

Foundation Degree Gateway Project
Report for the Children's Workforce Network

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Executive summary

The Children's Workforce Network commissioned a project to look at how Foundation Degrees are meeting the needs of the Integrated Qualifications Framework for the children's workforce. The project was supported by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills Gateways to the Professions development fund and overseen by a steering group including member organisations of the Children's Workforce Network. The project was carried out on behalf of the Children's Workforce Network by Simon Wilson and Mary Barber from Wilson Sherriff.

The key issues identified by the research are as follows.

The extent to which employers' needs are currently being met through Foundation degrees (pages 12 to 17)

Higher education institutions are increasingly shaping provision around employer demand in line with the government's agenda for World Class Skills. Sector Qualification Strategies, Sector Skills Agreements, the Integrated Qualifications Framework, and higher education standards including the Foundation degree benchmark statement are seeking to bring coherence to qualifications and skills across the children's workforce.

Higher education institutions are developing relationships with employers and use frameworks developed through sector skills councils, which are employer led. It is sometimes hard to sustain employer engagement during the development of Foundation degrees and beyond. Employers see positive benefits in staff taking Foundation degrees. However, there are concerns about losing staff who move on to new jobs. In other cases, it may be uncomfortable for staff to challenge practice using their new knowledge.

In general, providers find it easier to engage with public-sector employers than those from the private, voluntary and independent sectors. Fewer employers from the private, voluntary and independent sectors have been reached by efforts to promote Foundation degrees. Sector endorsement should act as a strong focus for employer involvement in Foundation degrees, but higher education institutions may see this type of approach as restricting their academic freedom.

The extent to which current Foundation Degrees support transition between different children's sector and different levels of qualification (pages 18 to 21)

Foundation degrees are opening up access to higher education for increasing numbers of people in the children's workforce. They are valued by employers who understand what they are, but there is still ignorance among others about their value. There were mixed views about the impact on pay and promotion, with some students strongly supporting Foundation degrees, while others were concerned that they may not lead to promotion or higher pay.

By widening horizons, improving confidence, and introducing the idea of reflective practice Foundation degrees prompt students to consider occupation changes that would otherwise have been closed to them. However, it was a common theme that

employers are only interested in supporting Foundation degrees that relate to current employment.

Foundation degrees developed for people who work with both adults and children tend to include the child protection and safeguarding element of the Every Child Matters agenda but may not include the other elements.

The potential of Foundation degrees as a key feature of the Integrated Qualification Framework, providing a bridge between vocational and higher education qualifications (pages 22 to 26)

There are innovative and exciting approaches to Foundation degree development led by colleges as much as by universities. They already build in several elements which encourage movement between occupational roles. Greater consistency of student experience can be achieved by universities and colleges working more closely together.

The single-provider model for Youth Justice offered by the Open University offers some interesting challenges for thinking about Foundation degrees. While this approach was decided by the Youth Justice Board, and not employers in the sector, it is worth considering the implications in terms of consistency of approach, and hence the importance of frameworks.

Foundation degree frameworks are not well understood, but are valued by some universities. There is scope to develop principles for the development of Foundation degrees based on Every Child Matters and the Common Core to support their positioning in the Integrated Qualification Framework. Setting standards based on qualifications for different occupational roles is expected to contribute to raising skills levels for the children's workforce. Sector bodies can help both employers and providers understand the system better.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for reinforcing and clarifying the future role of Foundation degrees in the context of the Integrated Qualifications Framework are proposed for consideration by the Children's Workforce Network in consultation with Foundation Degree Forward.

Recommendation 1: There is potential for Foundation degrees to bridge vocational and higher education qualifications and this needs to be taken into consideration within the development of the Integrated Qualifications Framework.

Recommendation 2: The Children's Workforce Network should facilitate the development of principles for children's workforce Foundation degrees. These should be based around Every Child Matters and the Common Core of skills and knowledge for those working with children, young people, parents and carers, and reflective practice in leadership and management.

Recommendation 3: Sector bodies in the Children's Workforce Network should promote networks of Foundation degree good practice across the children's workforce, bringing together sector bodies and providers. These networks could support the development of the principles described in Recommendation 2, and raise

the profile of sector endorsement and Foundation degree frameworks, as well as ensuring that sector bodies lead development for their sector.

Recommendation 4: Sector bodies should develop a communication initiative for the private, voluntary and independent sector on Foundation degrees so that these employers are better informed, and so that the development of Foundation degrees takes account of the reality of employment in these sectors.

Recommendation 5: Higher education institutions should be supported to build inter-disciplinary Foundation degree networks to break down internal barriers and take the lead in developing integrated approaches to working and learning.

Introduction

The Children's Workforce Network (www.childrensworkforce.org.uk) is an alliance committed to creating and supporting a world-class children's workforce in England. Its members are Skills for Justice, the National College for School Leadership, Skills for Health, the General Teaching Council for England, the Children's Workforce Development Council, Creative and Cultural Skills, Lifelong Learning UK, the General Social Care Council, the Improvement and Development Agency, SkillsActive, and the Nursing and Midwifery Council. The Network commissioned a project to look at how Foundation Degrees are meeting the needs of the Integrated Qualifications Framework for the children's workforce. The project was supported by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills Gateways to the Professions development fund and overseen by a steering group made up of Children's Workforce Network member organisations, Foundation Degree Forward, the British Association of Social Workers, and the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

The project examined the extent to which employers' needs are currently being met by Foundation Degrees. It considered how far they are supporting the transition between sectors and levels of qualification. It looked at the potential for Foundation Degrees to bridge vocational and higher education qualifications as part of the Integrated Qualifications Framework.

The project was carried out on behalf of the Children's Workforce Network by Simon Wilson and Mary Barber from Wilson Sherriff.

Foundation degrees for the children's workforce

Summary

We estimate that around 425 Foundation degrees relate in whole or in part to the children's workforce. Foundation degrees for the children's workforce are developing at different rates and in different ways.

According to the Foundation Degree Forward website, Foundation degrees 'are designed with employers, and combine academic study with workplace learning to equip people with relevant knowledge and skills to improve performance and productivity'¹. In most cases, Foundation degrees are still bedding in. Equally, developments such as the emergence of Every Child Matters and the Common Core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce, let alone the emergence of employer demand as the key driver for workforce development and sector skills plans, post-date the emergence of the first generation of Foundation degrees.

This means that different Foundation degrees are at very different stages of development. It also means that any proposals for action need to be considered in the context of at least a five-year time frame to ensure effective development and embedding in practice.

For the children's workforce, real impetus has been given to Foundation degrees by the promotion and sector endorsement of Foundation degrees in Early Years, and Working with Young People and Young People's Services by the Department for Education and Skills. The provision of funding support for Early Years Foundation

degrees and their linkage to the Early Years Professional Status has also been a significant factor in promoting the development of this Foundation degree. Sector endorsement for these Foundation degrees has been taken over from the Department for Education and Skills by the Children's Workforce Development Council, which is currently reviewing the overall system for sector endorsement.

There is also evidence of some highly responsive approaches emerging to meet employer needs, particularly those linked to the creation of new job roles, and Foundation degrees have been developed for the children's workforce in a wide range of disciplines. It is difficult to provide a single conclusive total figure, as the titles and coverage of degrees vary so widely. However, it is possible to summarise as follows.

We estimate that around 425 Foundation degree programmes relate in whole or in part to the children's workforce. It appears that all but about ten universities offer at least one Foundation degree course that relates to the children's workforce. Many universities offer a significant range of them. Many Foundation degrees relate in part to children and young people, but also include adults – for instance, those for assistant practitioners in health and community care, or for sports. Our total figure includes an estimate of the number of Foundation degree programmes that relate to both children / young people and to adults. A summary of the overall picture is outlined in the table below. The numbers given relate to course programmes – in many cases several courses with the same title may be delivered for a higher education institution by different colleges. These are each counted as a course programme.

Subject area	Number of courses	Comment
Health and Social Care	68	Not necessarily focused on children Includes 8 Foundation degrees for Assistant Practitioner roles in Health Care, Social Care, Assisting Professional Practice
Youth work	14	Focused on children and including youth and community studies Includes Open University Working with young people
Early Years	152	Includes a small handful of joint courses – e.g. Integrated Practice: Early Years and Young People Includes Open University
Working with children and young people	45	Includes Integrated Education and Care of Children and Young People, Working with Children and Young People, Childhood Studies
Learning support	70	Not necessarily focused on children Includes primary and secondary learning support
Sport and Fitness	58	Not necessarily focused on children
Youth / community justice	7	Youth Justice now to be delivered only by Open University
Playwork	11	

By way of indication, the following is a list of some of the universities offering substantial numbers of Foundation Degrees on the children's workforce.

Canterbury Christ Church University – 6 Foundation Degrees
Edge Hill University – 26 Foundation Degrees
University of Hertfordshire – 9 Foundation Degrees
Leeds Metropolitan University – 34 Foundation Degrees
University of Portsmouth – 8 Foundation Degrees
University of Sunderland – 12 Foundation Degrees.

The Open University offers three Foundation degrees – Early Years, Working with Young People, and Youth Justice - with substantial student numbers for each.

Many institutions are a planning significant expansion of Foundation degrees. While Foundation degrees are a significant feature of some sectors, their presence is still limited. An estimate of overall student numbers for Foundation degrees for the children's workforce in any one year might be of the order of 15,000. While this is substantial, it is still very small in the context of a children's workforce of several million.

Methodology

In the project brief, we were asked to address three questions:

- the extent to which employers' needs are currently being met
- the extent to which current Foundation degrees support transition between different children's sectors and between different levels of qualification
- the potential of Foundation degrees as a key feature of the Integrated Qualifications Framework, providing a bridge between vocational and higher education qualifications.

We conducted initial desk research around the key factors affecting the development of Foundation degrees and qualifications more generally. The bulk of the research for this project was qualitative. We convened discussion groups using a common set of questions for each group, and also held one-to-one interviews in person and by telephone.

We focused on the three main groups identified as affected by the development of Foundation degrees: employers, providers and students (and former students). Given the range and number of Foundation degrees offered within the children's workforce it was decided - in order to focus the work of this report - to look at five specific subject areas, some more established than others. These were: Early Years; Assistant health and social care professional; Sport and physical activity ; Youth justice; and Learning support. We did not hope to cover all groups for all subjects at all of the higher education institutions listed, but focused our discussions on five regions of England: the North West, the North East, the South West, the West Midlands, and the South East. We also responded positively to useful suggestions for one-off discussions or for attending meetings already planned. In practice, we had more group discussions with providers and students than with employers, where one-to-one conversations were most useful.

We held eight group discussions and six one-to-one interviews with providers. The University of Cumbria, Edge Hill University, University of the West of England,

University of Sunderland, University College Birmingham, Newman College, Canterbury Christchurch University, and City and Islington College all hosted provider discussions. Five of these discussion groups involved higher education providers from other universities in the region. We also held six one-to-one discussions, mainly by telephone. Provider participants were course leaders and developers, those delivering courses either in a university or college setting, and senior managers with the institutions. They covered the range of Foundation degrees outlined above. The questions for providers covered the following issues:

What do you think employers are looking for from Foundation Degrees?

What do you think students are looking for from Foundation Degrees?

Do you think that Foundation Degrees help employers meet their workforce needs?

Do you think that Foundation Degrees help students to gain promotion?

Do you think that Foundation Degrees help students move to new and different job roles?

How do you see the future of Foundation Degrees in the context of moves towards and Integrated Qualifications Framework?

Where do students move on to in the majority? – employment or higher education?

Does it prepare students adequately for higher education?

We carried out three group discussions with employers and eight one-to-one interviews. We interviewed employers from the range of sectors listed above. From local authorities and trusts we spoke to employers from health, education, youth offending, community exercise, early years and youth. From the private, voluntary and independent sectors we spoke to employers from young people with disabilities provision, children's social care, early years, childminding and foster care. The employers interviewed included service managers, senior managers in organisations, and human resources practitioners. They also included some self-employed practitioners.

The questions for employers covered the following issues:

Do you encourage your employees to study for Foundation Degrees and if so why?

What are the major factors impacting on you encouraging or discouraging employees to study for Foundation degrees?

What could be done to encourage you to promote the take up of Foundation degrees?

Are you more or less likely to employ a candidate for a job who has a Foundation Degree?

How do you see Foundation Degrees helping your staff do their current jobs?
Are your needs being met by Foundation degrees?

How do you see Foundation Degrees helping your staff to gain promotion or
move to new and different job roles?

What factors will affect your workforce needs in the next few years?

Are you aware of Foundation Degree frameworks and sector endorsement
and, if so, what is your view of them?

What qualifications from other occupational areas would be acceptable or
equivalent to you as an employer?

We carried out six group discussions and eight interviews among students. The group discussions were hosted by the providers listed above. We were also fortunate to receive a number of e-mail comments from students through provider-based or occupation-based online community groups. We also spoke to six former Foundation degree students. The students were studying Foundation degrees in Early Years, Childhood Studies, Learning Support, Youth and Community Studies, Sport, Assistant Practitioner Health and Social Care, and Integrated Practice. All but a very few of the students were in employment or seeking employment. The groups included both first and second year students and those who had moved on from the Foundation degree to study for an Honours degree.

The questions for students included the following issues:

Why did you choose to study for a Foundation Degree?

What is your employer's attitude to your taking a Foundation Degree?

How do you want your Foundation degree to help your career?

Is the Foundation Degree helping your career in the way you wanted?

Is the content of what you learn what you actually need?

Does it prepare you for employment or HE adequately (transitions)?

Do you see clear progression routes?

We also carried out six discussions with other parties with an interest in the project, in part in response to the comments on the briefing notes sent out in the course of the project. These included people from sector bodies and researchers with an interest in the field.

We would very much like to thank the educational institutions, employers, and students who took part in the discussions. They were very helpful, positive, and enthusiastic about the performance and potential of Foundation degrees.

The range of participants in these discussions provides a good base for qualitative discussions. However, recruitment to the groups was based on invitation and not all of those invited to attend could do so or chose to do so. Therefore these were self-selecting groups. Equally most, though not all of the student contacts, and some of

the employer groups, were taken forward through the higher education institutions. Therefore the sample offers good coverage but was not a random sample and cannot be seen as statistically representative.

This report is based in the main on the issues raised by participants in the discussions. In some cases their views are based on not having access to all the information they might need, or even in some cases to misunderstandings. However, these perceptions from providers, employers and students open up issues about communication and understanding which are important to the future development of Foundation degrees. Equally, we found that certain issues raised in response to our questions were much more interesting to the participants than other questions, and this is reflected in the balance of the report that follows. In the report we identify issues raised by significant numbers of participants, as well as those where differences of opinion and perception arose.

A more detailed review of the issues arising from each of the questions follows, together with some recommendations. We have sought to use the issues raised during the question sessions to open up questions for the Project Board overseeing this activity, and to offer recommendations for future work.

Section 1 – The extent to which employers’ needs are currently being met

Summary

Many higher education institutions are increasingly shaping provision around employer demand in line with the government’s agenda for World Class Skills. Sector Qualification Strategies, Sector Skills Agreements, the Integrated Qualifications Framework, and the higher education quality assurance framework are seeking to bring coherence to qualifications and skills across the children’s workforce.

This section looks at how employer needs are shaping the system of skills and qualifications, and draws out the key messages from employer discussion groups and interviews undertaken for the project.

World Class Skills

The government’s response to the Leitch review report² confirmed both a major national commitment to increasing skills levels across the UK workforce, and a shift in how skills provision is to be planned and commissioned. The move away from supply side planning to a demand-led approach offers new opportunities for learners, employers, and employer-led bodies to drive the development of provision. It signals a requirement for providers to involve employers and learners both in the development of provision and qualifications, and in all aspects of their implementation.

The Government’s High Level Skills Strategy *‘Higher Education at Work, High Skills High Value’* signals a move towards more demand-led HE provision and many higher education institutions are already in practice developing a much stronger focus on business-facing and employer-driven provision. Many of the newer universities have experience of working with employers, and the availability of HEFCE funding for additional student numbers has encouraged them to build on this experience to offer new Foundation degrees.

Foundation degrees, with the requirement to form the bridge between vocational and academic qualifications and the introduction of new employer co-funded provision, are likely to be in the vanguard of this new development.

Sector Qualification Strategy

The vision for an integrated qualification framework builds on the national requirement for a UK-wide framework of Sector Qualifications Strategies which seeks to make accurate responses to sector specific needs and requirements. The SQSs require an assessment of drivers and needs in broad sectors, and enable planning and development to take place on the basis of understanding those needs. In principle, therefore, qualifications should meet the needs of employers and learners in sectors. This implies that Foundation degrees, like other qualifications, should continue to develop through employer involvement, as outlined above, more than through a supply-side push from provider bodies.

Sector Skills Agreements

For each broad sector, a Sector Skills Agreement is being developed. A Sector Skills Agreement is an agreement between employers, the government, and workforce partner organisations to deliver an agreed action plan to meet the priority skills needs of the sector. Broadly speaking, sector skills agreements are developed through an initial assessment of the context and drivers within a sector; a review of current practice in learning, development and qualification; identification of issues for consideration; and a strategic plan that forms the basis of the agreement.

Progress on sector skills agreements among CWN partners is at different stages, and there is a close relationship between the relevant Sector Qualification Strategies and work under way on the agreements. Review of the documents available reveals a number of themes and issues of relevance to the Foundation Degree Gateway Project, for instance:

The CWDC (www.cwdcouncil.org.uk) identified that workforce modernisation is leading to the creation of new work roles that extend across previous role boundaries. The complex range of qualifications on offer is not fully understood by employers.

Lifelong Learning UK (www.lifelonglearninguk.org) identified key priorities including the need to explore options for 'professionalising' all parts of the lifelong learning workforce.

Skills for Health (www.skillsforhealth.org.uk) identified the Foundation degree framework as one element of a series of linked agreements, with the creation of pilot sites to ensure strong linkages between Foundation degree provision and the emergence of new work roles.

Skills For Justice (www.skillsforjustice.com) are creating a Skills Management Strategy which will allow a more effective focus on development throughout careers, building on an already substantial investment in learning and development at entry level.

A key issue for the children's workforce will be to ensure that individual Sector Skills Agreements have points of contact, in particular to enable 'horizontal' progression across different sub-sectors of the children's workforce. This is one of the key themes of the present project. Equally, sector skills agreements are developing at different speeds. Communication takes place across some Children's Workforce Network partners in respect of Sector Qualification Strategy developments, and there is scope for this activity to be extended through information exchange, and possibly some joint working at the implementation stage, in order to support 'horizontal' progression.

Integrated Qualifications Framework

While *World Class Skills* established a national vision, and action plans are being developed for each sector, the Integrated Qualifications Framework recognises the particular needs and context of the children and young people's workforce and sits between the sectoral and national levels.

The vision for an integrated qualifications framework for the children and young people's workforce has been clearly articulated by the Children's Workforce Network. The vision is a qualifications framework with acceptance and credibility across the workforce, that helps people deliver high quality services, raises the profile and status of the children's workforce, and meets the needs of employers. Central to the development of the framework are horizontal and vertical development pathways, endorsed by recognised sector bodies, and understood by employers. Consultations around the IQF in Summer 2007 identified a number of challenges for successful development of the framework, including building understanding among employers, the cultural shifts required in how people learn and train, and building credibility to enable transferability of qualifications across employers, training providers and sectors in the children's workforce.

Development of the Integrated Qualifications Framework will also depend on the work undertaken in the Qualifications and Credit Framework³. The Qualifications and Credit Framework will provide the structure for developing and accrediting unit and credit based vocational qualifications. All vocational qualifications developed for the Integrated Qualifications Framework must be fully compatible with the Qualifications and Credit Framework. Currently the processes and inclusion principles for submitting vocational qualifications to the Integrated Qualifications Framework are being tested and evaluated. Five consultation events have just been held across England with higher education institutions to develop comparable processes for submitting higher education qualifications to the Integrated Qualifications Framework.

Higher Education Qualifications

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (www.qaa.ac.uk) is consulting on a framework for higher education qualifications. The framework details the levels of higher education qualifications, with the Foundation degree included at intermediate level, below Honours degrees. It also includes a descriptor for qualifications at intermediate level, which includes the ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied including, where appropriate, in an employment context. The descriptor also refers to qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision making.

Children's Plan

During the research to produce this report both the *Children's Plan*⁴ and *Building Brighter Futures: next steps for the children's workforce*⁵ were published. These documents reaffirmed the continuing commitment to upskill the children's workforce in order to provide the best possible services to children, young people, parents and carers. The reports confirmed the government's continuing commitment to fund and support the development of early years professionals. They signalled a new focus of emphasis on upskilling the playwork profession, and for playwork as for other sectors of the children's workforces emphasised the move towards more graduate leadership.

How providers are meeting employer needs

Summary

Higher education institutions have well developed relationships with employers and use employer-led frameworks developed through sector skills councils. In some cases it is difficult for providers to engage employers with the development and/or delivery of Foundation degree programmes.

Higher education institutions are trying very hard to respond to current and developing employer needs. In broad terms, Foundation degrees are one such response. For instance, some employers in the sport and leisure sector found that Honours degrees in their subject area did not relate closely enough to workplace roles. Foundation degrees in sport and leisure were developed in response to that. We found good practice through which employers are involved in developing Foundation degrees and in the continuing evolution of the programme, for instance through membership of a project board overseeing it. One quite specific example is one local authority's involvement in the Community Based Exercise Foundation degree which provides an effective route into employment with the authority.

However, good practice of this type may be the exception rather than the norm. Once a Foundation degree has been developed we heard that higher education institutions often lose contact with employers who may have been closely involved in developing the degree. This is risky given the rapid changes to practice and structure among many employing organisations. It was a common comment from providers that employer networks take considerable time and effort to sustain.

Some responsiveness to employer needs appears to be quite tactical. For instance in more than one area an employer was planning to introduce a new job role and work was done to prepare a Foundation degree route for that role. In the event restructuring took place within the organisation, the new work role was not introduced, and nor was the Foundation degree. This caused frustration for the groups which had worked on the degree plans. It also raises a concern that tactical, short term employer developments may not be best met by Foundation degrees.

Impact of Foundation degrees in the workplace

Summary

Employers see positive benefits in staff taking Foundation degrees. However, some are concerned about losing staff who move on to new jobs. In other cases, it is not comfortable for staff to challenge practice using their new knowledge.

Employers were positive about staff who had taken Foundation degrees. They mentioned a substantial change in confidence, and a more outgoing and positive attitude. This was a key finding of a stakeholder evaluation undertaken by one higher education institution among head teachers reflecting on staff who had undertaken a Foundation degree in Childhood Studies.

Employers also commented positively on the impact in terms of reflective practice. They said that staff were more likely to ask 'why' questions and explore options and

alternatives when difficult situations arose. They gave examples of staff coming forward with suggestions for service improvement. One Foundation degree student was asked to organise a Fathers' Forum in the local community, and used reading from the degree and tutor support to develop their ideas. They said that they would not have known how to undertake this task without this new understanding.

Staff working in the Health Service who had undertaken a Foundation degree directly linked to an enhanced role were often able to move into that role as a promotion. The opportunity to develop their experienced and trusted staff in this way was valued by employers. However, the link between achieving a Foundation degree and career progression was less clear in other occupational roles.

Concern among managers that they might lose staff following their studies was a common theme. One head teacher we spoke to was happy that staff in his school would benefit the education system as a whole when they moved on; but one other was perhaps more typical in wanting to benefit from the investment of effort by the school in supporting Foundation degree studies.

We also heard from some former students, and from providers, that not all employers valued the Foundation degree, and progression and career opportunities were not opening up. Sometimes staff were challenging workplace practice based on their new knowledge. This was not always a comfortable experience.

Different types of employer

Summary:

In general, providers find it easier to engage with public-sector employers than those from the private, voluntary and independent sectors. Fewer employers from these latter sectors have been reached by efforts to promote Foundation degrees.

Higher education institutions seem relatively well set up to work with public sector employers who tend to embody much good practice. However, providers find it more difficult to find and engage with employers from the private, voluntary and independent sectors. In part this is because it is much more difficult to engage with smaller organisations. These are also the sectors where money is tighter and workforce development practice may be less well developed. Foundation degree students from the private sector may find that their current work environment does not measure up well against good practice benchmarks introduced during their studies. There were comments that former Foundation degree students use their degrees to move from the private to the public sector.

There must be a concern here that providers find it difficult to understand and match the concerns of smaller organisations, and that the potential benefits of Foundation degrees for staff and managers in the private and voluntary sectors are not being fulfilled. One provider participant observed that these sectors have not been taken along with the movement to promote Foundation degrees. However, there are examples of managers from private, voluntary and independent sector settings studying for Foundation degrees themselves. This also goes for self-employed people, working in sectors such as foster care. We did speak to one medium-size employer in the voluntary sector using Foundation degrees as a key tool in staff development, but providers said that this was unusual. At the same time, higher education institutions will only offer Foundation degrees where there is a supply of

students, and this is more likely to be achieved through collaboration with larger organisations. Networks of smaller employers might be one way of addressing this issue.

Providers said that employers usually responded positively face-to-face when provided with information about Foundation degrees but that there was not time to provide information in that detail to individual employers.

Critical to integrating thinking among employers is integrating workforce development at the appropriate regional, local and sectoral levels. Again, this may be much more easily achieved in the public sector. The new framework for local area agreements may assist in this, as it will require organisations to collaborate at local level to achieve agreed targets, leading at least in principle to more integrated working across agencies. Over time this may have an impact on skills requirements, as will the development of Children's Trusts. Voluntary and community organisations can be part of Children's Trusts so this may offer scope for integrating them more closely in workforce development planning.

Sector endorsement

Summary

Sector endorsement should act as a strong focus for employer involvement in Foundation degrees, but some higher education institutions see this type of approach as restricting their academic freedom

For the children's workforce, real impetus has been given to Foundation degrees by the promotion and sector endorsement of Foundation degrees in Early Years, and Working with Young People and Young People's Services by the Department for Education and Skills. This has stimulated considerable demand for programmes in these areas that has not always been reflected in terms of local work requirements. Equally, the disparity in the support available for students studying different subjects was a common theme in discussions.

Sector endorsement can act as a tool to support the development of 'fitness to practise' across the children's workforce. This approach has the potential to attract employers who do not understand Foundation degrees. We found that even some employers who release staff to undertake a Foundation degree do not always know what it is and – more importantly for the students – do not know how much work and commitment is needed to complete it.

Effective development of sector endorsement will require sector skills councils to offer an approach that is both strategic and flexible. Sector endorsement needs to take account of the rapidly changing landscape in terms of new work roles and greater integration. Scepticism about this approach was a common theme among provider participants, however, because it could restrict their ability to develop Foundation degrees to meet needs close to home, and could be seen to restrict their academic freedom.

There is also a need to build more common practice between the 'dedicated' children's workforce and those sector bodies – for instance for sport, health and justice – which cross the adult, youth and children's workforces.

Section 2 – The extent to which current Foundation degrees support transition between different children’s sectors and between different levels of qualification

Transition between different levels of qualification

Summary

Foundation degrees are opening up access to higher education for increasing numbers of people in the children’s workforce. They are valued by those employers who understand what they are, but there is still ignorance among others about their value. There were mixed views about the impact on pay and promotion, with some students strongly supporting Foundation degrees, while others were concerned that they may not lead to promotion or higher pay.

Doing a Foundation degree can be a life-changing experience, building self-esteem and a sense of identity. All of the providers we interviewed said they are useful for introducing non-traditional students to a range of qualifications and opportunities not previously open to them.

There are many positive aspects to this. Foundation degrees are opening up access to increasing numbers of people in the children’s workforce – predominantly women – to build upon their experience and vocational qualifications and progress to higher level qualifications and reflective practice. New roles such as Assistant Practitioner (Health and Social Care) or Community Based Exercise Practitioner have been opened up through the Foundation degree route. Foundation degrees enable those who have not previously engaged in higher education to gain ‘graduate’ status, contributing to the national policy of widening access and enhancing higher education skills at Level 4 and above in line with the government’s response to the Leitch review report. The potential to progress to an honours degree award through a top-up is also highly attractive. Many Foundation degree students are rewarded by recruitment, pay increases and promotion. Foundation degrees are highly valued by students and staff.

However, we also found some problems. A significant number of the former students we spoke to said that Foundation degrees are less valued than other qualifications, and were concerned to find themselves ‘stuck’ at least temporarily in existing job roles on existing pay scales despite having a new qualification. While employers and policy makers understand that higher qualifications may be required to do the same job, the equation of higher pay with qualifications was a common theme among students we interviewed. As in some cases there is a link between a new, enhanced job role and the Foundation degree qualification this can be seen as adding to the view of disparity. Whilst no qualification of this nature can be directly linked to an enhanced salary, it is important that obtaining such qualifications is clearly linked to career progression (which may be vertical or horizontal).

Foundation degrees are hard work. Students often have to balance commitments to the degree, work, and family. We interviewed former students who had found the

level of study and time commitment too demanding and who had dropped out of study. This was a demoralising experience for them. Studying requires a major commitment in time and money. There is inconsistency across sectors and subjects about the relative contributions of students, employers and public funding. In some cases students pay the cost of study and carry it through in their own time, with student contact time at weekends and evenings. In other cases employers allow time off (sometimes paid, sometimes unpaid), and there are funds available to meet course costs.

Transition between occupational roles

Summary

By widening horizons, improving confidence, and introducing the idea of reflective practice Foundation degrees prompt students to consider occupation changes that would otherwise have been closed to them. However, it was a common theme that employers are only interested in supporting Foundation degrees that relate to current employment.

Some Foundation degrees, such as Integrated Practice in Healthcare, are explicitly designed with lateral job role progression in mind. Around half the students we spoke to said that after they began studying for a Foundation degree they realised that there were many other options open to them for moving into other sectors, and that their qualifications would be useful across a wider workforce.

Foundation degrees opening up opportunities to move up and sideways across the range of children's workforce roles was a common theme. By widening horizons, improving confidence, and introducing the idea of reflective practice, even quite subject-specific Foundation degrees prompt students to consider occupational changes that would otherwise have been closed to them. The range of options considered may surprise even course leaders – for instance, one course developer in a Health faculty noted that students were considering careers across education, social care and even youth justice. The experience of studying with people from a different occupational background – such as youth workers and community workers coming together on a Youth and Community Work Foundation degree – allows mental barriers to lateral progression to be challenged. Some employers explicitly and implicitly support the way that Foundation degrees open up routes across occupational boundaries. The possibility of accumulating modules among different Foundation degrees, or 'stepping off' at various points to step on again later, was also mentioned as a benefit.

On the other hand, some Foundation degrees have a more specific role with a particular area of work associated with a more vertical progression route. For instance, many Teaching Assistants see the Foundation degree as part of a career pathway towards becoming a teacher. The Foundation degree is an important stepping stone to achieving the relevant qualification necessary to gain entry onto a professional programme. Given the widening access approach of a Foundation degree this can be an important access route to developing future practitioners. As with all such personal development strategies it is important to ensure that such a career trajectory is in line with employer requirements and workforce needs. In some cases a more direct entry route to teaching may be available.

Narrowly defined Foundation degrees focused on a particular job role also reinforce the 'vertical' spine and may reduce the scope for lateral movement. Further efforts are required to support appropriate programmes where employers are only just changing the way they deliver services. There is real scope here for effective communication with employers through sector bodies and providers to open up thinking about the role of qualifications in opening up lateral movement, as well as supporting people to do their current jobs or move a step up the promotion ladder. To some extent the Integrated Qualifications Framework will provide a guidance resource for that.

There are barriers to identifying lateral links within higher education institutions as well. In many cases, different faculties have been slow to identify potential connections between the Foundation degrees they offer. One provider of a Foundation degree outside the mainstream of the children's workforce said that 'the world of Children and Families can seem impenetrable'. The barriers between faculty silos were a common theme among providers, and these barriers need to be bridged for the full potential of Foundation degrees to emerge in bridging occupational roles.

One of the main ways in which people develop their careers laterally is through management pathways – for instance, moving from management of a children's centre to management of a youth facility, or from managing one team of practitioners to another. Many of the students and former students we spoke to saw this as the main opportunity for career progression across a wider field.

Management and leadership elements are already included in many Foundation degrees and higher qualifications, including that in Integrated Sector Leadership, may be a good step up from Foundation degrees. The 'management' components of reflective practice may be particularly important for the development of lateral career opportunities. It may be that higher education institutions could look more to National Occupational Standards in management and leadership in developing future Foundation degrees.

Children / youth / adult workforce integration

Summary

Foundation degrees developed for people who work with both adults and children tend to include the child protection element of the Every Child Matters agenda but may not include other elements.

Many people undertaking Foundation degrees work with both children and young people, and adults. This means that their particular occupational roles may not be seen as part of the children's workforce, and they may not consider progression routes into roles working only with children and young people. There is also a question about how far these Foundation degrees reflect Every Child Matters and provide an effective base for working with children and young people. Every Child Matters is a national framework for those working with children and young people⁶. It outlines five aims for every child: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. All of those we interviewed about Foundation degrees for people working with adults and children understood the importance of the child protection and safeguarding element ('be safe') and these are taken into account in developing Foundation degrees. However, among this

group, the other four elements of Every Child Matters were not well known or integrated in the design of Foundation degrees. These issues are emerging in different ways for different sectors.

Youth work and community work are seen as quite different in terms of theory and practice by many practitioners. Overall, there is a strong sense of two professions developing along parallel lines with little scope for progression between them. Integrating Foundation degrees such as Youth and Community work provide a context for youth workers and community workers to study alongside each other, and pursue a placement in the 'other type' of setting. We spoke to students who had developed a more positive view of the 'other type' of job role through this. In principle, this approach could open up more scope for people to move across the boundary from community work into youth work, and on to other roles within the children and young people's workforce. However, the number of students on Foundation degrees is relatively small; and the key driver for upskilling in the youth work sector is the drive towards a graduate profession. This may run the risk of reinforcing a single focus on Youth work Honours degrees.

For sport and coaching, a Foundation degree framework has been developed with SkillsActive. Some higher education institutions have used the framework, while others have developed degrees in a more ad hoc way. This framework does not explicitly draw upon the Common Core or Every Child Matters outcomes – rather, the approach is one which draws upon coaching principles to apply to both adults and children. In practice, many Foundation degree students will work with children and young people – for instance, coaching a youth team – during the assessed practice part of the Foundation degree. It is worth considering whether Foundation degrees for this type of practice would benefit from an explicit base around the principles of working with children and young people. This could build on the practice of related Foundation degrees such as Community Based Exercise which explicitly work around the Every Child Matters principles.

In the justice sector, those working with young people in the community (in Youth Offending Teams) consider themselves to be part of the children's workforce. People working in the secure estate, however (young offender's institutions, secure training centres and secure children's homes), are more likely to identify with prison officers and others working with adults. The Open University is now the designated sole provider for the Foundation degree in Youth Justice approved by the Youth Justice Board.

Section 3 – The potential of Foundation degrees as a key feature of the Integrated Qualifications Framework, providing a bridge between vocational and higher education qualifications

This section looks at some of the potential future directions for Foundation degrees as the Integrated Qualifications Framework emerges, and makes some recommendations.

Scope for future development

Summary

There are innovative and exciting approaches to Foundation degree development led by colleges as much as by universities. They already build in several elements which encourage movement between occupational roles. Greater consistency of student experience can be achieved by universities and colleges working more closely together.

Providers are taking up the challenge of developing and delivering Foundation degrees with some enthusiasm. We were struck by the commitment and energy of many of those we spoke to. Over the next few years we are likely to see further expansion of the number of courses and of students attending courses.

Foundation degrees have the potential to play an absolutely central role in an Integrated Qualifications framework. They are emerging as a tried and tested route for people at work to build on their vocational skills and competencies and set a course to a higher level qualification based around both a sound base of knowledge and reflective practice. As the bridge between Level 3 vocational qualifications and higher learning, Foundation degrees already have an impressive track record. This needs to be taken into full account as the Integrated Qualifications Framework is developed further. Equally, what remains to be seen is the extent to which the Integrated Qualifications Framework proves meaningful to employers in particular, more of whom need to understand the nature of Foundation degrees and their potential contribution to developing their workforce.

Foundation degrees already build in several elements which encourage lateral movement between occupational roles. The most important of these are the focus on Every Child Matters outcomes; the key role of reflective practice; and management and leadership. There may be some tension between the Children's Plan and *Building Brighter Futures*; the independence of higher education institutions; and the direct involvement of employers who may have quite specific needs. By and large this is a creative tension, and it will be essential that innovative developments take account of these different factors. At present there is some inconsistency. As most students are likely to study near to where they live and work, their experience is likely to be shaped by how that tension plays out in a given provider as much as by national standards.

A number of other issues are emerging which may hold back the capacity for Foundation degrees to meet their full potential in the context of the Integrated Qualifications Framework.

Relationships between further education colleges and universities are often very positive, but they can be difficult. Some higher education institutions do not offer Foundation degrees themselves, but validate other providers to do so. In this case, the lead provider may not fully understand what is involved. Effective development of a consistent standard of student experience requires better integration of delivery. Difficulties between higher and further education institutions are sometimes caused by communication problems and sometimes by the way in which students and courses are financed. There is no funding parity, and specific funding opportunities, including support packages – free laptops for instance - vary over time, and according to different criteria, which makes it difficult to plan.

The relationship between the students and their tutors is very important and many of the students need a lot of attention which means that there is a significant burden for the tutors outside teaching hours.

Colleges are innovating in their approach to developing Foundation degrees as a key part of their offer to students, and choosing relationships with one or more universities to accredit the degrees. Colleges are often close to local communities and this may increase the scope to recruit students from non-traditional backgrounds. However, a small number of the provider participants and sector representatives felt that the quality of some Foundation degrees initiated by colleges was lower, as colleges were not so well connected to the full range of academic and employer networks.

A small number of the students we spoke to studying Foundation degrees in a college setting felt that they were seen as second-class citizens by the universities that accredited their degree – for instance, they were not allowed full use of library facilities. This undermines the sense of value of the Foundation degree. These issues of value are important in ensuring that Foundation degrees meet their full potential contribution to the Integrated Qualifications Framework.

One way of integrating practice could be through sector bodies supporting and promoting the role of a limited number of providers. In effect, sector endorsement may have that effect. The most highly developed example of this approach is in the youth justice sector where, at present, a single provider, the Open University, delivers Foundation degrees across the sector. This approach is part of a concerted approach to workforce development across the sector – reinforcing the view that the level at which workforce development is planned is a key factor – and supported by a co-funding arrangement between the Youth Justice Board and local youth offending teams. This is a time-limited approach and over the next few years more discretion will be offered to local Youth Offending Teams / youth services, and the core funding from the Youth Justice Board will be reduced.

There is obviously a balance to be formed around consistency of approach, national access to good quality education provision, and enabling regional/local needs to be met. The proposed development of principles in Recommendation 2 of this report would significantly contribute to this, and aid recognition and transferability of qualifications.

Foundation degree frameworks

Summary

Foundation degree frameworks are not well understood, but show potential for future development.

As with sector endorsement, Foundation degree frameworks were seen as valuable by those universities that were engaging with them. Equally, as with sector endorsement, it may be that some providers would be resistant to being told how to structure their degrees. However, the Foundation degree framework concept is not well understood, and interviewees found it difficult to comment on the issue.

Currently the 'frameworks' that obtain are the Quality Assurance Agency Framework for Higher Education (intermediate level outcomes) and Foundation degree benchmark statements; any other appropriate subject benchmark statements (where relevant); the Common Core of skills and knowledge for those working with children, young people, parents and carers; and the sector skills councils' Foundation degree framework documents. In the future, the Integrated Qualifications Framework inclusion principles are also likely to impact. An example of a Foundation degree framework document is that devised by SkillsActive. It supports Foundation degree activity across the range of sectors from the outdoors to playwork including employer-led advice on design and delivery such as entry, progression, learning outcomes, links to national occupational standards, professional bodies and work-based learning. Other sector skills councils that do not yet have a framework might consider the use of this model.

There appears to be a real need for frameworks that offer guidance for higher education institutions in developing Foundation degrees to meet the needs of the children's workforce, and to ensure coherence in the Integrated Qualifications Framework. At the same time, institutions with a range of well established Foundation degrees are developing their own frameworks enabling core elements to be shared among different Foundation degrees based around the principles of Every Child Matters.

The sector skills councils are expected to be at the centre of this future work. In addition, some of the work of building good practice and better understanding might be taken forward by promoting networks of Foundation degree good practice across the children's workforce, bringing together sector bodies and providers. These networks could support the development of the principles described in Recommendation 2, and raise the profile of sector endorsement, Foundation degree frameworks, as well as ensuring that sector bodies lead development for their sector.

Integrating through a common core

Summary

There is scope to develop guidelines for the development of Foundation degrees based on Every Child Matters and the Common Core to support their positioning in the Integrated Qualification Framework.

One aspect of the development of Foundation degrees, relevant to the children's workforce, is that it is highly dynamic and this can be seen as a great strength. However, opportunistic development of Foundation degrees can lead to confusion and lack of coherence. In order to enable coherence and greater integration, there needs to be a common "framework" or guiding principles.

Every Child Matters is widely seen as an umbrella for developing Foundation degrees for the children's workforce.

There is interest among higher education institutions in using the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge as a framework for the integrative parts of the Foundation degree offer⁷. Some higher education representatives felt that the Common Core had not been used to its full potential as a framework for enabling multi-disciplinary working. There is no sense in reinventing the elements of the Common Core which could equally act as a 'core' for all Foundation degrees for the children's workforce. This might take the form of all or part of a Foundation degree framework. However, given that there are already quite a few frameworks out there, it might be more appropriate to offer principles for the development of Foundation degrees based on Every Child Matters and the Common Core. The principles should be developed to support the positioning of Foundation degrees in the Integrated Qualification Framework.

Evidence suggests that the principles should relate explicitly to management and leadership. As outlined above, it is largely through management roles that people in the children and young people's workforce are likely to progress. Therefore the leadership and management elements of Foundation degrees may become more important.

Integrating qualifications for greater coherence

Summary

Requiring qualifications for practitioners of certain roles is expected to raise skills levels for the children's workforce. However, there was a common concern that the market for qualifications is skewed by the promotion of certain qualifications. Sector bodies can help both employers and providers understand the system better.

Requiring qualifications for practitioners of certain roles is expected to raise skills levels for the children's workforce. In turn over time this will feed through to higher service standards and rewards for staff. However, there was a common concern that the market is distorted by the promotion of certain programmes, often supported by financial assistance – for example the support provided for those seeking Early Years Professional or Higher Level Teaching Assistant status was perceived as devaluing early years or learning support Foundation degrees by comparison.

There are also some barriers to progression from Foundation degrees. In teaching, for instance, the Foundation degree is not likely to provide a route into secondary teaching without additional subject study, although a number of institutions are exploring approaches to build on subject specialisms such as PE.

In Youth Justice, there is a requirement to reach the Professional Certificate of Effective Practice, below the level of the full Foundation degree. Again, there appears to be no route to top up Foundation degrees in some areas to degree level.

Youth work is becoming an all graduate (Honours) profession. On the other hand, in sport and coaching, the development of Foundation degrees from 2001 was at least in part driven by employer perceptions that then existing Honours degrees were not meeting the needs of the workplace. In the sector Foundation degrees are now valued by employers because of their strong base in workplace practice.

It is important that students receive clear guidance on possible routes for 'topping up' their Foundation degrees. We spoke to a student who had completed a Foundation degree, expecting that she would be offered entry on to the second year of a Social Work honours degree but was then only offered entry on to the first year. She felt that this devalued the hard work she had put in to complete the Foundation degree to a high standard.

Over the course of the project it became evident that different institutions are seeking to address the same barriers and rigidities in the qualifications system in different ways. Sector bodies have a key role in helping providers and employers understand the system.

As more parts of the children's workforce aim to become graduate-led, Foundation degrees are likely to have a major role to play. However this may be at the expense of the integrity of the original Foundation degree concept. Whilst Foundation degrees themselves are graduate qualifications, the status of a Foundation degree and an honours degree may reinforce the role of Foundation degrees as simply a means of improving access to higher education, and opening up the vocational and reflective practice element of degrees more generally.

Recommendations for future action

The following recommendations for reinforcing and clarifying the future role of Foundation degrees in the context of the Integrated Qualifications Framework are proposed for consideration by the Children's Workforce Network in consultation with Foundation Degree Forward.

Recommendation 1: There is potential for Foundation degrees to bridge vocational and higher education qualifications and this needs to be taken into consideration within the development of the Integrated Qualifications Framework.

Recommendation 2: The Children's Workforce Network should facilitate the development of children's workforce principles for Foundation degrees. This should be based around Every Child Matters and the Common Core of skills and knowledge for those working with children, young people, parents and carers, and reflective practice in leadership and management. The guidelines could be made available to sectors and Foundation degree developers for those who work with both adults and children / young people for those elements of their provision.

Recommendation 3: Sector bodies in the Children's Workforce Network should promote networks of Foundation degree good practice across the children's workforce, bringing together sector bodies and providers. These networks could support the development of the principles described in Recommendation 2, and raise the profile of sector endorsement and Foundation degree frameworks, as well as ensuring that sector bodies lead development for their sector.

Recommendation 4: Sector bodies should develop a communication initiative for the private, voluntary and independent sector on Foundation degrees so that these employers are better informed, and so that the development of Foundation degrees takes account of the reality of employment in these sectors.

Recommendation 5: Higher education institutions should be supported to build inter-disciplinary Foundation degree networks to break down internal barriers and take the lead in developing integrated approaches to working and learning.

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¹ www.fdf.ac.uk

² <http://www.dius.gov.uk/publications/leitch.html>

³ www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/pdf/IQF/Clear_Progression_2008.pdf

⁴ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/>

⁵ <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk>

⁶ <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/>

⁷ <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/>