotes to maintaining her personal links with industry contacts, travelling some distances for meetings with them to maintain her own profile and promote her FD. She also now targets alumni from her course if they have secured employment in a relevant organization. Others describe an extensive period of contacting multiple organizations in order to find employers willing to help develop industry-set projects.

> *It was really sort of emailing around, ringing around, any contacts that we have, and we managed to find two or three multimedia companies at that stage who were willing to help. That is the most difficult part, finding employers who, who will help.* (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Multimedia)

This search was ultimately successful in finding one employer that was keen to become extensively involved in designing a project and providing feedback to students. The same interviewee describes the particular difficulties faced by rural colleges in engaging employers in providing placements or sponsoring their own employees.

> *It is quite difficult to get sponsorship out of employers. Well again because we are an rural area and there so many small companies, you know they don't tend to have the money, and I think that's why we don't get that many part-time students, because employers can't release staff.* (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Multimedia)

In response the university is considering developing an on-line approach for the part-time route.

In the case of two of our FD sample the programmes were developed specifically at the behest of one employer. Staff on a bespoke FD in Business Management indicated that the initial impetus had come from high level contact between the education department of an armed service and the university's vice chancellor. The development also involves another university located in another part of England. Although this could have been a narrow development the programme organizer suggests that the service 'never wanted a closed programme' and so other armed forces and eventually corporate organizations have been given access to the programme, although not to its management structure which remains firmly in the hands of the originators. Clearly in opening up the programme to other major employers, and offering it via distance learning, the university had protected itself to some degree from any change in service training policy. Providers offering bespoke FDs which focus on the needs of one employer may be vulnerable as we move into recession unless organizations can be persuaded that such training investments are themselves a necessary part of survival.

Thus we found then that programme organizers from both the FD and HN frameworks had encountered difficulties in securing employer involvement, and this was a particular concern for non-professional programmes which sought to offer placements to full-time students. As we have seen in some ways the response of developers in both countries were similar, for example to put the onus on students for finding their own setting, or develop alternatives. However HN programme developers have an option which is not open to those working within the FD framework of minimizing or even moving away from employer involvement in delivery. In contrast, FD developers have to persist with engagement and develop innovative ways of working with employers taking into account the constraints of time and resources, for both parties, that they encounter.

3.5.3   The influence of a required link to a degree programme

Another aspect that causes divergence between the two frameworks is the extent to which programmes are designed with particular progression routes in mind. As we have seen the Scottish HNs are intended to supply vocational skills, along with core skills. Progression is not in itself a required goal of the framework although a variety of routes are encouraged. Thus students studying an HNC/D programme might progress into a degree programme or a vocational programme in employment. In contrast each FD must identify a progression route into an honours degree programme, normally one offered by the university which is validating the FD.

Interviews with programme organizers from our English sample suggested that this progression requirement was a very significant factor in shaping the content and style of the FD. For example one programme organizer for an FD in Chemical Engineering described how they had to consciously smooth the transition from a very innovative first year, which was based almost entirely around industry-set projects, to a more traditional lecture-based format for the second year. He described how they identified the 'minimum' content required for progression onto the degree, and this became the

starting point for developing the content of the second year of their own FD. The programme organizer was himself resistant to this academic influence.

> *I claimed at the time, I still claim now that we could have had a more interesting course, had we not had the requirement to have that transfer at the end, and erm I was a strong promoter of foundation degrees in their own right.* (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Chemical Engineering)

However making the transition smooth for students, who would be dealing with the third year of an honours degree programme, enabled him 'to sleep at night'.

Other interviewees also referred to the need to balance the new and innovative approaches to WBL and WRL that they were developing with more traditional learning content. In particular when they came to validation a number indicated that particular scrutiny was focused on the extent to which the FD performed academically. For one organizer, university validation was a difficult process.

> *I would say that at the validation the industrial person was probably more supportive of what we were trying to do, I think sometimes the academic advisors are more concerned about the academic side of it and, the majority of erm, academics don't always see the work-based learning side of it.* (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Multimedia)

Perhaps because of the different validation arrangements in Scotland, where higher education institution (HEI) input is balanced by that from colleges, industry and SQA, this did not emerge as a significant issue for HN programme developers.

3.5.4   Influence of the introduction of FD policy itself and associated guidance

It is clear from the above that FD policy, with its focus on employer engagement and progression to HE, has strongly shaped the responses of many English programme organizers. Some outlined how the more detailed guidance which emerged in the form of the QAA Benchmark (2004), and the work of Foundation Degree Forward (*fdf*) had influenced their approach. For example the organizer of one FD in Multimedia indicates he followed advice to include at least 30% WBL in his programme. This pushed him harder to seek out new forms of WBL.

> *It was made very obvious to us that you know, we weren't going to get through validation unless it had these work-based learning opportunities, and if we go for a QAA that's what they are going to be looking at. And so it has probably made us, you know signpost them more and think up new ways of, of gaining those opportunities. So yea I think that's an improvement with the foundation degrees.* (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Multimedia)

However other programme organizers emphasized continuity with previous HND provision and suggested that no great change was needed.

We'd been running, very successfully, an HND for several years. And then, obviously, the government started to raise the idea of FDs with the idea that it was far more industrially linked with employer recognition and employer input and that sort of stuff. And when we looked at our existing HNDs, we realized that we were so close to an FD already in context and concept all we really needed to do was go through the validation process. So, we had the product there already. We had the industry links and we had done for many years. So, it was really almost a name change. (Programme organizer, full-time and part-time FD in Hospitality)

For some English institutions the national policy emphasis on FDs, and the identification of FDs as the major source of additional student numbers, was the significant driver in fuelling expansion of these programmes; rather than for example approaches from employers or research into the needs of industry.

3.5.5   FD policy emphasis on part-time flexible provision for employees

As we have seen FD policy has been framed in terms of enabling students to study flexibly, including on a part-time basis. Providers have been encouraged to do more to respond to the needs of employers and of existing employees for up-dating and progression in their careers. The same emphasis on flexibility is not found within HN policy, although traditionally much HNC provision has been viewed as serving existing workers. National statistics indicate that part-time provision is now a much larger feature of the FD framework in England than is the case within HNs in Scotland. For example during 2007-8 in England 40% of FD entrants were part-time (HEFCE, 2008) whilst according to Scottish Funding Council (SFC) data just 28% of Scottish HNC/D students were part-time (SFC, 2009), with the vast majority of them at HNC level. Our interviews also revealed interesting differences in the way that the sample programmes approached the work-based experience of part-time students.

Few Scottish HN programmes in our sample appeared to draw systematically on the work-based experience of employees or integrate the learning that may have resulted. For example, although one HNC Engineering programme has a number of students in relevant work who attend on a day release basis, no mention is made of using their work within the programme. Other programmes, such as one HNC in Computing, indicated an awareness of the students' relevant work and made the suggestion that 'possibly' they could link their learning activities to it. More encouragement is provided by an HN in Engineering where employed students may be permitted to relate their projects to their employment, as long as the work is of an appropriate technical standard and is in an area that the college can support. Here the programme organizer infers that such requests may come from the employer. Whilst the attitude in this programme is permissive there was no evidence that such linkages were promoted to students as desirable.

Our analysis of FDs offered on a part-time mode identified different approaches to utilizing relevant work. Some programmes, particularly in the education sector, require that students have access to substantial hours of relevant work with children. Students are required to draw on this work in completing assignments for several WBL modules. For example in one FD in Early Years they may be required to undertake observations of children in their setting and write a report indicating what they have learned from these observations using course frameworks. Part-time students on an FD in Engineering (which is also offered full-time) are able to negotiate projects with the college which focuses on their normal working environment. They must complete a technical report and give a presentation within the college. Elsewhere students on another FD in Engineering are required to undertake specific industry-set projects (which apply across the cohort) but they must in addition submit an overarching assignment which relates this learning to their own area of work. Thus relevant work appears more systematically incorporated into the teaching and learning strategy of FDs than is the case on HNs.

3.6   Conclusions

Our empirical work with a sample of 38 programmes indicates that despite the different policy frameworks which govern HN and FDs, when we examine what has been implemented by colleges and universities a number of points of convergence can be identified. Within each sample we found a wide range of approaches to WBL and WRL, and overlaps in what was offered by HNs and FDs. Thus we found examples of HNs with very extensive WBL provision and employer involvement in supporting students in the workplace, and examples of FDs where it had not been possible to incorporate WBL and instead college-based WRL had been utilized. We have suggested that the nature of the sector, its structure and existing approach to training, are important factors in bringing about convergence in the two frameworks. In particular professional bodies have an important influence on the nature and extent of WBL on both sides of the border.

Similarly at the other extreme in sectors which lack a tradition of training, and which have a preponderance of small and medium-sized organizations, programme organizers within both frameworks struggle to engage employers. There is some evidence from this research that the emphasis within FD policy on the importance of engaging with employers and the central role of WBL has encouraged FD developers to persist further in their attempts to involve employers. They are also more likely to have developed innovative approaches to WBL and WRL which add a new and potentially valuable dimension to the student experience, although we also found some examples of innovation within the HN sample.

The requirement that each FD should have an identified progression route to an honours degree was experienced by some programme organizers as a constraint on their ability to innovate, and they suggested this was in conflict with the emphasis on the needs of employers. However, as we will discuss further in Section 5, it appears that there is a significant demand from students for progression in both countries, and such

arrangements are intended to enable them to maximize the credit they receive from their existing qualification.

Section 4   The experience of WBL or WRL on selected programmes

In this section we will explore participants' experiences of WBL and WRL on a sample of HN and FD programmes. We have noted in Section 2 that the national policy frameworks for HNC/Ds and FDs differ with respect to the greater emphasis on WBL and employer involvement in the FDs. However we have also suggested in Section 3 that these national policies are mediated through other factors, and in particular occupational cultures and practices. We will now consider the ways in which these factors influence the learning experiences of students.

4.1   Data gathering

While Stage 2 of the research was based on a fairly large sample of 38 programmes, it was agreed that for Stage 3, in which we wished to gather data from the students involved, we should concentrate on a sample of six programmes, made up of three matched pairs of HN and FD programmes. These were selected from the larger sample included in Stage 2. In selecting these programmes we sought to reflect a range of different types of WBL or WRL. However we also sought to select a sample of programmes which were, as far as possible, representative of the national profile in terms of institutional organization, subject area, and the urban/rural dimension. On this basis the three matched programmes were in the areas of: early years; hospitality/travel and tourism; and fashion. Within these three sets of programmes there was a wide variety of different forms of WBL or WRL. Data were gathered from students on these programmes in two ways. Firstly, a short questionnaire was administered to all students. This gave us the opportunity to gather data about the general characteristics of the cohort of students. Secondly, it enabled us to identify students' overall views of the WBL/WRL activities they were undertaking. Finally, it enabled us to select an appropriate range of students to participate in individual interviews.

A total of 78 HN students and 33 FD students completed these questionnaires. The lower number of FD students reflected the fact that these programmes are generally smaller than HNs, and overall the response rate was a relatively high one of 87% for the HNs and 80% for the FDs. The second stage of data gathering involved interviews with a smaller sample of students and employers and representatives of SSCs. This enabled us to gather more in- depth information about the nature and experience of WBL/WRL on these programmes. A total of 12 HN students and 18 FD students were interviewed. Establishing contact with employers and sector skills council (SSC) representatives proved difficult in many cases, however 6 employers and 2 SSC representatives associated with the HNs were interviewed, while 4 employers and 1 SSC representative associated with the FDs were included in the sample. In total 43 interviews were completed for this stage of the research. The questionnaire and interview data were gathered during 2007.

4.2 The range of WBL or WRL on the programmes

4.2.1 Early Years
Students on the part-time FD in Early Years use their own workplace as a resource for WBL. Students are normally working full-time in their setting. The college assignments require students to draw on the work that they do in different ways. Within the WBL modules they are required to undertake a piece of work that relates to specific module topics. Students have to match their work in the setting to the topics that have been set. This may result in some adjustment to the work they are normally involved in within the setting, but in many cases this is not necessary.

Students on the full-time HNC in Early Years spend 14 weeks of their 36 week HNC out on placement. These are usually in three separate blocks of 5 weeks, 5 weeks and 4 weeks and usually in the same nursery setting for all 3 placement blocks. The HNC Early Years is a 12 unit HNC totaling 96 credits and 3 of these units are specifically related to WBL (24 units = 25%). However, a number of the other theoretical units have aspects which have to be carried out in placement (such as case studies, observing children etc). Therefore one of the programme organizers indicates that around 60% of the overall assessment is work-based assessment, the rest is college-based.

4.2.2 Hospitality, Travel and Tourism
The two case-study programmes within the general area of Hospitality and Travel and Tourism differed from each other considerably in terms of their structure, size and approach to WBL or WRL. The full-time FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism is a relatively small programme, by the time we gathered data from the students only 12 students were attending. By contrast the full-time HND in Travel and Tourism had 40 students and was one of a suite of programmes within the college which had over 100 students participating.

WBL and WRL was an important feature of the FD and included student placements, visits to a range of venues, and a number of guest lecturers. Students are expected to find their own placements and this process is assessed. By contrast, there were no student placements or direct work experience of this kind in the HND in Travel and Tourism. When interviewed in Stage 2 the programme leaders made it clear that they had come to the conclusion that it was not practical to include student placements as an integral part of the programme because of the major problems associated with obtaining placements for the large student cohorts with which they dealt. This meant that the college could not guarantee work experience for every student, and it was not thought fair in these circumstances to expect students to find their own placements.
> *…they all say they would like work experience, a number of people do ask for work experience, but there's too many problems.* (Programme organizer, full-time HND in Travel and Tourism)

However WRL is provided through a range of activities which include the provision of a simulated aircraft cabin, and a reservation and call centre through which students are introduced to the use of industry standard software for bookings and ticketing within course units. There is also a Tour Guiding unit in which students research a venue and prepare a guided tour for students and staff.

4.2.3   Fashion

The full-time FD in Fashion is based in a university and students undertake several 'industry-based projects' (1 per semester) during their programme. These are set by a designer from a leading company in the industry and, as far as possible, they simulate a real piece of work for that company. Students undertake the projects within the university, although they may have a visit to the site of the designer at the beginning of the process. The designer normally visits the university firstly to brief the students on the project, then to undertake a midway review and finally to review the students' designs.

Although the programme organizer had commented that, given the hectic nature of the fashion industry, it was not possible for the university to find students placements, students were expected to find their own fashion related placement during the summer holidays. Students were provided with some support from the course for this search, such as guidance sessions on writing CVs. These placements lasted 3 weeks full-time. Opportunities for placements in design companies were at a premium and students had to be resourceful in finding other sorts of work, including work in fashion retailers such as small boutiques and high street branches of larger fashion chains.

Thirdly, students also have several sessions which take place in a related work context. These involve joint teaching between a course lecturer and a member of the organization's staff. They provide opportunities to look at the work of previous designers. These three elements of WBL/WRL make up just under half of the programme.

The full-time HNC in Fashion programme runs for 36 weeks. While there are core units within the overall programme that are theoretical, the majority of the programme is focused on practical elements to allow for independent learning. The HNC students are not on placement in the traditional sense. They gain work-related experience through working with photographers. There are two strands to this aspect of the programme. Firstly, at the commencement of the HNC year, external photographers are invited into the college to set up a mock photography studio in the college, as close as possible to what the students could expect externally. Secondly, towards the end of their year, the students liaise with a photographer to do fashion shoots. Either way, it is the students who initiate these links and take ownership of this. This is all part of the submission of their assessment portfolio at the end of the course year.

4.3   The experience of WBL or WRL

Despite the greater emphasis on WBL in the policy framework for FDs, responses to the questionnaire indicate that HN students are as likely as FD students to view these types of learning experiences as *very important* in developing knowledge, understanding and skills, and developing abilities to do the job. For both sets of students over half of respondents indicated that WBL or WRL was *very important* in these respects. However, given the more limited opportunities for WBL or WRL on the HN programmes (with the exception of the HNC in Early Years) HN students were less likely than FD students to describe WBL or WRL as a *very valuable* aspect of their programmes (79% of FD students described this type of learning as *very valuable*, while only 45% of HN students described it in this way).

Through the interviews with the students, employers and SSC representatives we were able to explore in greater detail the learning experiences associated with WBL and WRL on these programmes. This enabled us to identify four main themes:

- a 'different type of learning';
- the integration of WBL or WRL with other learning activities;
- experiencing 'real life';
- a 'foot in the door'.

We will now consider the ways in which the extent and nature of the opportunities under each of these headings differed between the programmes, and differences between Scotland and England in this respect.

4.3.1   A 'different type' of learning
The opportunity to have access to a 'different type' of learning was a theme which emerged among students on both FD and HNC/D programmes. The nature and extent of these opportunities differed depending on the type of WBL or WRL which was available. This was also related to the sectoral differences which we have discussed above, as well as the impact of the national policies which have been discussed in Sections 2 and 3.

In Section 3 we indicated that placements can take different forms. In our sample for Stage 3 this could be seen in the HNC in Early Years where relatively long placements are an integral and highly structured part of the programme, but also in the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism and the FD in Fashion, where the placements were shorter and less structured. While the opportunities for this 'different type' of learning were most extensively available on the longer and more structured HNC placements, there was evidence that they were also available on programmes with the shorter placements.

The views of students on the HNC in Early Years can be seen as being summed up by Penny who emphasizes the value of the placement in complementing the college-based learning.

> *The placement has developed my knowledge completely because it's all well and good reading something but then actually going out and observing something. Because it's all well and good saying I will do that but then actually seeing if you can do it or you can reflect on the practice that you have or just actually seeing that you can do it practically.* (Penny)

The SSC representative, Phyllis, also emphasizes the importance of this different learning environment when she comments that students need to be exposed to the variety of issues thrown up by working with real children. For her, the college-based learning would be 'completely meaningless' without this opportunity to see it 'put into place'. The importance of this type of learning for these students undertaking the HNC in Early Years can be seen from their responses to the questionnaire in which 95% of these students describe WBL or WRL as *very important* in developing knowledge, understanding and skills, and 70% describe it as *very important* in developing their ability to do the job. Overall 80% describe WBL/WRL as a *very valuable* aspect of the programme.

For students on the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism, the placements are a less central and integrated part of the programme, but the different learning opportunities they provide are still emphasized. Some contrast the 'theoretical' knowledge of the classroom and the quite different learning which is gained from work experience. Thus Cindy notes that dealing with the problems encountered in a work setting led to learning which could not be found in the classroom.

> *Because you get knowledge of how it works. You could sit in a classroom all day with people telling you how it works but you never actually find out till when you get out there when you find all the problems and things and have to deal with them…* (Cindy)

We have noted that students on the FD in Fashion were expected to find short placements for themselves and it appeared that many struggled to find ones which were most relevant to their course. As a result there were more limited comments on the value of the learning experiences associated with these placements.

However the experiences of students on this FD in Fashion indicated the value of other forms of WRL in this respect. The industry-led design projects on this FD, which are set by staff from well established commercial companies, were noted by students as being of particular significance. It was suggested that the process of having the project set up by an 'industry name', and being briefed by them, made them more interesting and challenging. Susan describes how the process used for this project encouraged students to treat it differently to other coursework.

We treated like it was proper, like we were working for [name of design company]*, which was how* [name of course leader] *set the whole thing up, it just felt really pressure, pressure.* (Susan)

Students on the HNC in Fashion also emphasize very strongly the value of value of the WRL associated with their photo shoots, and the learning which they gain from this. Ann presents this view when she suggests that this is what all of the students really want to be doing, and those other parts of the course are things that they accept as necessary.

That's what every girl in the class wants to be doing; to go out and work on fashion shoots and editorial work on film sets […] Even though there are pressures, everyone's really enjoying it at the same time. (Ann)

These photo shoots, while they are not really industry-based, in that the students have to set them up for themselves, are nevertheless clearly seen as central to the learning experiences which students have on the course, and also very enjoyable parts of their programmes. This is an interesting example of how the college can create a WRL experience which students might find it hard to gain on a placement, given their lack of experience in the field.

On the HND in Travel and Tourism there is less emphasis on work-related projects as a central aspect of the learning experiences provided for students. However the value of the simulated WRL experiences provided through setting up an aircraft cabin and a travel agency in the college was noted by a number of students. The employer who was involved with this programme also commented that this was a valuable opportunity for students to experience learning in a 'live' environment.

…it gives the student if you like a feel for actually working in the aircraft, that sort of thing is very very good. The travel agency side is very good as well it gives the student there a chance to use a live system … (Steve, employer, full-time HND in Travel and Tourism)

However it must also be noted that, while these learning experience are seen to be valuable, not all students have access to them and a number seem to have had no experience at all of this type of learning. As a result less than a third of these students describe WBL or WRL as very important in developing knowledge, understanding and skills, or the ability to do the job, and less than a fifth describe these types of activity as a *very valuable* part of their programme, while all of the FD students in this area saw WBL or WRL as *very valuable*.

It can be seen then that the opportunities to gain access to this 'different type' of learning was in part dependent on the occupational culture associated with the programmes, as in the case of the HNC in Early Years. However there is also some evidence that there was greater emphasis on providing these opportunities in the FD programmes, reflecting the national policy framework.

4.3.2 Integrating WBL/WRL and classroom learning

Associated with the idea of providing different learning experiences through WBL or WRL is the issue of integrating this learning with classroom-based learning. This is identified more clearly as a priority within the FD policy framework than within the HN framework. The extent to which there is evidence of this integration of different types of learning varies considerably between the different programmes and the types of WBL or WRL opportunities which they provide.

The evidence of integration is probably strongest in both of the Early Years programmes, and this is perhaps not really surprising given the emphasis on structured placements and workplace supervision which has been an established feature of training in this field. While there is considerable evidence of integration of WBL or WRL with classroom-based learning on both the HN and the FD, there is some evidence that this is stronger in the FD programme. This reflects that fact that all of the students on this programme are working in the field, and studying part-time. The WBL is therefore not a separate placement activity, but is based on their regular working activities. As a result some students note that it is hard to distinguish between the work-based and other types of modules. One of the employers, Sandra, suggests that the benefit of having the dual student employee role is that students can try out ideas the very next day, rather than waiting for a distant teaching practice. Gemma, a student on the programme, suggested this mix made the knowledge she gained from the course 'more focused' and easier to apply.

These linkages are developed in a number of different ways. One example is via 'investigations'. Gemma describes how sessions in the college in a unit on child protection helped to develop her knowledge of the subject, and then she did her investigation 'to see how well it linked to our actual work'. More generally, students commented on the ways in which assignments are expected to contain materials from work and academic theory.

All of the students on the FD in Early Years that we interviewed talked about how the WBL elements and the course as a whole had helped to change the way they went about their jobs. For example Jane describes how observations of children can be 'literally watching children'. Now, in her view, it is more about the evaluation and analysis of what you see.

> …it can be a very simple thing they have done that actually can tell you an awful lot about that child when you look at it properly. (Jane)

Overall then it would appear that there is considerable evidence of integration between the work-based and college-based aspects of this FD and this is associated with the roles of participants as both students and workers.

In contrast, students on the HNC in Early Years are full-time students, and integration of college-based learning and WBL/WRL is achieved in quite a different way through their

placements, and the assignments associated with these placements. Students build up a 'placement portfolio' documenting what they have done whilst on the placement. College-based units contribute learning outcomes that have to be demonstrated on the placement; and in order to complete the college unit successfully students need to undertake these elements whilst on placement. Students and employers comment on the opportunities that exist to get involved in planning work in the setting. For example Margaret involves students in weekly and daily planning sessions, and this is partly so that she can fit their college requirements into work plans more smoothly.

Students are aware that when they write up their assessments any links that can be made between theory and practice will be valued by college assessors. Zoë stresses this linkage between theory and practice.

> *…but we're having to think about it, you know I wonder what theory that goes along with. So that's quite helpful because when it comes to doing your assessment you've got evidence to be able to back up that this is such and such a theory and it goes along with this and you get more marks that way; linking it to practice.* (Zoë)

A number of employers commented on the benefits of this link between college and WBL. Helen, one of the Nursery Coordinator teachers, describes in some detail the how the alternating pattern of attendance turns 'pretty raw' students into potential employees.

> *…there is something particularly good about having some theory then a placement and going back for theory then coming back for placement it really develops their practical skills and their theory.* (Helen, employer, full-time HNC in Early Years)

This is something that they couldn't achieve through college study or workplace experience alone, for her it is 'something about the combination, it allows them to match the theory with the practice'.

The opportunities for students who are working in a relevant field to integrate college-based learning and WBL was also noted by the students on the HNC in Fashion who are also part-time workers. Like the part-time students on the FD in Early Years, these students comment on the ways in which their studies and work are complementary. Thus Kay is able to comment on the ways in which the selling skills and make-up skills which she uses within her job in a large cosmetic company in a store have developed as a result of the course. At the same time her coursework has benefited from the experience of practicing on the wide variety of customers she meets at work. By contrast the full-time students on this HNC had relatively little to say about the nature and extent of the integration between WBL or WRL and classroom-based learning.

For students on the FD in Fashion, while there were some references to the ways in which classroom-based learning and WBL/WRL were linked, this was not a theme which was extensively discussed by respondents. The same is also true for students on both

the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism and the HND in Travel and Tourism and a relatively small number of students on these programmes described WBL or WRL as being *very well linked* to other aspects of the programmes.

So despite the greater emphasis within the FD policy framework on linking WBL/WRL with other aspects of the programmes, it would appear that it is sectoral influences which are again of greatest importance here. There is most evidence of integrating WBL with other types of learning on programmes such as the HNC and FD in Early Years where there is a well established tradition of work-based supervision as part of the training process for new entrants to the occupation, and relatively much less evidence of this on the other programmes. However it can also be noted that this FD is a part-time programme, which provides opportunities for integrating learning associated with students' actual work situation with college-based learning. In Stage 2 we had also observed other examples of this in part-time FDs, while there is less evidence of this in the declining number of part-time HNC programmes. This is likely to be associated with the trend for part-time HNC students to be studying together with full-time students on an in-fill basis, rather than on separate part-time programmes.

4.3.3   Experiencing 'real life'
A third theme, which emerged from students' comments about their experiences of WBL or WRL, was the value of being involved in 'real' working situations. Students on all of the programmes, with the exception of the FD in Early Years, where the students already had extensive working experience, commented on the value of this aspect of their programmes, although there were again variations depending on the type of WBL or WRL they experienced. Two main sets of issues emerged.

The first set of issues focused on the value for students of having experiences which would help prepare them for the working situations which they would enter. The opportunities here are particularly associated with placements, and while the HNC in Early Years provided the most extensive opportunities in this respect students on the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism also commented on these opportunities.

Students on the HNC indicated that they felt they were 'basically another member of staff' (Zoë). This led to identification as a member of the team, and recognition of the responsibilities which went with this, as Penny notes.
> *Yeah definitely, because you're professionals and you've got a responsibility to be there and you're part of the team and you've got to work with the team.* (Penny)

This position of the students was also recognized by members of staff in the nurseries. Employers view the placement as a way of bringing new people into the field and potentially into their own setting; for Jenny these are 'future employees'. As one employer comments there are mutual benefits to be had.

It's beneficial to both because it's an extra pair of hands for us and we hope that we can give the students ample insight into what they can expect when they go into full-time employment. (Margaret, employer, full-time HNC in Early Years)

While placements on the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism do not have the same role as part of an 'induction' process, students see them as an important part of a process through which they are learning what it will be like to work in this industry. The importance of the placements in this respect was clearly stated by Beatrice.

It's been really challenging because […] in practice when you go to the venue and you have to do it and that's real life then […] this is the reputation of the [venue] and it's a bit more responsibility and has been a bit scary but a bit of fun at the same time and very, very challenging. (Beatrice)

In a similar vein Richard, having been given a position in which he was 'actually manager of the box office' comments that it was 'hard work but very, very rewarding'.

For students on the FD in Fashion gains from their placements in this respect are more patchy and limited, and a number commented on the difficulties of obtaining placements in key areas such as design or buying. The more important experiences for students on this programme appear to be associated with the industry-led projects.

For students on the HNC in Fashion, while the photo shoots were not placements in the real working world, they were nevertheless welcomed by students as giving them experience of the world of work which they hoped to enter. Kay refers to the ways in which it is preparing her for the situations she will have to confront when she goes into work, and suggests that for this reason it is the most important part of the course.

…I'm going to know basically the way that it's going to work and who's going to be around me and that kind of thing so it's definitely probably the most important part of the course. (Kay)

The second set of issues identified by students regard the extent to which this gave them experiences of different types of working environments, which was of value in itself, but also helped them make career choices. Students on the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism, who had previous experience of working in the field, commented that the course represented an opportunity to move on. One contribution of the course in this respect was the opportunity to visit a range of different venues, or undertake placements in different contexts, which was of value in giving them some insight into what goes on in various situations. Keiron highlighted why this was beneficial to him.

I wanted to do some differences just to get a feel of different environments with different situations because I'm not completely sure where I want to be or what I want to do yet… (Keiron)

Another student, Beatrice, who had become involved in marketing as part of one of her placements was able to comment that she now knows that she enjoys this type of work. In a similar vein students on the FD in Fashion commented on the opportunity that the placement provided to sample aspects of the industry they wanted to work in. For example, it enabled Madeline to experience the repetitive nature of pattern cutting and to shift her thinking towards merchandising. For Erica the experience of working with the owner of a boutique was a more consistently positive experience, enabling her to see 'where my future might go', and in her case confirming her preferences. As we have indicated the HND in Travel and Tourism provided no direct work experience, but there were indications that those students who took the aircraft cabin unit found it to be useful in helping make career choices regarding this type of work.

It would appear then that students on both HNC/Ds and FDs value the opportunities to experience working life which the different forms of WBL or WRL can provide, and while placements are the most obvious way of providing this, other forms of WRL are also valued.

4.3.4   A 'foot in the door'

The fourth theme, which emerged from students' comments about their experiences of WBL or WRL was the opportunities which it provided to establish contact and get a 'foot in the door'. The role of WBL or WRL in this respect was identified by students on only two of the programmes, nevertheless it is worthwhile to note the comments which these students made. This issue was identified most clearly by students on the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism. Beatrice, when asked what was the most important aspect of the WBL within the course, identified the placements for this reason.

> *This year I think work placement probably, because I think it's getting your foot in the door as well, whereas when you go for a new job you can say I worked for the* [name of company] *and I got all this […] So I think that probably is the most important experience.* (Beatrice)

A number of the students had had placements in music festivals, and these were identified as being very valuable for a number of reasons, including the 'really good networking' opportunities which Richard was able to identify as a key feature of these events. One of the other students, Keiron, was able to comment that the contacts he had established in this way had already led to temporary employment.

> *Well contacts really because I worked sort of in the office for the* [name of festival] *and then I sort of made an impression of someone that was in charge of the site and I actually worked for him again at the* [name of festival] *so I'm going to be working for him again at the* [name of festival] *like this year and I get paid and everything so that comes from that.* (Keiron)

A similar view was also expressed by students on the HNC in Fashion who indicated that they valued the opportunity to make contacts through the photo shoots. In this respect

Nicola commented that 'sometimes in this industry it's not what you know, but who you know'.

It can be noted that while the value of WBL or WRL in this respect was identified by both students on an HNC in Scotland and students on an FD in England, there may also be sectoral differences impacting here. Thus the value of establishing these informal contacts may be of greater importance in occupational areas such as hospitality/travel and tourism or fashion, than in ones with more structured career pathways, such as early years.

4.4   The role of employers in these programmes

We have noted in Section 2 that the national policy frameworks within which FDs and HNs operate have quite different expectations regarding the role of employers in the delivery of these programmes. The QAA Benchmark (2004) indicates that where possible employers should be involved in the delivery of programmes, and the assessment and monitoring of students, particularly with respect to the learning which takes place in the workplace. However the guidelines for HNs do not indicate any expectation of involvement in this way, although it is expected that employers will be involved in the development and validation of these programmes. Data from Stage 2, reported in Section 3, has already indicated some of the difficulties which programme staff in both Scotland and England have experienced in involving employers in the development of programmes, and the importance of the cultures and traditions in different occupational sectors in shaping the different levels of involvement. In Stage 3 we have investigated the extent to which employers have been involved in the actual operation of these programmes. The picture which emerges is once more one of considerable variation between different HN and FD programmes, as well as differences at a national level between Scotland and England. We will consider this under two headings: Teaching and other forms of supporting learning; and Assessment, both formative and summative.

4.4.1   Teaching and other forms of supporting learning
Despite the different national frameworks there was little evidence of employer involvement in formal teaching roles in either the FDs or the HNC/Ds. That is, except where professionals had been taken onto the institutions' staff, external employers did not contribute to delivering significant parts of the curriculum. However there was some limited involvement of this kind on the FD in Fashion. Here some teaching sessions were delivered jointly by a staff member from a relevant work setting and a university lecturer. The employer involved is clear that her perspective is different to the theoretical approach taken by the university teacher. She considers it complementary, ensuring the students see 'that there are two sides to the same story'. However this was the only example of a joint teaching role which we observed.

The programmes in which there was the greatest evidence of employer engagement were, as might be expected, the HNC and FD in Early Years, and this again reflected the

strong tradition of workplace supervision in the wider education sector. There were however some differences in approach reflecting the structure of the FD as a part-time programme for people in employment, while the HNC is, as we have noted, a full-time programme.

The HNC in Early Years is probably the programme which has the highest level of employer involvement. Each student has a 'placement supervisor' identified within the workplace. The supervisors are able to attend a meeting at the college which provides a briefing about the course and their role. There are then several visits by college staff to the setting which provide *opportunities* for contact between supervisors, tutors and students. The focus of these visits is for the tutors to discuss with the student the developing placement portfolio. Helen, a supervisor, notes that it is not necessary for her to be present for the meeting although she tries to make sure she is available. If things are going smoothly Helen notes 'I don't have a lot of time with the lecturer from the college'. Chris, another supervisor, sees a positive benefit for supervisors from these visits; she is keen to be 'singing from the same hymn sheet'.

Some supervisors downplay the role that they take in providing support to students. Helen differentiates her role from training, she characterizes it as 'on the hoof within the job'. However another supervisor, Margaret, outlines a more formal approach in which she describes how she works with students to agree a programme of work.

> *Because they come out with lists of things which they have to do within their weeks with us […] you know we'll make suggestions to them and just discuss the best way to approach it, we'll come up with ideas and they'll come up with ideas, and between the two of us we'll work together to try and give them a good insight into what to look for and how to write it up.* (Margaret, employer, full-time HNC in Early Years)

In the case of the FD in Early Years the connections between the college and the workplace are less clear when it comes to support. A tutor from the college does come out to the workplace at the beginning of the course to familiarize themselves with the setting and check that it was suitable. However despite this Pat (an employer) commented:

> *Basically the girls are independent really, they sort of follow their own things from college and we don't have a lot to do with the college.* (Pat, employer, part-time FD in Early Years)

It appears that the topics of the workplace investigations are developed in the college and follow the pattern of module delivery.

Students indicated that they did receive support for their learning from a senior practitioner. In a couple of cases students were supported by people who were working in another setting, since there was no one at a senior level in their own setting who could provide support. In these cases the person who took on this role was already identified by the local authority as a 'link teacher' for the students setting. Students

identified a number of ways in which employers, and in particular mentors were providing support. For example Pat provided practical help by enabling Rachel to work with older children for some sessions, providing access to computers to type up her assignments at work or access the internet, and letting her leave early on college nights. Other students have also benefited from some flexibility around work schedules and from access to books and other resources.

With respect to the four other programmes in this stage of our study, while there were different types and levels of employer involvement, this was at a much lower level than that found on the two Early Years courses. There was however some evidence of greater employer involvement on the FD programmes than in the HNs. This could be seen most clearly in the FD in Fashion. We have already noted the role of the 'industry-led' project in this programme. Susan characterizes this as 'real involvement' from the companies, including the initial visit to the university to explain the brief, and it is clear that the industry designer gives a considerable amount of time to setting up the projects.

With regard to support from employers during placements, FD Fashion students reported very mixed experiences. This reflected the different locations which they had found for these placements, and there was no evidence of a systematic structure of support being in place.

With respect to the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism it would appear that the level of employer involvement is very limited. While students indicated that the managers they worked with were often friendly and accessible, they were also generally very busy, and students did not feel inclined to bother them. College staff emerged as the key people with whom students continued to interact.

The two other HN programmes both had limited, although rather different, forms of employer involvement. In the case of the HNC in Fashion, given that the fashion shoots are the major form of WRL which they undertake, the main relationship is with the photographers who work with the students on the photo shoots. However students indicate that the relationship with the photographer can vary considerably, with some becoming engaged with the students to help them achieve the best results, while others show no interest in becoming involved in this way. Students, such as Kay, also comment on the role of tutors in the preparation for their photo shoots.

> *It's different with the photographers; sometimes you can get a fashion photographer who will like come in and he'll direct you and he'll direct the model and he'll be brilliant and then other times you'll get somebody else and they're just kind of wanting to take the pictures and take the cash, that sort of thing but the tutors are quite good with sort of helping us through the process.* (Kay)

In the HND in Travel and Tourism, given that all the WRL takes place within the college, the college staff are clearly the key source of support. Although there is little other

direct involvement of employers in the teaching and assessing of the programme, the industry representative whom we interviewed said that he had a long history of involvement in the course. He gives guest lectures, but perhaps more importantly is a member of the advisory committee which the college has established to keep the programme up to date with developments. He suggests that this is very important in an industry in which technology is moving so fast.

> *…and the airline business is a very fast moving industry and we did put pressure on it to specifically have the technology aspect of it updated and that is happening again I am pleased to say.* (Steve, employer, full-time HND in Travel and Tourism)

Another form of employer involvement which was noted on both the FD in Fashion and the HNC in Fashion is the role of part-time staff who are formally employed by the institution but who also work in the industry. This was commented on by students in both programmes as important aspects of provision. Thus students on the HNC programme indicated that this had helped shape their choice of college in which to study. Nicola highlighted that was one of the main reasons why she chose this particular course.

> *So that's one of the reasons why I actually came to* [name of college] *because I heard that the teachers, the tutors are still in the industry and that's the main number one thing that you look for from a college, that they have people who know the up to date way of doing things rather than people who were in it 10 years ago ….* (Nicola)

On the FD in Fashion a student, Kerry, describes a part-time member of staff who is also a designer as 'inspirational' in opening up her thinking about draping fabric. It is his professional credibility as a designer which enables her to take his knowledge about fabric on board.

> *…because I knew he actually is a designer, he lectures here, but also he has his own company, I guess it's the respect for him and what he does.* (Kerry)

4.4.2   Assessment, both formative and summative
In general it appears that employers' involvement in assessment is fairly limited across all the programmes we investigated, although there is again more evidence of involvement in the Early Years programmes, particularly in formative assessment.

In 2005 the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) was granted the licence to become the SSC in Scotland that represents the social services sector, including Early Years. The SSSC representative, Phyllis, indicated that they had been active in arguing for a 'substantial amount of observed and assessed workplace practice' within the revised HNC in Early Years. And it does appear to be the case that supervisors now have a key role in deciding whether the student has completed the placement satisfactorily. Some supervisors characterize this as feedback and emphasize the limited nature of the judgments being made.

I sign bits of paper for them to say that they are actually attending [...] and then the questions go into a little bit more depth like how are they managing to relate to the children and how are they managing to relate to other members of the team [...] I mean they are very general questions I am not expected to give a great deal of feedback. (Helen, employer, full-time HNC in Early Years)

The format for this feedback is an A4 sheet listing the 8 outcomes which have to be marked satisfactory or unsatisfactory, in addition there is room for 3 or 4 sentences of written feedback. This supervisor suggests that 'signing off how the week has gone' and giving this feedback to the student will take about 30-40 minutes each week, which she does not consider burdensome. Like Helen, Margaret makes a distinction between the report she writes as a supervisor and actual assessment. Before becoming involved in any assessment she would need to develop an understanding of the standards that were being applied within the course.

In contrast, Jenny does consider that the judgements she makes, whether satisfactory or not, are part of assessment, although she seems almost reluctant to come to this view within the interview. Supervisors felt that the final assessment decisions were made by the tutors, and that cases where supervisors had concerns about a student could be discussed with them.

Students also seem a little unsure about the role taken by workplace staff in assessment. Some seem to consider it merely a verifying type role as Jackie indicates in the following quote.
Well the work I do I show it to my supervisor and he'll sign it and then obviously I'll give it to my tutor and he'll sign it all. My supervisor has to actually say that I've actually done it and that's okay. (Jackie)

All of the students identify the tutor as having the leading role in the placement assessment. In summary, a slightly ambiguous picture emerges from the data on assessment in this HNC. Most supervisors characterize their role as providing feedback rather than assessment and locate the final decisions, as students do, with tutors. Yet they are making judgements on the student which do feed into assessment.

Students on the FD in Early Years are clear that there is no assessor from the workplace, and that the college is the primary assessor. The absence of a workplace assessor was in contrast to their experience on previous National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at Level 3 and to their colleagues' experience of learning on the degree level EYPS (Early Years Practitioner Status) course.

Ironically perhaps, given the lack of employer input into summative assessment, it appears that a major focus for mentor support is explaining the assignments; what is required, how you might go about it and also, in some cases, how to write it up.

Barbara describes her role as a mentor in translating the requirements into terms that the students will understand.

> *Basically if they don't understand it, I can just sort of look through the assignments with them and then if they haven't understood what the tutors are saying I'll put it in plain English.* (Barbara, employer, part-time FD in Early Years)

A number of students had similarly sought and received formative feedback from their mentors. For some students, like Gemma, this went beyond feedback towards something more formal.

> *Before I handed an assignment in I showed it to the head or I showed it to the teacher [her mentor] and they marked it but that was nothing to do with the assessment, it was just purely to help me.* (Gemma)

Although some mentors are already engaged in providing formative assessment, the three employers we interviewed had mixed views on whether they would like a role in the actual final assessment. Barbara would welcome it partly because she could draw on her knowledge as a graduate of the course. Sandra felt some discussion with the course leader might be useful, but was very wary of more work, and Pat was clear that there would not be time for a greater role in assessment.

With respect to the other four programmes we can again observe differing types and levels of employer involvement in assessment, which reflect both differing occupational cultures and traditions and national policies and frameworks.

The industry-led project in the FD in Fashion is perhaps the most interesting example of employer involvement in assessment. We have commented above on their role in providing an initial brief to set up the project. They then return for a mid way 'crit' and a final 'crit'. During the final visit to the university they look at all the finished garments and select the best designs, and explain why, in their terms, these designs 'worked'. Susan describes how this was made as real as possible.

> *They set it up so it was like a special buying meeting, so they picked out things that they would go for in an actual buying meeting and then we all came in and they explained why they'd gone for these things and it was just really real.* (Susan)

This session took place as a group, but individual feedback was also provided to each student by the designer. This verbal feedback was written up often by course staff as industry people 'don't want to do the writing'. Although this feedback is important most students seemed aware that it was the college that had the final say. In doing so Sarah believes that course staff are balancing that feedback with a wider view, which puts an emphasis on the overall learning process.

> *I mean I think they obviously have the feedback into what works because if you haven't created something that is what they want to sell in shops, you*

obviously haven't fulfilled the brief properly […] but then I think the tutors go through and look at things like construction and then you get marked on that […] as long as you've shown the process of your idea and how it's come about and why and where and where it's led you, then you'll still pass…. (Sarah)

We have also noted above that on this FD a staff member from a related work setting provides some joint teaching. From these sessions the staff member provides verbal feedback on the way the students are progressing, but she is clear that this cannot stretch to assessment.

As indicated above both the FD in Fashion and the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism have relatively short placements. It was reported by students that employers did have some role in the assessment process for their placements, through observing their performance in the workplace, and feeding this back to the college tutors. However, students were uncertain about how this feedback would be taken into account, and were not aware of the criteria that might be used.

There is almost no evidence of employer involvement in assessment in the HNC in Fashion or the HND in Travel and Tourism, although it does appear that staff from a major airline are involved in assessing the air cabin unit.

4.5   Conclusions

Data from this stage of our study has shown that the emphasis on WBL in FD policy has resulted in more extensive learning opportunities of this type for FD students when compared with those on HNs. However it is also clear that students on HNC/Ds view these types of learning experiences as *very important* in developing knowledge, understanding and skills, and developing abilities to do the job. There is also evidence that differences in cultures and traditions within occupational sectors have significant impact on the availability of opportunities for WBL or WRL in both countries. In particular sectors such as Early Years, which draw on established traditions of workplace supervision within the education sector, place much more emphasis on providing structured support for students, and this is true in both the Scottish HNs and the English FDs. In this respect national policies are mediated through occupational cultures and traditions.

This stage of the research has also shown the value to students of a range of learning opportunities which include WRL as well as WBL. An interesting example of this was the use of college-based, but industry-led design projects in the FD in Fashion. Students clearly found these projects a very valuable learning experience, and this indicates the opportunities which can exist to develop innovative approaches to WRL where more conventional WBL experiences may be difficult to arrange. Given the evidence that the students on the Scottish HNs view this type of learning as very important, there may be value in exploring ways of providing more opportunities of this type.

We also observed wide variations in the nature and extent of employer involvement in these programmes. While, as might be expected given the national policy framework, there is greater emphasis on ensuring that there is some form of employer involvement in the FDs, it can be noted that in some cases this is still limited and, perhaps counter intuitively, the highest level of structured employer involvement is in the HNC in Early Years. This is associated with the importance of placements in preparing students for their professional role, and reflects the importance of national regulatory frameworks and historical patterns of support in this area of work. It can also be noted that there is little evidence of extensive employer involvement in assessment in any of the programmes. Even in the HN and FD in Early Years, where there is a fairly high level of employer involvement in supporting students, formal involvement in assessment seems limited. These finding indicate the importance of developing approaches to employer involvement which build on the cultures and traditions which exist in different occupational areas rather than seeking to impose a more unified set of expectations which can be unrealistic.

Section 5 Transitions into further study and employment

In this section we will focus on the transitions made by students into employment and/or further study after the completion of their HN or FD. As we have seen in Section 2 clear differences emerge in the objectives set for HNs and FDs by policy-makers. The role of HNs in delivering the vocational skills and preparing students for employment is emphasized, although further study is also recognized as a progression route for HN qualifiers. Policy for the English FDs, whilst emphasizing vocational skills, and in particular, meeting the needs of employers, also *requires* that each FD should have an identified progression route to an honours degree. It is in the context of these different objectives that we will examine the transitions made by students within the two frameworks. We will draw on national statistics and data from our own study to report on the initial outcomes for students.

We will also consider the extent to which students are able to draw on the WBL or WRL encountered within their FD or HN in their subsequent work or study. Here we use the phrase 'draw on' to encompass the diffuse ways in which students might use or be influenced by this learning process while in work or further study. This moves the focus from traditional notions of *applying* knowledge and skills in a new context towards new understandings of how knowledge is re-contextualized and changed by considering its relationship to a new practice situation (Evans et al, 2009). It also allows for the possibility that FD/HN graduates might use the learning from their WBL or WRL as one resource in developing new knowledge in particular situations in work, or indeed further study. Here we will utilize interview data from ex-students, and some employers, to explore the ways in which they draw on sector specific knowledge and skills, as well as more general learning or work skills, which have been developed by the WBL or WRL process.

5.1 Data gathering

For this final stage of our research we returned to the six programmes we had previously worked with in some depth (see Section 4). Programme organizers for these FDs and HNs were contacted to obtain information on the work/study outcomes for students 9 months after the completion of their programmes. In this way initial outcomes were identified for 117 students with only 11 remaining unknown. Interviews were then carried out with 19 students who had been interviewed at Stage 3. The reduction in the sample size (from 30 at Stage 3) was due to the difficulty of tracking down ex-students, particularly those who were no longer studying, 9 to12 months after completion. The interviews took place during 2008.

Our aim was also to interview the employers of those students who were now in related work; however it was only possible to interview six employers. The majority of these interviews were obtained in the early years sector and it proved extremely difficult to secure interviews with employers in the hospitality/travel and tourism, and fashion

sectors, due in part to the extremely small numbers of students who had gained related work in these areas. We also interviewed the programme organizers of the main progression routes within universities for these FDs and HNs.

Despite the difficulties of this longitudinal element within the research we have been able to generate some interesting data on the transitions made by students, and the issues that are viewed by them and others as significant in this process. As we shall see below the data emerging from our study corresponds closely to the national datasets in both countries.

5.2   Initial transitions for students

National datasets provide some indications of the likely outcomes for students completing HNs and FDs (although some difficulties in comparison arise from the different methodologies applied). The most relevant dataset issued by the Scottish Government combines information for full-time HNC and HND students into one HN qualifiers category.

Table 3   First destination of HN qualifiers from full-time programmes, 2006-07

	Study/training	Permanent UK employment	Temporary UK Employment	Overseas employment	Believed unemployed	Other
Sub-degree	57%	31%	5%	1%	4%	2%

Source: Scottish Government, 2008

It appears from Table 3 above that the majority of full-time students are using these HN programmes as a stepping stone to further study, suggesting that HN qualifications may be seen in this light as 'transitional qualifications' by some students. The majority of those who do enter employment do so at an associate professional or technical level (49%), or at a higher professional or managerial level (22%) (Scottish Government, 2008).

In England a similar picture emerges of high progression rates from FDs onto further study. In this case figures are available (see Table 4 on page 51) for both full-time students, who are predominately younger students, and part-time students who tend to be mature and already in employment whilst studying their FD.

Table 4   Destinations of FD qualifiers from English HEIs, 2005-06, six months after qualifying

Destination	Full-time		Part-time	
	No.	%	No.	%
Studying (not employed)	1,850	47%	240	13%
Studying and employed	825	21%	685	38%
Employed	1,015	26%	815	45%
Unemployed	105	3%	35	2%
Other	110	3%	15	1%
Total DLHE respondents	**3,900**	**100%**	**1,790**	**100%**

Source: Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, quoted in HEFCE, 2008

The latest HEFCE statistical bulletin does not provide the same level of detail as the Scottish data regarding the types of employment that have been taken up by FD students. However they report that *of those in employment*, 48% of full-time and 49% of part-time qualifiers were in a 'graduate job' six months after completion. When data was gathered from the 2002-03 qualifiers it was possible to assess their employment outcomes three and a half years after qualifying, at this point the proportion in a graduate job had increased to 54% (HEFCE, 2008).

While the datasets provide broad indications of the likely outcomes for students there are frustrating gaps in our knowledge. In particular neither is able to show the extent to which those entering employment do so in a role which is related to the subject area of their qualification[4]. In our small sample we have attempted to drill down further to identify those who gained related and unrelated work and this is shown in Table 5 on page 52.

This data in Table 5 provides a 'snap-shot' of the outcomes for these students 9 -12 months after completing their HN or FD. In line with national statistics progression rates to further study are high, on both the FDs where formal links to honours programmes are a requirement, and on the HNs where progression is not so strongly emphasized. Given the vocational emphasis present within both policy frameworks it is striking that, with the exception of the part-time FD in Early Years, the numbers in work related to the occupational area of their qualification appear low. In the case of the full-time FDs only 1 student was identified as having obtained related employment on completing their programme, although 3 remained unknown. The HNs have a higher number of graduates entering related employment, although figures for the HNC in Fashion were not disaggregated into related or unrelated by the programme organizer. Allowing for the uncertainty in the data for this HNC it appears that overall 16% to 23% of these HN students gained related employment. However, it has been argued (HEFCE, 2008) that a longer follow-up period may be necessary to capture the eventual outcomes of

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[4] Greater understanding should emerge as a result of the new Futuretrack programme of longitudinal research undertaken by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) into the experiences of 2006 entrants to higher education (HECSU, 2009).

students, as some of those currently in unrelated work may move into relevant employment at some future point.

Table 5   **Known outcomes for students in our sample who completed their FD or HN in 2007, 9-12 months after completion**

Course	No. on course at initial research interview	No. in related work only	No. in unrelated work only	No. in study and work	No. in further study	No. un-employed	No. known not to finish course	No. with unknown outcome
FD Early Years (PT)	7	2		5 (FT study + related FT work)				
FD Hosp/ Travel and Tourism (FT)	9		2	1 (PT study + unrelated FT work)	3			3
FD Fashion (FT)	17	1	3	1 (FT study + unrelated PT work)	10		2	
HNC Early Years (FT)	25	5	2		14		4	
HND Travel and Tourism (FT)	40	8	9		11		4	8
HNC Fashion (FT)	30	9 in work of which 2 were identified as in related self-employment			16		5	

Our follow-up interview sample reflected the above spread with 12 of the 19 student interviewees being in further study (although 3 combined this with related work), and 7 being in work only (4 related and 3 unrelated). Despite the small sample overall we obtained some rich interview data and a number of issues emerged.

5.3 Progression into further study

5.3.1 Opportunities for progression and credit transfer

As indicated above, the majority of students, across all courses, appear to continue their studies to the next level, either to an HND or an honours programme. All of these students felt that their FD or HN qualification had been instrumental in gaining entry to their desired programme, and those interviewed reported that the process of application and acceptance was unproblematic. Applicants were sometimes required to achieve a threshold mark for entry; however these were not viewed by students as punitive. And there is evidence from one programme organizer at least that these stipulations are not rigorously enforced.

All of the FD students progressed directly to the final honours year, a finding which reflects the high level of credit applied to FDs nationally (HECFE reports that 87% received full credit if progressing within their institution, whilst 60% of those who changed university did so (HEFCE, 2008). With the exception of a small piece of work to be submitted for the Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Fashion, FD students were not required to complete any bridging course prior to starting their honours. The programme organizer for the BA receiving students from the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism indicated that this high exchange value was due to a university wide policy of applying 'the full tariff'. His own view was that a further semester, prior to starting the existing third year, should be required by these FD students.

In contrast, students on the HN were not always able to obtain the maximum credit for their qualification. Those on the HNC in Fashion did progress directly to the second year of a linked HND. However students on the HNC in Early Years applying for an honours programme in the same area were subject to a 'filtering' assignment which would enable staff to guide them towards entry at Year 1, without any credit, if it was deemed necessary. The programme organizer for the BA in Early Years refers to this as a 'negotiation' with the student, although students may insist on Level 2 entry and, she indicates, 'we cannot stop them'.

Finally while HND Travel and Tourism students were able to receive the full credit for their qualification within the BA at the linked university, a post-1992 institution, transferring to an older university would mean starting at Year 2. The programme organizer for the linked BA suggested this was due to an underlying 'snobbery' about the value of HNDs within parts of the HE sector. Data does indeed show that, for whatever reasons, a differentiated pattern of progression from HN to degree programmes exists across the Scottish universities (SFC, 2007). Where HN students in our sample were transferring to degree programmes they were usually required to undertake a bridging unit prior to entry and/or a series of short study skills courses in the initial stages of their new studies. None of our interviewees suggested that these were additional unwelcome hurdles; rather they were seen as helpful preparation for the new level. Thus in Scotland progression arrangements appear to be more complex;

in contrast the emphasis placed on progression to honours within the FD framework appears to have eased the transition for students into these programmes.

5.3.2 Drawing on WBL and WRL in further study: perceptions of students and 'receiving' programme organizers

In the full-time examples we studied, the WBL/WRL experiences which had been included within the HN/FD learning process were not mirrored or extended on the honours route. Students perceived that there was 'no room' for WBL on the honours programme in which they were involved. The pressure of the dissertation was cited as the main reason for this by a number of interviewees. Students would, however, have welcomed further opportunities for WBL and WRL. For example Beatrice described her frustration with the 'hands off' approach of the BA course (England), where theories or approaches to work practices were discussed but not actually implemented.

> *Like this year I am finding it more difficult because people are just talking like 'this is what we do' and 'it is like' whereas I am more hands on because in the Foundation Degree it was 'This is what we do and we are going to go out and do it.* (Beatrice, student, full-time FD in Hospitality)

Students who progressed from the HNC in Early Years onto a degree programme were also disappointed to find that a placement was not built into this course and suggested that this made their HNC experience even more valuable in seeking work. In contrast, WBL was a feature of the HND in Fashion to which most of our HNC Fashion students progressed. The approach to WBL/WRL had shifted however; on the HND it took the form of a placement, while the HNC experience had been organizing a fashion shoot.

While students were not, in general, able to access new WBL/WRL in their degree programmes some students indicated that they drew actively on their existing WBL gained from their prior FD or HN. For example Beatrice describes how she relates new theories, for example on marketing, back to situations she encountered through her FD.

> *So when they are talking and saying, 'This is why it works' I can say oh I will relate that back to what we did.* (Beatrice, student, full-time FD in Hospitality)

Where possible she tries to interpret the 'broader' generalized material she is taught in the honours degree in terms of specific events, testing out new theory against her understanding of 'what works'. Conversely Lucy drew together her new theory and WBL experience from the HNC in Early Years course to re-evaluate her practice and consider causes for some of the interactions she experienced in the past.

> *Once it came to my degree and I've looked at child development […] I've noticed how much, even though I hadn't really thought about it in my placement, that how the theorists work really comes into play and how children's knowledge can be expanded because of that adult, and its just sort of certain theorists that I had to look at that I was just like 'Oh so that's why when I was on my placement, this is why the lecturer said this is the sort of thing to do.* (Lucy, student, full-time HNC in Early Years)

It appears then that for a number of students in our sample the WBL gained on their HN/FD remains a live resource that they draw on in making sense of new theory from their honours course.

Although students and programme organizers viewed the WBL experience that students brought with them to the next level as positive, one programme organizer, for the BA Travel in England, felt this came at a cost. In his view the WBL within the FD programme had taken time away from other academic teaching, leaving significant academic skills gaps which affected completion rates. These included a lack of experience in referencing theory and research skills. While no other interviewee suggested such a causal relationship, a number of students and programme organizers also identified a significant 'step up', in academic terms, which required new skills. Students on the part-time FD in Early Years appeared to be more confident in navigating the change in style required at honours level. One suggested that it was important to 'suss out' individual lecturers to see where their preferences lay, towards journal articles and research data or towards reflection on examples from practice. In Scotland, students moving from HNs to degree programmes received additional support in making this 'step up' via bridging programmes. These focused on essay writing, referencing theory, avoiding plagiarism and introduced some research skills. Students in our sample suggested these courses were important in helping them to understand the new requirements, and they do not appear to be viewed as burdensome despite the extra time commitment.

One key difference which almost all student interviewees highlighted was the shift to more independent learning at the higher level. Students had to do more independent research on each topic, and had less access to lecturers in the larger honours cohorts. This was a particular concern to one FD student we interviewed who had come from a cohort of nine students into the honours final year at a large university, where, as she put it, 'I feel like a number'. More positively, several students from across the FDs and HNs suggested that it had been their previous experience of WBL or WRL projects which had enabled them to cope with this. For example, Jean says

> …and because you didn't have other peers or you didn't have your lecturers there to do it, you had to work that through yourself and it was very independent and I think I gained a lot of skills and knowledge of how to do that independently when I was out on placement and because of that I am now able to work through my degree and sort of set deadlines. (Jean, student, full-time HNC in Early Years)

Elsewhere the programme organizer for the HND in Fashion reported that students who had come from the HNC, and had experience of setting up their own fashion shoot, were much more confident when required to contact and work with freelancers on the HND.

One final shift that was reported by students was a change in industry focus on the new programme, perhaps to a new field or level. For example there was a distinct shift from

the FD in Fashion, with its concentration on making skills, towards developing the students' own creativity as a designer within the honours year. Students suggested that they were still able to draw on their technical skills in the honours year to support this shift. Those moving from the HNC in Fashion onto the HND programme also described a distinct change in focus from general skills related to fashion to skills required for working within the film or theatre sector, although here there was a mixed response regarding the ability to draw on existing fashion skills in this new area. However in both these cases the students were continuing with the same provider and the impending change appeared to have been communicated to students effectively. A shift in content and level also occurs between the HND in Travel and Tourism and the degree programme at a linked university.

> *I think the HND will take you so far, as I've explained to you it's the sort of width and there's a certain amount of depth there, but this industry needs strategic thinkers[...]we say you're tomorrow's leaders, and its getting them to think at a higher level.*" (Programme organizer, full-time BA in Travel and Tourism)

The width and breadth within the HND that she is referring to above includes preparing students for work in specific travel contexts at a practical level, for example booking tickets for customers or being part of the cabin crew. Whereas she suggests there is a greater need for leaders, managers and strategic thinkers. Students themselves appear to experience this as quite a problematic leap, with one suggesting there seemed no connection between the HND learning and that on the honours programme.

5.4   Progression into/within work

5.4.1   *Perceived role of FD/HN in gaining work or progressing within work*
One advantage of our study is that by interviewing a sub-sample of the cohort we have been able to gain insights into the factors that students and other stakeholders feel have influenced these employment outcomes. Here we need to acknowledge that possessing an HN or FD qualification, and having undertaken WBL or WRL as part of this learning process, is only one factor among many that might influence the employment outcomes of a particular student. Other factors include the state of the economy, and hence availability of suitable jobs, and individual factors such as the mobility of students, other life/work experiences that they offer, or simply how their personality is perceived by interviewers. However, students have been encouraged to view their qualification as improving their job prospects, and had some expectations that they would move into related work.

As we have indicated the small number of interviews that we have been able to obtain with students who are in work following completion means that the issues that we highlight here can only be proposed as tentative indicators, rather than definitive findings. In particular, outside of the qualifiers from the FD in Early Years, we have been

able to interview very few students in related work, partly because there appear to be few who actually fall into this category (see Table 5 on page 52).

There are indications from the interview data that some FD students are identifying a mismatch between their expectations for future work, whilst on the course, and their experiences in the labour market. This was a particularly strong theme within the FD in Hospitality/Travel and Tourism interviews where all three students we interviewed had sought but not found work related to their qualification. These students had experience of a number of short placements in different aspects of their industry and had undertaken regular WRL as part of their FD. Some had high hopes that their placement experience would, in combination with the qualification itself, help to secure them relevant work.

> *If I was an employer I wouldn't take someone on who had a degree in management, I would take someone on who had an experience in it. But if you've got a degree and experience then that's the best of both worlds isn't it?* (Richard, student, full-time FD in Hospitality)

This combination should, they suggested, 'give them the edge' over someone with qualifications that did not include this type of learning. Within our initial research interviews, reported in Section 4, several students had suggested that the placement had given them a 'foot in the door' in the industry which they hoped to exploit to secure relevant work. However nine months later our interviewees had not been able to find work in their region. For example, Joyce says

> *I have been looking now for a year and I think I feel that you have more chances to find jobs in* [FD degree name] *down south in maybe London. Maybe I should have figured that out before but that is what I felt. I feel that here you need to find a company and make your way up basically.* (Joyce, student, full-time FD in Hospitality)

All of the other students interviewed from this FD echo her conclusion that jobs in this specific industry are scarce and any that do exist will require a significant move away from the region that they live and studied in. None of the students we were able to interview felt able to make that move as they had families or relationships which prevented such mobility. Joyce's comment also suggests that students have only just become aware of this as an issue, and she at least is questioning whether the FD route is an appropriate one for entry into this specific area of work. It is worth noting that this data was gathered in early-mid 2008 before the effects of the current recession were apparent.

Students on the FD in Fashion had been encouraged to view the focus on 'making skills' as a major selling point of the course. This was an emphasis which is enthusiastically endorsed by the SSC who suggested that a shortage of skills bedevils fashion programmes in the UK. When interviewed for Stage 3 a number of students anticipated hopefully that their course would be viewed favourably by employers when contrasted

with more academic design degrees. One student did obtain relevant work within the small Savile Row tailor where she had undergone her summer placement. However, other students who exited with the FD in Fashion have found it necessary to move into retail or even completely different sectors (such as banking) to find work. It should also be noted that several of these students have ambitions to use their knowledge and skills to establish their own small businesses at some point in the future and hence re-enter the fashion sector. According to the programme organizer for this FD, many students aspire to work for the top design houses. However, she cites her experience at a recent graduate recruitment event to suggest that such employers remain unaware of the existence or value of FDs. Instead of valuing the solid skills base delivered by the WBL and WRL elements of this FD they seek graduates with design flair and creativity. In the light of this the majority of students decided to progress to the honours top-up year offered by the same institution. Indeed such is the lack of exchange value amongst employers, and recognition amongst students and parents, of the FD that the institution has now ceased to offer it as a distinct qualification and it is now fully incorporated within a three year BA. Nevertheless, some continuing students who we interviewed whilst they were completing their BA still felt that their particular pathway to honours, incorporating the more practical FD years, might contrast favourably with a more conventional route to honours which had concentrated on more academic and drawing skills. This suggests that some students continue to perceive that their WBL or WRL has significant exchange value with employers even if they feel it will be necessary to complete an honours degree in order to secure their desired job.

The students on the part-time FD in Early Years were already well established in work as a condition of their part-time course. Those we interviewed at Stage 3 were hoping to progress their careers and gain recognition for their new qualification. However, only one of the four students we re-interviewed had experienced a formal change in role and an increase in pay. Her perception was that the FD was a contributing factor in securing her promotion to manager, although the fact that she was already the deputy manager was also significant. The other Early Years qualifiers had already reached the most senior positions in their setting prior to completing the FD. Any subsequent changes in role were in addition to their existing workload and were not recognized by increased pay. The experience of these students mirrors the poor returns reported elsewhere in the sector (Knight et al, 2006; Murray, 2009). This may in part reflect the structure of the sector where smaller organizations offer limited opportunities for progression. However interviewees also identified recent changes in the qualification structure in the sector as weakening the exchange value of their FD. For example one student explained her decision to progress to honours level.

> *Because I felt that in this moment in time that the Foundation Degree isn't terribly recognized and on its own I don't actually know what it stands for in the means of qualifications. The other reason being that with everything the CWDC* [Children's Workforce Development Council] *are doing, before very long everybody is going to have to have this early years professional status*

and you have to have a full degree to be able to do it. (Penny, student, part-time FD in Early Years)

Opinions amongst employers of the relative value of the FD, an honours degree and the new EYPS course varied, with several suggesting that they operated on the basis that the higher the qualification the better. One employer favoured the new EYPS qualification since it was a 'setting development', whereas she viewed the FD as 'personal development'. One student was being encouraged by her employer to move into teaching as a way of progressing beyond her small nursery school setting.

The same theme of mismatched expectations did not emerge strongly from the HN interview data. This may partly be a result of the limited number of interviews that it was possible to secure with those in work. The figures we were able to obtain suggest that a slightly higher proportion of HN students obtained related work than was the case on the FDs. Unfortunately, despite numerous efforts, we were not able to interview HNC Early Years qualifiers who had gained related work, and so were unable to explore the contribution of their HNC, and its WBL component, to securing this work or the nature of their roles. Students on the HNC in Fashion appear to be able to secure related part-time work in a retail environment, and one interviewee suggested that the HNC had been a significant factor in gaining her position. These students are also encouraged to pursue self-employment, an option which at least two of our interviewees were now actively pursuing.

Those entering work with an HND in Travel and Tourism qualification appear to be fairly evenly divided between those who found related and unrelated work. The two respondents who were in related work had contrasting perceptions. One felt that the subject matter, skills focus and WRL experience, of the HND had helped to secure his part-time work, whilst the other initially considered that it had had no effect, although he later suggested that the 'piece of paper' may have been valued as a sign of general ability. Both felt that had a placement been included within the HND this would have given them added 'credibility' with employers, although Frank's experience of job hunting indicates that this might need to be an extended placement to yield results.

> *Most of the places that I was applying for when I left college said they wanted somebody with more than 6 months experience, so that was the most difficult thing trying to get a job at first because if nobody ever gave you a job you can't have any experience.* (Frank, student, full-time HND in Travel and Tourism)

In general those we interviewed who were now in unrelated employment felt that their qualification had had not been a significant factor in gaining work. They were often in jobs that had started before the course, particularly in the retail sector, which did not require a HE level qualification. Although one student indicated that his FD degree had been significant in securing work since his new employer wanted people 'who could be committed to something'.

5.4.2 Drawing on WBL or WRL in current work, and influence on future learning at work: perceptions of students and some employers

With the exception of the students on the FD in Early Years, few of our interviewees were in what they considered to be related work. While this hampers our analysis of the extent to which students are able to draw on the knowledge, skills and understanding developed via WBL/WRL learning in their subsequent work a number of key questions are beginning to emerge from the data.

The students who studied the part-time FD in Early Years were, by requirement, all working in a relevant setting throughout the course. They refer to drawing on the knowledge, skills and understanding gained from the course in both sets of interviews, i.e. whilst still studying and one year after completion. As we have seen in Section 4 a number of students suggested that the WBL modules had encouraged them to look differently at the everyday work they do, for example through using more analytical approaches to observing children's behaviour. This theme continued within the follow-up interviews. Here they report instances where they have been able to draw on the theory to deepen their understanding and change their practice. For example one student described how her new understanding of literacy theories led her to be more aware of the initial attempts at writing that were being made by children in her group, seeing this 'scribbling on bits of paper' in a different light. This insight enabled her to extend the children's learning by creating more purposeful activities. These examples suggest that the WBL process is not only perceived as relevant, but that it is helping students to look at their work in a new and insightful way. Interviews with a number of employers indicated that increased awareness of underpinning theory was strengthening the practice of employees.

> *…instead of just saying we're going to do this, this and this, their conversation now is a lot more in-depth about why they're going to do it, its not just we need to hit this early learning goal. Again it's the understanding of what they're doing and why they're doing it.* (Barbara, employer, part-time FD in Early Years)

One stressed however, that what she was looking for was the 'art of marrying the theory and actually what goes on at the grass roots' that is 'actually getting them [theories] to work'. However, she suggests that while this is her ideal it is possible to do the FD 'academically' and although she viewed the FD as good personal development for her employee she has not seen a positive change in her organization. One employer suggested a link existed between developing understanding of theory, confidence and the ability to challenge existing practices. Discussing a new development which has been implemented by the student she says,

> *I'm sure she would have done that anyway, but I do think that having the background and the backup from the degree has given her that confidence to know that what she is saying is, correct is not the right word, but she's got that knowledge in the past that is backed up with theory […] She would challenge the day to day routine organization and so on if she felt there was*

a better way of doing something. (Teresa, employer, part-time FD in Early Years)

Thus it appears that it is a combination of existing practice knowledge, theory, developing confidence, and a receptive employer, that has enabled this student to generate the new initiative.

The students we interviewed who studied the part-time FD in Early Years continue to draw on the approaches to learning generated through their WBL to develop their understanding and practice. They describe using course texts, other sector resources, and also the internet to research new curriculum developments, and to plan appropriate activities. Some also draw on a network of ex-students as a learning resource, 'swapping ideas' about new developments at work. This suggests that the learning processes and relationships established by the FD continue to have an effect on the way these employees learn through work. Students used informal networks and formal mechanisms to share their learning with colleagues. For example one described showing her assignments to her immediate colleagues and discussing them as a team. Another worked with her manager to introduce structured meetings for sharing ideas with less qualified staff, eventually introducing formal mentoring processes. This she suggests resulted from her own experiences of the FD. Employers also suggested that they had seen particular examples of the learning being 'cascaded down' from the FD students to other colleagues.

We were unable to interview those students who studied for the full-time HNC in Early Years and who had entered employment, in part because of the high progression rates to further study. However one interviewee who was combining further study with a part-time position in a nursery setting indicated that she drew on her observations of senior staff from her placement setting when working with children in her new setting. She suggests this has helped her in both immediate practical ways, for example she drew on their particular approach to physical play, and more generally.

> *Observing how the nursery teacher and the primary school teacher communicate with the children has changed the way that I do it as well, I understand what works and what doesn't work [...] just general sort of practice skills that I've observed throughout my placement that I can then develop and go forward and do it as well.* (Lucy, student, full-time HNC in Early Years)

So for this HNC student it is the practical skills and the opportunity to learn from established professionals that she emphasizes; in contrast to the analytical approaches emphasized by existing employees on the FD.

Outside of the early years sector the difficulty of identifying students who were now in related work, and hence might be expected to be able to draw on their sector specific WBL/WRL learning, was even more acute. Indeed the extent to which they did consider their job related to their FD/HN was an interesting point of discussion with a number of students in our sample. For example one student who studied the FD in Fashion and

who found part-time retail work in a small boutique was able to describe in some depth the aspects of her course, and the WRL elements, that she was drawing on in advising customers. Although neither she nor the FD programme organizer considered retail as 'related work', her employer suggested that a number of specific aspects of this FD were valuable. She highlighted as beneficial knowledge of collections, and an understanding of quality within the manufacturing process for 'designer' products. More broadly she considers that her employee is now 'tuned in on how the fashion world works'.

Elsewhere we interviewed two HND Travel and Tourism students who were now working in, what seemed to us, jobs which were related to their qualification. One was positive about the extent he could draw on his learning, highlighting a 'Customer Service module' as enabling him to deal with conflict with customers. He also suggested a specific WRL element (tour guiding) which had helped him 'because it's the same field'. Given his work role this seems a broad definition of 'field'. In contrast another student, Frank, considered that his work for an airline, processing bookings, is 'not really linked to what I learned at all'. He suggests that the learning he gained on the course would be more relevant to working in a travel agency (his preferred work option). His view of the same customer service module is that it is 'very generalized' and not helpful for his 'totally different' work. Thus relatedness is itself very much a matter of perspective.

Of course the ability to draw on learning from their FD/HN in work is not merely a feature of relatedness, or indeed the individual's views on that, but is tightly bound up with the context of work that these students enter. That is the culture of the organization, its structures and personnel, and the extent to which these encourage and legitimize the process of students drawing on this learning (Evans et al, 2006). Those working in the early years sector appear, in the main, to have opportunities for introducing changes into their own practice and that of the wider setting. Some FD graduates have been given specific responsibility for developing new initiatives by their employers and are now viewed by them as an expert in that topic, in part because of specific assignments undertaken on the FD (e.g. developing liaison procedures with new parents). Although even in this sector a counter voice can be heard in the data, suggesting that the learning process has not changed the employees' practice, or impacted on the setting.

In contrast in other sectors or organizations there may be little appetite for staff introducing new ideas. For example Frank suggested his role, processing bookings for an airline company, provided limited scope to draw on his HND learning. His department is described as operating on an 'ad-hoc basis', without deadlines, making his own role reactive rather than proactive. This variation between and within sectors suggests further work is needed to investigate the means through which involvement in WBL or WRL can enable employees to change their own or wider organizational practices, and the factors that inhibit this. That is the relationship between the particular WBL/WRL processes which are implemented, the characteristics of the organization and eventual skills utilization requires much further scrutiny.

Students in work that was clearly unrelated to the occupational area of their qualification did nevertheless refer to some general aspects of their WBL or WRL as helpful in their new roles. For example a fashion student who was now working in a bank was positive about the WRL aspects of her course. The experience of working to tight deadlines had helped her to 'organize herself' in her new role and had enabled her to seek out answers to unfamiliar problems. These sorts of general 'employability skills' of organization, time management, communication and problem solving were also mentioned by other students in unrelated work as still having some value in their new roles. A retail employer suggested that placements should primarily be about preparing people for the 'whole lifestyle' of the workplace. That is 'being sharp', which for her includes arriving on time, making yourself available for tasks, and presenting yourself appropriately. The industry specialist who teaches on the FD in Fashion had a less utilitarian conception of the role of her workplace sessions, and the extent that students might draw on them in other work or life situations.

> *I say to them the aim of this is to teach you how to look, it teaches you then how to describe what you see, its to teach you how to stand up and defend what you see to make deductions about it. I mean they're not industry specific skills, in a sense they're kind of life skills.* (Deborah, employer, full-time FD in Fashion)

This re-emphasizes the important role of HE in promoting analysis and argument across the different contexts in which students will move, including their study, work, community and social lives.

5.5   Conclusions

As we have seen the destination of students in our study closely reflects national datasets. In both our Scottish and English examples progression onto further study, particularly onto honours degrees, is high. In this sense the programmes studied are meeting the declared progression objective of FDs and providing added value for the HNs. There was evidence that the explicit requirement for progression with the FD framework had eased the process of application to HE for these students. All gained the maximum potential credit for their FD, entering the honours at the start of the final year.

Progression arrangements for HN students were more complex, with some courses operating filtering processes and most requiring bridging components. Progression into *related* employment for full-time students appears to be low in both frameworks, and strikingly so for the full-time FDs studied. This is an interesting finding given the vocational nature of both these qualifications, and the focus on intermediate level occupations that is an explicit feature of FD policy as well as a traditional role for the HNs. It appears then that both FDs and HNs may be viewed as 'transitional qualifications' by significant numbers of participants.

Nevertheless the students we interviewed who had moved into honours study were still actively drawing on aspects of their WBL or WRL in their further learning. Indeed many were disappointed that such WBL opportunities were absent from their new programmes. The increased emphasis on academic learning within the honours programmes was widely reported, although the extent to which this was deemed problematic varied. HN students valued the study skills support provided via bridging units, suggesting it was a necessary part of making the transition.

Although we were unable to interview many students who had progressed to relevant work, partly because of the small numbers in this category, those on the part-time FD in Early Years were able to provide rich examples of the ways in which they continue to draw on their WBL within their subsequent work. There was also some evidence from students and employers that this learning was being shared with colleagues through informal and formal mechanisms. Elsewhere we had very limited data on the ways in which sector specific learning was being used within related work. We have suggested therefore that further work is required to investigate the relationship between the WBL/WRL processes, the organization and skills utilization in a range of sectors. Those in unrelated work acknowledged the role of their WBL or WRL in developing a range of general 'employability skills' that they needed to draw on in their new work.

Section 6   Conclusions and implications of this research

Within this research we have attempted to map out the different policy agendas that have emerged in Scotland and England for work-related HE. We have highlighted how different definitions of the problem have led to diverging policy solutions. While in Scotland confidence in the HN system has been restated, and a process of modernization undertaken, in England a decisive shift has occurred to establish and support a new framework of FDs. In this final section of the report we will provide an overview of our research by firstly highlighting key differences in the national policies; secondly mapping out some of the main differences and similarities in the practices that have emerged; and finally addressing the implications of these differences and similarities for future practice within both national frameworks. This overview can be read as a stand alone summary of the main findings and issues arising from this research.

6.1   Policy divergence

In Section 2 we identified some of the key elements of the two national frameworks. In Scotland HNs are charged with supplying the vocational and core skills required by the Scottish economy. HNs are national qualifications, validated by SQA, developed in the main by national consortia, although opportunities for specialist collaborative or specialist single centre developments exist. They are taught for the most part in colleges, and there is no explicit aim to promote progression to degree study, although it is recognized as one possible outcome. While learning outcomes are specified at a national level, there is flexibility in the teaching and learning processes used in colleges. There is no requirement for WBL or WRL.

In contrast, FD developments in England have had to balance a number of agendas. They are intended to address perceived skills deficits at the intermediate level and enable providers to reconnect with employer needs, including at the local or organizational level. They are also viewed as a vehicle for increasing and widening participation in HE and providing opportunities for progression to honours degrees. FDs are currently validated by universities, although colleges now have the right to apply to award them, and they are taught in both sectors. The role of employers in the design and delivery of FDs is emphasized, and characterized in terms of a 'partnership' with colleges and HEIs. WBL is required and flexible approaches to delivery are encouraged, in particular to facilitate growth in part-time provision. We have suggested that the need to respond to employers and at the same time ensure smooth progression to a named honours route produces tensions in the design and implementation of FDs.

The particular focus of our research has been the effect of this policy divergence on the WBL and WRL which has become established within HN and FD programmes. In Section 3 we explored in more detail some of the difficulties with definitions that have arisen in this field, suggesting that it is now saturated with competing definitions of each term.

However, for this report we have used the terms to refer, as broadly as possible, to learning *in* the workplace (WBL) and learning which is *relevant* to work (WRL) but which may take place elsewhere. We shall return to the extent to which these differences in location and focus are significant or helpful later in this section. As well as mapping the range of WBL and WRL that has been established within HNs and FDs we have explored in more detail the experiences of students, employers, programme organizers and other stakeholders, who are engaging with these learning opportunities. Here we point to areas of difference and to perhaps surprising areas of commonality between the two frameworks.

6.2   Differences and similarities across the two frameworks

6.2.1   In Scotland HNs focus on national needs, in England FDs may be focused on national, local or organizational needs

Although the mechanisms are in place in Scotland to develop HNs to meet niche markets, through specialist collaborative or specialist single centre developments, our own research, and analysis of the national data suggest that the majority of HNs are focused on meeting national needs. It is therefore largely the national consortia, facilitated by SQA, that are developing HNs. These include representatives from Scotland's Colleges, HEIs, and from industry. Industry representatives are charged with determining that the particular HN meets the needs of employers in the sector and that it is likely to lead to future related employment. Thus the focus is on the needs of the sector as a whole, and the prospects of future work. Colleges implementing the national HNs are able to select or omit specific units however, providing a degree of flexibility within the system. Given the focus on national sector issues, HNs tend to be broad in nature and can attract large cohorts of students.

We found significant numbers of our FD sample programmes were focused on national needs, and had also worked with the model of involving 'representatives' either directly from industry, usually large employers with a track record of supporting learning, or from industry organizations. Other FDs were seeking to identify regional or local needs; working with selected employers who were again viewed as representing the wider industry. We observed some similarities between the processes used to develop these national and regional FDs and those used to modernize the HNs. Both were seeking a range of views from 'representative' employers, through for example surveys and committee membership, and both were aiming for a curriculum that would be accepted by the wider industry. However, while in Scotland SQA provided resources for, and facilitated, this process, in England, in most cases, it was colleges and HEIs who were responsible for initiating new developments.   Some colleges may not be well placed to undertake the market analysis which is necessary, including the process of distinguishing potential *demand* from expressed needs. FD cohorts in our sample were on the whole smaller than those on the HNs, in single figures in a number of cases, and there is evidence that some FDs had exhausted local demand within a few years of launching.

A much smaller number of FD programmes in our sample were focused on meeting the needs of individual organizations for employee development. In these bespoke programmes the notion of 'partnership' was emphasized by developers. It was characterized as involving joint working and ongoing discussions, encompassing delivery as well as design. Whilst this model potentially promotes the responsiveness of HE, and may lead to more effective provision for existing employees, there is evidence of some difficulties emerging. Working in partnership requires greater resources, from each side, than the representative model, and this can place a burden on programme organizers. Programmes that rely on a single or limited number of employers are also vulnerable to changes in training policy, an issue that may become more problematic as the current recession takes hold. However, in our sample two successful partnerships had been established with very large national organizations, and cohorts were maximized by delivering to the wider organization via distance learning and in one case by opening the programme up to other organizations. There may also be pedagogical benefits from providing opportunities for students to learn within a wider group.

6.2.2   *There is a wide range of approaches to WBL and WRL within both the FD and HN frameworks, and considerable overlap between them*

In Section 3 of this report we have outlined a number of approaches to WBL and to WRL that can currently be found within the HNs and FDs in our sample. We have outlined considerable similarities between the approaches taken in the two frameworks, particularly when considering full-time provision. Given the policy requirement that WBL be an 'integral feature' of FDs it is not surprising that some WBL, and/or WRL, featured in *all* of the English programmes we studied. The nature of the QAA guidance on FDs, with its arguably helpfully imprecise definition of WBL, has perhaps permitted rather greater use of WRL than was originally expected. In Scotland, staff who are developing and implementing national HNs appear to have the flexibility to incorporate WBL or WRL at a level which they see as appropriate, or to omit it from their programmes. Thus the HN framework permits, rather than encourages or prescribes, the use of WRL or WBL.

6.2.3   *Students in both countries comment positively on the learning opportunities provided through WBL and WRL*

Most of the students that we interviewed (see Section 4), from both countries, valued highly the WBL or WRL that they had experienced. Most enjoyed their experiences despite the challenges, and appeared to find it a motivating experience. Most were strongly supportive of the role of both WBL *and* WRL in their programmes, where they had been able to experience these approaches. In addition, full-time students who had experienced relevant placements viewed these as a potential selling point in the search for eventual employment. Students who had not had a positive placement, or had not had that opportunity at all, would have welcomed it. The interviews suggested that students place considerable value on carefully constructed WRL where it provides exposure to aspects of the workplace that they might not otherwise experience. This included: projects defined by top industry professionals; simulations where access to

'live' working situations is difficult; or opportunities to market their own ideas to real customers.

6.2.4 The culture of the sector, acting within both countries, can mediate policy divergence to produces similar practices

We have suggested that it is the culture, structures and opportunities of the particular occupational sectors which have led to similarities in the approaches to WBL and WRL. In particular where professional bodies have a strong role in determining the nature of initial training, or they have shaped approaches to supporting learning within work, then the effects of this influence are evident in both frameworks. Here WBL and WRL can become significant aspects of both HN and FD programmes. In other sectors the absence of a culture of employer engagement in training and development of new employees, particularly within small and medium-sized organizations, can make WBL and WRL harder to establish. More positively in the creative industries, and some emerging sectors, flexible working patterns may provide opportunities for involving staff from industry in supporting learning, as part-time teaching staff. Again programme organizers in both countries take advantage of these opportunities. Thus we would argue that the culture of the sector is *mediating* the divergence in national policy and producing some similarities within the WBL/WRL practices of these programmes.

6.2.5 Employers in both countries are reluctant to devote time to WBL and WRL, and this is a major constraint that programme organizers in both countries work with

Programme organizers in both countries reported considerable difficulties in securing employer involvement, due to time constraints and employers' needs to prioritize more operational issues. Within Scotland, HN policy locates employer involvement largely in the design phase of the HN. The design process generally is facilitated by SQA, rather than individual colleges, and employer involvement is operationalized by conducting surveys and drawing selected employers onto national consortia, and eventually onto the validation panel. Where employer involvement remains largely within the design phase it does not appear to be a major resource issue for colleges. However, as we have noted in Section 3, some HN programmes organizers seek to involve employers in delivery, and in the case of the early years sector assessment. English policy on FDs requires the involvement of employers in design, delivery and where possible assessment. Here individual universities and colleges are attempting to secure employers for the design and validation phase, and also persuade them to contribute towards delivery or send employees onto the programme. It is not uncommon for FDs to be working with different sets of employers for these two phases.

Programme organizers in both countries reported that it was time consuming and sometimes difficult to secure employer involvement, particularly in delivery and assessment. These difficulties can be viewed as another factor which mediates the implementation of potentially divergent policies, and results in similarities in practices. The process of securing employers, and the nature of their involvement, was again

influenced by the culture of the sector. Those working in sectors with well established networks of employers with positive attitudes towards training, for example the early years sector, appear to be able to use industry networks to promote various types of employer involvement. These networks make it possible to identify workplace mentors for example. In other sectors, such as the hospitality or creative industries, programme organizers drew on their own personal networks in their attempts to involve employers. Inputs in these sectors might be focused on a particular time-limited contribution, be it setting a project or giving a session. Programme organizers appear mindful of the need to protect their network and to avoid making too many or frequent demands on employers.

We were able to interview a small number of employers who had been involved in the design or delivery of HN or FD programmes. Although they recognized the need for their contribution, and had themselves committed time to it, they were clear that this could only be done on a limited basis. Inputs would need to be brief and there appeared to be no appetite to get involved in summative assessment, although some contribute to formative feedback to students. Many programme organizers appear to recognize this time constraint and to be responding by ensuring that employer involvement is targeted and focused.

6.2.6 FD policy is resulting in greater opportunities for WBL and WRL for students when compared with HNs, and in particular some innovative approaches to WRL are emerging

Notwithstanding the similarities noted above our research suggests that the requirement within FD policy for WBL has had an effect on the extent of WBL and WRL that is available to these FD students. That is, with some exceptions, the FD students in our sample were more likely to have access to WBL, and to have opportunities for combining different types of WRL, than the HN students. FD students viewed WBL and WRL as a more significant and important part of their current programme, than did the HN students, some of whom had had very limited exposure to WBL or WRL. As we have noted within the report there are a number of exceptions to this statement. The HNC in Early Years is one where a third of the programme takes place in the workplace, where taught material is related to workplace assessment and where employers provide an input into that assessment. However we have also found HNs where no WBL or WRL could be identified at all at the time of interview, or where opportunities for WRL were not available to all students. While we have found some FDs with rather limited WRL only, all FD programmes have, by necessity, persisted with some form of WRL or WBL. Some programme organizers suggested that they had been working towards specific targets, for example 30% overall, in order to be sure that they would 'satisfy the benchmark' at validation.

Given the difficulties noted above of engaging employers, FD programme organizers are taking different routes to satisfy the requirements. We have found examples of programme organizers restricting the size of full-time FD cohorts to ensure that

opportunities for placements are available to all, and/or putting the responsibility for securing a placement onto students. But more positively some programme organizers are developing innovative alternatives to traditional WBL, in the form of quality WRL. In Sections 3 and 4 we have outlined what appear to be valuable approaches to WRL that build on the practices and capacities of the particular sector, for example the use of virtual WBL companies within the developing multimedia sector. Although examples of innovative WRL can also be found within the HNs, making WBL a requirement of FD policy does appear to have resulted in both WBL and WRL being stronger features of the English framework.

6.2.7   *The emphasis placed on current employees within FD policy is reflected in more part-time FD students, and greater integration of their WBL, when compared to HNs in Scotland*

In Section 3 we used national datasets to review the position of part-time study within the two frameworks. Overall part-time students now make up 28% of HNs students in Scotland (SFC, 2009), and most of these are studying at HNC level. Our own sample of HNs reflected this predominance of full-time courses. Many that did offer a part-time route did so by letting students 'in-fill', that is attend sessions selected from a predominately full-time programme. There were few examples, even in our larger Stage 2 sample, of programmes which were designed principally with the needs of part-time students in mind. Where we did find examples of programmes which were specifically designed for part-time study, attendance was organized around the constraints of existing work. A higher proportion of FD students study part-time, 40% in 2007-8 (HEFCE, 2008), than is the case within the Scottish HNs. Although we also found examples of part-time students 'in-filling' into what were really full-time FD courses in our English sample, we found more examples of programmes that were designed specifically for existing employees, including some bespoke programmes designed with input from their employers. These were offered via flexible means, for example by distance learning. However, we also found some examples of part-time courses that had failed to recruit, despite initial hopes for their market.

What distinguished the FD part-time courses from their HN counterparts was the extent to which they required students to draw on their learning through work as part of the learning process. This appears to be a significant feature of FDs designed for part-time study, particularly those in education. In contrast the part-time HNs we studied permitted, rather than encouraged or required, students to draw on their existing work. Evidence from interviews in the early years sector (see Section 4) suggests that the process of integrating existing work with analytical approaches and theory provides a powerful learning opportunity. Students and employers reported that such WBL was still influencing their practices one year on from completion.

6.2.8 Progression rates to further study are high within both frameworks. The requirement within FD policy for an honours degree progression route appears to be a significant influence on the learning process and content of FDs. This influence was not apparent within our HN sample, perhaps due to the absence of any explicit progression requirement within policy

In Section 5 we drew on national datasets to outline the high levels of progression to further study that are currently found within both countries. 57% of full-time HN students progress to some form of education or training (Scottish Government, 2008), while 68% of full-time FD and 51% of part-time FD students are undertaking further study (HEFCE, 2008)). It is perhaps unsurprising that progression is a feature of the FD framework since it is an explicit policy aim and at least one progression route into honours study is a requirement of validation. Universities are currently the only bodies validating FDs, although this may change as colleges now have the right to apply for the power to award them. A significant numbers of universities also are heavily involved in their delivery. There is some evidence from our sample that programme organizers are mindful of the need to ensure a smooth transition for students into honours, particularly where students are entering an honours programme at the validating university. Some have suggested that the need for progression has significantly shaped the content of courses and the emphasis placed on developing academic abilities. In some cases this has led to decreasing the emphasis on WBL considerably within Level 2. This is perhaps evidence of the impact of the policy tension we highlighted at the beginning of this section. FD developers are attempting to balance the needs of employers for work skills and the academic priorities which flow from the requirement for progression to honours.

Although progression onto further study is not an explicit aim of the HN framework in Scotland, we found that progression rates were also high within our Scottish sample. Again this reflects the national data, and SFC policies which encourage articulation. Formal links existed between the HNs and the receiving programmes, which might be an HND or bachelors degree. However there is limited evidence of these links influencing the content of the HN programme, or the learning processes involved. Where students need to develop or strengthen their academic skills in order to succeed in the new course, 'bridging' support programmes are often established prior to entry or as part of the early stages of the receiving course, and this preparation for degree study is located within the university.

6.2.9 Students on the FD tend to receive the 'full tariff' for their qualification when entering further study, while many HN students receive only partial or no credit

When we followed up graduates within our six cases studies we found that in line with the national pattern the majority had progressed onto degree studies. All of the FD students who had done so gained the 'full tariff' of Level 1 and 2 credit, thus entering directly onto Year 3. This was the case where students within our sample progressed to the linked course, and also where they changed to a different provider. Students in our Scottish sample who were progressing from an HN onto a bachelors degree were not

always able to receive the full credit for their existing qualification, and in some cases received no credit at all. National data also suggests that students seeking entry to one of the pre-1992 institutions are more likely to enter at a lower level than those at a post-1992 university. As we have noted above even where students do obtain the full credit for their HN, they are required to undertake further bridging courses. It is worth noting however that students see these as a helpful part of their transition into degree study.

6.2.10 Some students reported difficulties in obtaining related work, or progressing within their occupations

National statistics on the outcomes for FD or HN students provide some indication of the numbers who are in work at key points after completion of their course. In each country the data reports on different aspects, which hinders cross-UK comparison. In neither case is there data which looks in sufficient detail at the employment outcomes of students, in particular the extent to which students obtain work which is related to their area of study. Our own efforts to identify 'related work' within a small sample demonstrates the difficulties of this task. Nevertheless the data we have obtained, and our interviews with graduates, have pointed to a number of potential issues which are worthy of further research.

We found the number of full-time students who were now in related work was low in both our HN and FD samples, particularly so in the FD case. This is in part the reflection of the high number of students continuing onto further study. However a number of issues emerged in our interviews with those who were seeking related work. Students who had studied an HN which contained relatively limited opportunities for WRL suggested that further WRL, and opportunities for WBL in particular, might increase their chances of obtaining their preferred jobs. However the full-time FD students, who had greater experience of both WRL and placements, were also experiencing difficulties securing related employment. A number of FD interviewees described potential mismatches between their hopes for work and the employment market they faced on graduation, even prior to the current recession. These resulted, they suggested, from the lack of related employment that was available in their region, or from employers requiring honours degrees rather than the FD. Even the part-time FD students, who had all continued in related employment, were disappointed to report limited or no financial returns on their qualification. However, this may be associated with limited funding within this sector. Further research would be needed to clarify these initial indicators from graduates, and to explore the match between FD development and demand for labour.

6.3   Implications of these findings

The comparative nature of this research has provided a new opportunity to examine policies for vocational HE in each country. We have mapped their different aims and requirements, including aspects which are emphasized and those which are absent. We have also attempted to explore the ways in which these policies, with their different

features, are implemented and experienced by students, staff and stakeholders. This research adds to work elsewhere which is helping the sector to understand what forms of practice are emerging. Although this picture remains partial, and further research is certainly required, we would argue that enough is now known to suggest changes which may enhance practice.

6.3.1   Balancing the national and local/regional roles of HNs and FDs

We have noted that HNs have been developed for the most part as national qualifications, while FDs have a much stronger local or regional dimension. While there are strengths in each of these approaches, further consideration should be given within the HN framework to ways in which developments might be more responsive to local needs - in appropriate circumstances. At the same time the difficulties of providers taking a local focus should be given further consideration within the FD framework. Those planning programmes need effective support for the complex task of analyzing local or regional needs to ensure that demand from employers and students is sustainable, and that students have local and national job opportunities.

6.3.2   Recognizing the value of WRL and WBL and increase these learning opportunities, particularly in Scottish HNs

Despite the lack of emphasis on WBL and WRL within the HN policy agenda this research has found considerable evidence of it in practice within the Scottish system. Thus it appears that sufficient flexibility already exists to include WBL or WRL in these programmes where appropriate. We have reported that students on both FDs and HNs value these approaches to learning, and we suggest that opportunities to develop more innovative approaches to WRL and WBL for both full-time and part-time students should be explored. With regard to part-time students we have noted the more integrated approaches to WBL found in part-time FDs, and suggest it would be valuable to explore more opportunities to develop this approach within part-time HNs in Scotland.

6.3.3   Developing WRL and WBL which grows along the grain of the sector

Our research has mapped out the range of approaches to WBL and WRL that are currently used within the FD and HN frameworks. The considerable emphasis placed on WBL within FD policy has established a strong identity for these new qualifications, and resulted in valuable opportunities for students to learn within the workplace. The relatively permissive stance taken on defining this learning process has also encouraged the growth of a range of WRL opportunities within FDs. However, at present the role of WRL is rather downplayed in current guidance. We would argue that innovative WRL should instead be recognized and celebrated for the access it can provide, in a targeted form, to key areas of work.

We have suggested that WBL and WRL have flourished in both frameworks where it draws on the structures and culture of the occupational sector; that is where it grows along the grain of existing practices. Thus the aim of encouraging further growth in WBL and WRL, in both frameworks, may be promoted by retaining and celebrating the widest

possible view of WBL *and* WRL. It is, we would argue, better to ensure that learning is fit for purpose and provides valuable opportunities for students, than that it is necessarily located in the workplace or has a particular form of employer involvement.

6.3.4   Developing a realistic approach to working with employers

Our research reports on the difficulties faced by programme organizers in both countries in engaging with employers, and in particular in securing their involvement in programme delivery and assessment. Again the extent and forms of engagement that were found are influenced by the occupational sector. The emphasis on employer involvement in delivery which is present within the FD framework has encouraged FD programme organizers to persist in areas where their HN counterparts might relinquish the task. Whilst this has resulted in some valuable forms of targeted engagement, it is also considered by some developers as unrealistic and burdensome. In reassessing policy in both countries it is important that this reality is addressed, and that programme organizers are supported in making constructive links with employers which again follow the grain of the sector and which may, or may not, therefore resemble 'partnerships'. In particular any expectations that employers will be extensively involved in assessment, particularly in relation to FDs, should be scaled down. Interesting examples of employer engagement, including formative assessment have emerged. This has included the role of supervisors in the early years programmes, and industry-based staff in providing the brief and assessing projects in the FD in Fashion. In some cases employers are happy to be involved, but they often require support in making targeted contributions to the learning process either at the design or delivery stage. Greater awareness of the range of possible roles may encourage employers to get involved in delivery, in ways that make sense to them.

6.3.5   Recognizing the contribution of HNs and FDs as transitional qualifications onto further study, and thereafter employment

High levels of progression onto further study has emerged as a positive outcome of both the modernized HNs and the new FDs. There is evidence that the majority of students are now using HNs and FDs as transitional qualifications on a pathway to further qualifications. Through these routes students are accessing opportunities for study, often at bachelors degree level, that may not have been open to them previously. However, only limited recognition has been given thus far within policy, in either country, to the importance of this transitional role, or its implications.

In Scotland, as we have seen, the potential for HNs to promote progression onto further study has been an implicit, rather than explicit objective of the modernization process. The key driver of this process has instead been meeting the immediate and future skills needs of the Scottish economy - at the intermediate level. This priority has continued to have a key role in shaping the development of HNs. However there is evidence that the majority of full-time students who are completing these vocational qualifications are not immediately entering the workforce, but instead perceive greater benefit from continuing their studies. Recent policy initiatives to encourage and strengthen

articulation links from HNs to bachelors degrees are a further recognition of the importance of this role for HNs (SFC, 2007). However there is a danger of some discontinuity between the policy framework for the development of HNs and the ways in which students are now using these qualifications.

In England progression onto honours degree study is of course already an explicit aim of FD policy. At the same time FDs are also positioned by policy as an end in themselves in meeting perceived needs within the economy for intermediate level knowledge and skills. Policy tends to obscure the tensions inherent in these two objectives. Processes of FD development are framed, in policy terms as involving partnership, and they increasingly emphasize employer input - a position of influence which is likely to increase following the Leitch report (Leitch, 2006). Yet, at the level of individual FD development, the persisting academic culture of the HE sector, and the need to ensure a smooth progression to honours degree studies is a powerful influence. Individual institutions and programme developers are therefore sometimes working within a difficult space, mapped out by the wider aims of the course, and the ways in which students are actually using their qualification.

While the above may not impact on all HNs and FDs, the national statistics and our own study suggest that these are significant issues for many, perhaps the majority, of programmes, particularly those developed for full-time study. We suggest that future policy needs to firstly recognize the current position of many HNs and FDs as transitional qualifications, and secondly begin to debate the implications of this, putting measures in place which will better support their role in developing higher level skills and knowledge. As a brief stimulus to this debate we offer the following potential implications.

- *We need better means of exploring demand with employers and potential students, and these should take account of the transitional role of these qualifications*

Current approaches to determining demand should now be reviewed. They should of course include a close consideration of the requirement for intermediate level skills in that particular sector. Key issues here include determining what roles require these skills in the sector, how extensive the job opportunities for new and existing workers are, how these are distributed locally and nationally, and the extent to which HN or FD qualifications are both necessary and sufficient for employment. These are issues which developers already have firmly on the agenda (although they remain difficult to determine). However, demand also needs to be considered in terms of the contribution HNs or FDs can make to a longer vocational or vocational/academic route. For example what are employers' and potential students' views of such a route, what do they want it to achieve, and what are the possible outcomes? We would argue that colleges and individual HEIs may not be well placed, or sufficiently resourced, to undertake this expanded task. This is an issue particularly for FDs, which are often being developed at a

local level. Therefore further support for the process of determining the real demand for these qualifications is needed.

- *We need to strengthen links for joint curriculum planning between staff in colleges and higher education institutions*

Insofar as these qualifications are used as transitional awards it is important that there is good matching between the curriculum in the HNs and FDs and the bachelors degree programmes to which students progress. This issue has been recognized in the arrangements for the development of both HNs and FDs, but there is evidence that more could be done to strengthen these links, especially with respect to HN to degree progression. This could facilitate progression of students with full credit, and successful study on degree programmes. This would involve staff in universities and colleges working more closely together, and being more aware of the work being done in each other's sectors. In suggesting strengthening these links it must of course be recognized that HNs and FDs will continue to have a role in preparing some students for progression straight into employment, or to enhance the knowledge and skills of people who are already employed. The structure and content of these programmes must continue to recognize this role, and prepare students appropriately. In this respect it is necessary to recognize the multi-functional nature of these programmes, and differentiate between these different roles more effectively than is done at present.

- *We need better management arrangements to support the transitional role of some HNs and FDs*

Policy-makers and institutions need to consider what approaches to ongoing progamme management might best support a transitional role. There is scope to build more effective links between providers and to improve the preparation of students for further study. It appears that credit transfer functions more smoothly in England. However, further research to explore the experiences of 'progressing students' could contribute to the enhancement of both FD and HN programmes, to ensure students are well prepared. This could also contribute to ensuring that receiving bachelors degree programmes provide better support for students in making the transition. This could also include exploring ways of building more effectively on the WBL and WRL experiences of students once they enter the receiving programme.

- *We need to understand the distinctive contributions of HNs and FDs to the learning pathways that their students construct*

We also need to engage in a deeper debate about the roles of the HN or FD in these transitional pathways. It might be argued that these qualifications are merely providing a new and more accessible route onto more prestigious bachelors degree courses. This may in itself be a valuable role, although such wider access could perhaps be achieved by other more efficient means. Policy needs to articulate what it is that is particularly

valuable about the HN or FD study itself that forms the initial stage of this form of degree pathway. That is, what is distinctive about this phase of the students' longer programme, and why it is worth supporting as a separately administered and certificated qualification. Some of the students within our study have begun to articulate this for themselves, arguing that their FD route towards honours provides them with a balance of knowledge and skills, which they consider makes them more employable overall. We need to test this with further empirical research to inform a critical debate on the role of HNs and FDs.

6.3.6   *Researching outcomes for students and employers*

In this research project we have attempted to trace the outcomes for students in terms of further study and immediate employment. Whilst we have had only limited success in tracing immediate employment outcomes a number of important issues have been noted by students which require further research. These are particularly apparent in the FD sample where graduates in some sectors reported difficulties in finding related work. There is of course already some work underway which will shed further light on these issues. In England the 'Futuretrack' programme of research has been established to track graduates from HE into employment, and this will include a sample of FD students. However, given that this project is attempting to address the whole of HE, it may not generate data to explore these FD issues in sufficient depth. In Scotland the On Track longitudinal survey provides information about the destination of a sample of qualifiers from colleges and universities, but does not provide detailed information about HN students. More recently a study to track the progress of students completing HNC/Ds is now being undertaken by staff within CRLL at GCU. It would appear that, despite these studies, there remains a need to trace the trajectories of both FD and HN students. This should include research into employment outcomes as well as the experiences of these students in further study.

Although the data we have been able to gather from employers has been limited, there are some indications in this report of the ways in which the part-time study of employees can contribute to the wider learning of the organization. Further research would be valuable to illuminate the longitudinal effects of particular approaches to WBL and WRL within different organizational contexts. In particular to examine the relationship between the particular WBL or WRL practices that have been used, the organization and its approach to learning and the impact of these on skills utilization.

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List of Acronyms

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

Bachelor of Arts (BA)

Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRLL)

Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)

Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)

Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE)

Early Years Practitioner Status (EYPS)

Foundation Degrees (FDs)

Foundation Degree Forward (*fdf)*

Further Education (FE)

Further Education Colleges (FECs)

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)

Higher Education (HE)

Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU)

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Higher National (HN)

Higher Nationals (HNs)

Higher National Certificate (HNC)

Higher National Diploma (HND)

Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/Ds)

Information Technology (IT)

National Occupational Standards (NOS)

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

Open University (OU)

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)

Sector Skills Council (SSC)

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)

Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)

Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF)

Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

Work-based learning (WBL)

Work-related learning (WRL)