PROGRESSION OR CUL DE SAC?

FROM FOUNDATION LEARNING TO THE STUDY PROGRAMME

A study of four organisations in the English Further Education Sector.

A Thesis submitted to the Institute of Education, University College London

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration

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ABSTRACT

Successive governments have raised concerns about the relatively low numbers of people who achieve qualifications at Level 2. In 2005, the New Labour government announced the intention to introduce a new programme, the Foundation Learning Tier, that would provide qualification progression routes from Entry Level to Level 2. The mechanism for this progression would be the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF)

The underpinning aim of this contemporaneous study is to explore the perceptions and understandings of managers and lecturers in the Further Education Sector of the change to Foundation Learning and its successor, the Study Programme. The key question to be explored is the extent to which these programmes facilitate progression to a Level 2 course.

A case study approach was selected, with four sub-cases: two General Further Education Colleges and two Independent Learning Providers. Managers and lecturers were interviewed, using a semi-structured approach, focusing on the structural and educational consequences of policy implementation.

The centralised national policies and performance measures were not sufficiently flexible to accommodate the diversity of the provision in the four sub-case organisations. The implementation of the Foundation Learning Programme resulted in increasing perceptual and structural hurdles to vertical progression. The pedagogical approaches in the curriculum design served to compound educational disadvantage and limit opportunity.

Without a paradigm shift in policy-making, encompassing a fundamental understanding of the purpose of education, and of the ways in which policy and pedagogy can combine to foster progress, the provision around level 1 for school leavers who under-achieve at school is unlikely to result in a reduction in the attainment gap.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	A Basis for Choice
AELP	Association of Education and Learning Providers
ALS	Additional Learning Support
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
ASB	Adult Skills Budget
AVCE	Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education
BEC	Business Education Council
BIS	Business, Innovation and skills
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
CPVE	Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department for Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DoE	Department of employment
E2E	Entry to Employment
EFA	Education Funding Authority
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FEU	Further Education Unit
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FES	Further Education Sector
GFE	General Further Education

GFL	General Foundation Learning
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualifications
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
IAG	Initial Advice and Guidance
ILP	Independent Learning Provider
ILR	Individualised Learner Record
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
LEA	Local Education Authority
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NPM	New Public Management
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofqual	The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PAs	Personal Advisers
PISA	Programme of International Student Assessment
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
QCA	Qualification and Curriculum Authority
QSRs	Qualification Success Rates
ROSLA	Raising of the School Leaving Age

RPA   Raising of the Participation Age

SEU   Social Exclusion Unit

SFA   Skills Funding Agency

TEC   Technician Education Council

TECs   Training and Enterprise Councils

TVEI   Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

UVP   Unified Vocational Preparation

YOPs   Youth Opportunities Programme

YPLA   Young People's Learning Agency

YTS   Youth training scheme

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INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH AIM

The Royal Commission on Secondary Education, 1895 (cited in Spens, 1938: 62)

> In every phase of secondary teaching, the first aim should be to educate the mind, and not merely to convey information. It is a fundamental fault, which pervades many parts of the secondary teaching now given in England, that the subject (literary, scientific or technical) is too often taught in such a manner that it has little or no educational value. The largest of the problems…is how to secure that in all schools, and in every branch of study the pupils shall be not only instructed, but educated.

From *Young Citizen* by A E Morgan (1943: 11)

> Education in the past has fallen short in two main respects. It has failed to recognise its responsibility to regard all the facets of human personality. The system has shown gaps and unbalanced emphasis at times and in different ways. Here one has found neglect of physical education; there the intellectual has been under-emphasised; the spiritual has bulked too small or too large; and in general there has been a tendency to forget the immense importance of training the emotional powers… The other main respect in which we have gone wrong is in laying undue stress on the personal advantage of education. The whole system and spirit of modern education has over-emphasised the necessity of getting on. Parents and children alike have regarded it as the means of climbing to or maintaining social and economic status. The whole system has depended on, and bred the competitive spirit. In a sense there is nothing wrong with that; but it is not enough. If life depends on participation in a common lot, the purpose of education must include training in the talent for co-operative citizenship… it is only in social co-operation that personality can flourish fully.

From *Half Our Future*, John Newsom (DES, 1963: 86)

> The experience of some of the most successful teachers confirms that boys and girls can enjoy intellectual effort and respond to aesthetic experiences, even though their own attainments, assessed in terms of basic skills, may be very modest. Adolescents, at any level of ability, are not indifferent to important aspects of human life and behaviour.

My interest in conducting this research developed from my experience in the Further Education Sector (FES) from the 1980s onwards. I started in the sector as an adult literacy volunteer, before becoming a county organiser for Adult Basic Education and a college lecturer in English and Communications. As a lecturer, I taught at all levels and on all types of courses, ranging from mature students GCE A Level to Communications for students with very high needs. My experience also included much curriculum development during the 1980s, when further education colleges opened up significant second chance opportunities for adults who had not succeeded at school. I was particularly involved in developing courses for students from the emerging social movements, including access provision, where the initial pedagogical approach drew on the work of Mezirow and Freire, and where European Social Funding encouraged innovation. I was also involved in provision for young school leavers, for whom the pedagogical climate was less expansive, where funding was less generous, and where, unlike second chance provision for adults, I found expectations to be low. As a senior lecturer I taught on the FE teacher training programmes and became an external assessor for FE teacher training in two universities. I was a college co-ordinator for equality of opportunity before being appointed vice principal for curriculum and quality, and then becoming a college Principal.

My perceptions of provision at Level 1 have been shaped by my experiences of working with cohorts of students on those courses, of managing the provision and, more recently, as an HMI with specialisms in English and in foundation provision. I select three specific experiences that have had a continuing impact on me and contribute to my decision to undertake research.

The first experience occurred in 1986, following the road shows by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) announcing the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes. A few months later I found six filing cabinets on the top floor of the college used for the NVQ in administration. One group of mature students muddled up the files, so that another could come and put the files in alphabetical order. They had to do this six times in order to complete their cumulative assessment record. Although the situation has improved, the

provenance of the competence-based approach as an educative medium continues to be contested.

The second experience occurred in 1991, with a group of students studying for the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE), who were offered the opportunity to take part in a City Council project, in conjunction with four other colleges in the conurbation. The students spent the academic year in a large shopping centre and worked in a retail outlet of their choice. Each store had a staff mentor, trained as part of the project, who supervised the students and their work. Each student also had a college tutor and an assessor for their NVQ in retail. Off-the job training took place in the shopping centre training room. The project was very successful, as all 25 students completed the programme and several were subsequently employed. What was remarkable about the project, was the way in which students were able to consolidate their skills over time, particularly their communication skills, and many effectively learnt the formal language needed in working with people. Most memorable was the response of the store mentors, who claimed that the experience had challenged their perceptions of young people, and that they would view them more positively in future.

The third experience arose from my teaching a group of school leavers, mostly male, who were re-taking English GCSE. Many had very low previous grades. I had been focusing on preparing assignments that seemed to me to be relevant, such as aspects of sport and pop music. However, the syllabus included the short stories of Katherine Mansfield. As a way of making sure the text had been fully covered, I read aloud the story *Miss Brill* to them. This story is about an elderly lady in the park, wearing a fox fur, who was mocked by a group of unthinking young people. The written work produced by those students showed significant understanding of the main themes. The experience confirmed for me what Newsom argued in *Half our Future* (DES, 1963): the imperative to recognise the capacity of all young people for insight and understanding, despite low formal achievements.

I am aware that none of these experiences is unique, and during my inspection visits I am constantly provided with examples of the ways in which second-chance

opportunities have transformed lives. Such experiences are often the main motivator for lecturers and managers. I cite these examples as clarification of my interest in carrying out this research into Foundation Learning.

My initial perception of the Foundation Learning programme was that the curriculum design was particularly bleak, with the three separate accredited strands, and no opportunity for work experience, and yet the programme was promoted as enabling progression to Level 2. My research aim as I embarked on the study was to explore practitioners' perceptions of the programme during implementation. At the time of my application in 2010, no research had been published about Foundation Learning, although the Evaluation of Foundation Learning (DfE, 2011c) and the *Wolf Report* (DfE, 2011a) were published in the second year of my study, and are referred to in my thesis.

The research aim is to compare the perspectives and experiences of four organisations in the further education sector as they implement the changes to Foundation Learning and The Study Programme. My thesis is concerned primarily with the provision and associated policies for the cohort of students who participate in educational programmes at Level 1 or Entry Level 3.

The study is organised around five chapters.

Chapter 1 reviews the historical background to the provision for school leavers who have underachieved at school. Referencing the literatures and theoretical perspectives associated with this cohort and the educational programmes, it presents the key research questions that are emerging at this stage.

Chapter 2 reviews in greater depth the generation and formation of the Foundation Learning and Study Programme, focusing in particular on the extent to which policy makers have learnt from previous policy failures.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and methods. The adoption of a case-study approach to the research is justified, as is the selection of the four organisations that form the sub-cases. The research is contemporaneous, conducted in three stages, capturing changing perceptions during implementation

of the policies. The chapter confirms the theoretical perspectives to be referenced in the analysis of the data: the concept of the *double shuffle* (Hall, 2005) guides the analysis of policy implementation. The analysis of the educational programme is referenced to the work of Bernstein (1990, 1999 and 2000) and the responses of the participants to curriculum change is conceptualised through the adoption of the mediation typology used by Higham (2003).

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data from the four sub-cases. Each sub-case is presented separately, allowing for a comparison of findings. The data in each case is presented first in respect of the perspectives of managers and then of lecturers as they enacted the Foundation Learning policy. This section is followed by the perspectives of the managers in the first few weeks of the change to the Study Programme. The chapter concludes with a comparative summary of the data from the four sub-cases, with an emphasis on the extent to which the declared aims of both programmes, to foster social mobility through vertical progression, were successful.

Chapter 5 reflects on the implications of the data, locating the findings within the current educational context. After reflecting on the wider implications of the data, the chapter concludes by arguing for a paradigmatic shift. For this shift to occur, I argue that the subordinate social democratic strand of the *double-shuffle* (ibid.) has to become the dominant strand so that the neoliberal strand, with the focus on performance measures, funding methodology and qualifications allows for a more expansive programme of learning and a policy that recognises the potential and diversity amongst school leavers who underachieve.

CHAPTER ONE: SCHOOL-LEAVERS WHO HAVE UNDER-ACHIEVED: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION SINCE 1944

Introduction

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the policy history that contributed to the formation of the Foundation Learning Programme. The chapter does not provide an overview of all aspects of the further education sector (FES), but highlights those aspects that had consequences for the provision for the cohorts of young school leavers, often from poor socio-economic backgrounds, who under-achieve at school, leaving with few or no formal qualifications. The collective term *under-achievers* is adopted rather than *low-achievers* because the latter term, which is commonly used, is determinist, implying an individual deficit. Although the term low-achievers may well describe the reality in relation to attainment, it does not necessarily reflect the reality in terms of individual ability and potential.

The chapter is divided into three major sections, which largely reflect significant policy shifts that shaped educational provision for school leavers who had underachieved in the post-compulsory education state. The period from 1944 to 1976 saw the establishment of a quasi-comprehensive system and marked the identification of themes that continued to resonate for the next forty years. The period from 1976 to 1997 was pivotal for the FES, leading to the incorporation of colleges and the emergence of a quasi-market. After much lively pedagogical debate, the settlement around provision for school leavers who had underachieved was largely established by the end of this period. The period from 1997 to 2010 was dominated by New Labour's continuation of what has been seen as a neoliberal approach to policy formation, combined with a meritocratic interpretation of social justice, in which credentialism came to be seen as the way of upskilling the workforce and fostering social mobility. I will argue that Foundation Learning, introduced in 2010, was an example of policy failure, paying scant heed to the lessons evident from previous failed educational policies, and from the findings of the research findings and key reports such as the Newsom Report (DES, 1963).

1944 – 1976: The rise and fall of the post-war consensus

From a tripartite to a partial comprehensive state school system

The 1944 Education Act was born out of a social democratic settlement between the war-time Coalition Government, the churches and the education service. It became increasingly clear that economic liberalism, despite its *invisible hand* (Smith, 1776), was not capable of resolving the social chaos resulting from industrialisation and unregulated capitalism, in a socio-economic context of expanding urban poverty, unemployment and illiteracy (Olssen at al, 2004). However, from the outset, this educational settlement was weak and founded on shaky ground, with philosophical and political contradictions at the heart of liberal thinking and understanding (Ball, 2008; Green, 1990). The structure of the sector effectively continued the reproduction of class divisions and 'cast a long and pernicious shadow over the education of the less privileged groups' (Tomlinson, 2005: 8). State schools from 1945 were little different from those that had developed before the war, with grammar schools, technical schools (only 53) and secondary modern schools, where almost four fifths of young people received their secondary schooling. Few left with any qualifications.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, four reports from the Ministry of Education highlighted the weaknesses of the tripartite system, identifying the parlous situation and lack of opportunities for those from lower socio-economic groups. *Early Leaving* (DES, 1954) highlighted the fact that a large majority of young people left school before taking any qualifications, particularly those from poorer households; the report advocated urgent raising of the leaving age. The Crowther Report (DES, 1959) highlighted the very low proportion of school leavers aged 15-18 who undertook further training, or became apprentices on leaving school, and recommended a continuing technical system alongside academic courses. The Beloe Report (1960) recommended the introduction of a leaving certificate for the 80 per cent of young people for whom GCE O level was perceived as too difficult.

John Newsom's report *Half Our Future* (DES, 1963) was particularly scathing about the poor quality of schooling and the high proportion of pupils who left school

without any qualifications. He found that 40 per cent of children in secondary modern schools were still being taught in overcrowded school buildings and 79 per cent of schools in slum areas were inadequate. The report found a link between class, immigration, poverty, the slums and the lowest levels of achievement, and identified *linguistic deficiency* as a common feature related to poor academic achievement. He recommended greater proportionate resourcing for slum areas, and warned against the determinist notions of *fixed intelligence* and the assumptions that basic skills are a proxy for overall ability (DES, 1963: 86):

> The experience of some of the most successful teachers confirms that boys and girls can enjoy intellectual effort and respond to aesthetic experiences, even though their own attainments, assessed in terms of basic skills, may be very modest. Adolescents, at any level of ability, are not indifferent to important aspects of human life and behaviour.

The Comprehensive School (Pedley, 1963) challenged the validity of IQ testing, noting its adverse impact on educational equality of opportunity. Young's dystopian volume, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958) warned of the adverse consequences of neglecting the significance of socio-economic factors when conflating merit solely with effort and achievement.

These publications contributed to the national debates that led to the introduction of comprehensive schools; a partial end to the tripartite system; the raising of the school leaving age (ROSLA) in 1972 as well as the introduction of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) in 1965, so that more young people who did not leave, could achieve qualifications.

In its manifesto in 1964, the Labour Party stated its commitment to end selection and, in the subsequent Circular 10/65, the Labour Government requested that local authorities submit plans for comprehensive schooling. However, implementation was weak (Ball, 2008; Chitty, 2009; Tomlinson, 2005), and these intentions were further attenuated when, in 1968, the Labour Party rejected the Public School Commission's recommendation that private schools be abolished, just as it had ignored that recommendation in the Fleming Report (1944) to the Board of

Education, that direct grant grammar schools become fully accessible to pupils irrespective of income. Despite Conservative Government legislation in 1970 and 1979 to prevent the end to selection, by the late 1970s, 80 per cent of children were educated in comprehensive schools, compared with 8.5 per cent in 1965 (Ball, 2008). Implementation was, nevertheless, piecemeal and it was not uncommon to find the selective system effectively retained through streaming, or even separate buildings (Chitty, 2009; Tomlinson, 2005).

The introduction of ROSLA in 1972 was seen as a progressive measure in social democratic terms, and, as with the change to comprehensive schooling, it took some time to reach final agreement. Woodin et al (2014) argued that critics saw the change as delaying adulthood, and were unclear whether the measure was a cost to the state, or a benefit. They further argued that, although designed to improve the opportunities for the poorest children, it had serious consequences for those families, because it meant another year without the possibility of income. The debate about the nature of the curriculum, often referencing the Newsom Report (op.cit.), was protracted, with suggestions including spending the year in a GFE college.

Post-compulsory provision and the establishment of a quasi-market

The 1944 Education Act required all local education authorities (LEAs) to provide further education (Green and Lucas (eds), 1999). They had statutory responsibilities for securing adequate facilities for full-time and part-time education for individuals over the compulsory school age, as well as adequate cultural and recreational leisure-time facilities for adults. LEAs were required to submit schemes for further education to the minister, and Circular 133 established a blueprint for implementation (Fieldhouse, 1994). Proposals included the establishment of 1200 County Colleges, and scholarships and grants for students who had left school at 15 to attend them up to 19.

Although the planned national expansion of Further Education colleges did not take place, at a local level, technical colleges, often former Mechanics Institutes, colleges of commerce or art, and technical schools, had gradually evolved as institutions

providing day release vocational education for people in employment. They offered both technical and commercial training, leading to well-established qualifications through City and Guilds and Royal Society of Arts (RSA). Although the numbers in technical training between 1959 and 1965 rose from 444,000 to 653,000, only a small proportion of 16-19 year olds participated (Green and Lucas (eds), 1999). The apprenticeship system was poorly regulated, and in decline, with very few school leavers participating (Unwin, 2006). The debate about the role and relative responsibility of employers in the training of young people, exercised successive governments at that time, and has never been satisfactorily resolved.

The Conservative Government introduced the Industrial Training Act (1964), which, for the first time brought together unions and employers in a social model partnership to form a Central Training Council. However, the Industrial Training Boards were unable to fulfil their expectations either in meeting the needs of industry, or in meeting the needs of young people in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs (Ainley, 2007; Unwin, 2006). Finegold and Soskice (1988) identified a broad consensus, by both the Labour and Conservatives Parties at this time, to leave training to industry.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, rates of unemployment were low and, as Ainley and Allen (2010) argued, the availability of entry level work, particularly in manufacturing, meant that many young people could leave school without qualifications, but with the expectation of early marriage and setting up home. By 1973 the oil crisis, and the decline in traditional industries providing entry-level manual jobs, led to unprecedented levels of unemployment among young people with few opportunities for training. The Conservative Government intervened with the Employment and Training Act (1973), which amended the Industrial Training Act (1964), and established the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) as a non-departmental public body of the Department of Employment (DoE). The Commission consisted of ten members drawn from industry, trades unions, local authorities and educational organisations, and had a specific remit to provide training courses for unemployed adults and young people.

The establishment of the MSC denoted a paradigm shift in the governance of the FES (Ainley, 2007; Chitty, 2009). It marked the start of a quasi-market in the training of young people for employment. For the first time, private training companies competed with colleges for DoE contracts to provide short training courses for unemployed young people. Funding became linked to employment outcomes, which represented a fundamental change in the funding of education and training courses, by incentivising successful outcomes, rather than funding by enrolments. The establishment of the MSC resulted in a bipartite system, whereby both the DoE and the Department of Education and Science (DES) funded programmes in the FES.

Equity and Attitudes

The social democratic settlement that informed the war-time coalition contained a number of elements: full employment, universal welfare provision and an education system committed to equality of opportunity. However, the understanding of equality of opportunity was based on a form of meritocracy, which sprang from elitism rather than redistribution. Gewirtz (1998) described this meritocratic understanding of distributive social justice as the weak liberal definition of justice as equality of opportunity, rather than the more radical strong liberal version of justice which advocates affirmative action or positive discrimination. In the Labour Cabinet of 1945 Fieldhouse (1994: 287) argued that:

> There was strong support for traditional elitism, and a majority did not believe that the education system was socially divisive. Greater equality of opportunity, which really meant equality of competition, rather than equality *per se*, was the goal.

He found that ministers in the 1945 Labour Administration were over-reliant on departmental advice, a suggestion echoed by Keep (2009) when he identified similar reliance, during New Labour's administration, on a civil service that had been long dominated by neoliberal ideas, and did not challenge the prevailing culture.

The initial tripartite secondary system was based on the Norwood Committee Report (1943) which asserted that there were three kinds of minds: academic,

technical and practical. This deterministic view of individual ability underpinned the tripartite system, limiting opportunity rather than contributing to a distributive form of justice. Alongside this partial understanding of equity, unhelpful, negative attitudes to the young people perceived as failing the school system are a constant feature of their history and the lexicon that surrounds them. The acronym NEETs, referring to young people not in education, employment or training, introduced in the 1970s, is based on what young people are *not*, subtly reinforcing negative views.

The Newsom Report (DES, 1963: para 50) recognised the ways in which the socio-economic context led to *linguistic deficiency,* that limited opportunities, but did not necessarily reflect ability. Bourdieu (1997) argued that cultural capital consisted of familiarity with the dominant culture and the ability to use educated middle class language. Lack of this cultural capital presented a barrier for pupils from poorer socio-economic groups, as he explained (ibid: 494):

> The educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture.

Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) adopted the term powerful term *symbolic violence* when analysing the way in which the education system in France, during the 1960s, legitimised middle class culture, particularly use of language, so that a student's lack of the appropriate formal language resulted in stigma and blame. In a context where opportunities appeared to be open to everyone, the failure to succeed came to be seen as the fault of the individual. Pupils were to blame for lack of talent, and parents for not providing the appropriate background. This resulted in a mismatch between the educational and cultural expectations of the school, and the background of the children and their parents.

In England, attitudes at work reinforced similar negative perceptions. Contemporaneous research shows that full employment in the 1950s and 1960s did not eradicate social differences or address low levels of attainment at school. In

her seminal study of youth work, *The Unattached* (1965), Mary Morse argued that the segregation of the labour market and the perceived threat of immigrant labour workers, confirmed a sense of alienation. She showed how, for many young people, the available jobs were often temporary, boring, repetitive and poorly paid, a situation very similar 40 years later to the large increase in low-level entry jobs in the service sectors. Morse described how, in one firm which employed a significant number of apprentices, the managers' positive approach to the apprentices, nearly all male, contributed to the continuing marginalisation of the young people who were not apprentices:

> The apprentices were treated as if they were still capable of learning and allowed to establish their own youthful identity within the firm. The non-apprentices on the other hand, apart from not having so many amenities and concessions, were merged into the mass of adult labour force and had little opportunity to establish a separate identity. (ibid, 1965: 22)

The policy context of this period effectively rehearsed aspects of the agenda for post-compulsory education for the next 40 years: the link between poverty and educational outcomes; deterministic assumptions about young people's types of minds and abilities and suitable educational 'tracks'; growing youth unemployment resulting from a rapidly changing labour market; the tenuous relationship between employers and industrial training; the stubbornly low numbers of apprenticeships available for 16-17 year olds; the introduction of a quasi-market into the post-compulsory sector; and blinkered understandings of equity as well as negative assumptions about young school leavers who had underachieved.

1976-1997: The start of a neoliberal consensus and the emergence of the new vocationalism

The Great Debate

The year 1976 is cited in the literatures as marking an epochal change in educational policy (Ainley, 2007; Ball, 2008; Chitty, 2009; Payne, 2000; Tomlinson, 2005). Researchers argued that James Callaghan's speech at Ruskin College in 1976 was the genesis of the economic, neoliberal approach to education (described more

fully below). This speech built on the process that had already started following the establishment of the MSC, as well as rehearsing the much-publicised debates about education that had been a feature of the 1960s. These debates had been presented in the media from the late sixties in the Black Papers (Cox and Dyson, 1969), as a struggle for dominance between *progressive* child-centred pedagogies and *traditional* formal approaches, as right wing policy groups and academics revisited deterministic assumptions of intelligence, and championed streaming and proposed testing from the age of seven (Cox and Boyson, 1977).

Callaghan's speech was framed in the context of the economic reality of an oil crisis and the dramatic decline of traditional heavy manufacturing industries. Schools and colleges were described as failing to prepare young people for the world of work. The speech signified the start of what was known as the Great Debate in education, and focused on the curriculum, assessment and standards, education and training of teachers and school and, critically, working life. Callaghan questioned the autonomy of teachers in the determination of the curriculum, suggesting a core curriculum, and marking the eventual death knell of the *secret garden* of the curriculum, whereby teachers in schools had significant flexibility over content and pedagogic approaches (Lawton, 1980). The outcome of these debates and policy change ruptured the previous liberal humanist and social democratic consensus about the purpose of education, introducing the term *new vocationalism* into the lexicon in further education and training, and marking the formal establishment of a *utilitarian* view of education (Lumby and Foskett, in Raffe and Spours (eds) (2007).

The policies rigorously pursued by the Conservative governments, following the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, ushered in the new orthodoxy of the New Right, known as neoliberalism. Core to the Conservative government's agenda was the reform of the public sector through the introduction of business models of governance and management, known as New Public Management (NPM) (Newman, 2001). NPM was based on a combination of liberal economic ideas, with a focus on competition, free markets, rolling back the power of the state and tight control of public spending, and the Conservative New Right's focus on nationhood

and family values (Olssen et al., 2004 and Chitty, 2009). By 1997, neoliberalism had become the new settlement, with competition, consumerism and performativity at its centre.

The drivers for change to meet the requirements of an increasingly globalised economy became entwined in the FES with the darker economic purpose of increased competition between education and training organisations known as 'providers', and increased efficiencies through the measurement of performance targets. The seismic structural shift in the governance of the FES, from a localised to a centrally funded quasi-market, was finally completed in 1993. The demise of the MSC and the establishment in 1988 of 72 local Training Enterprise Councils (TECs) to fund private employment training courses, was followed four years later by the FE and HE Act (1992), under which, in 1993, FE colleges became incorporated, funded centrally via the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Links with the LEAs were severed, marking the end of local accountability and representation, as colleges entered a competitive local market. These reforms were presented in the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (DES/DoE, 1991) as giving managers and organisations greater freedom in operational decisions.   But this was, as Ball (2003) points out, an example of *misrecognition*, for the processes were not of deregulation, but of reregulation as education policy became increasingly bureaucratic and centralised at the same time as competition was encouraged locally.

The rise of the 14-19 agenda

The opportunity to establish a fully tertiary national system post-16, proposed in the Macfarlane Report (1979), was not taken by the Labour Government at the end of its administration (Green and Lucas (eds.), 1999).   The increasing focus on preparing young people for the labour market resulted in the start of a new agenda, arguing for a 14-19 vocational pathway. Chitty (2009) referred to the Yellow Book, a briefing prepared for Callaghan in preparation for his Ruskin speech, which identified the need to include vocational elements in the school curriculum for pupils who combined practical interests with average or below average ability. This confirmed an elitist perception that has bedevilled vocational education in England:

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the vocational route continues to be perceived as appropriate for those of lesser ability than those following the academic route.

The Conservative Modernisers, such as Lord Young, who wanted to reform the curriculum in schools to reflect the requirements of the labour market, saw the academic elite as damaging to the skills needs of the country (Chitty, 2009). Lord Young wanted secondary schools to prepare young people more effectively for the labour market. The resulting Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), piloted by the MSC in 1983, and extended to all LEAs in 1987, was unique in its aims to provide a vocational pathway from 14 years of age, which required collaboration between GFE colleges and LEAs. However, it also pre-figured a centralised approach to provision, rupturing what had been a consensus about the autonomy and professionalism of teachers and localism (Hodgson and Spours, 2008). In so doing it exemplified well the policy tensions of the period: tensions that that have never been satisfactorily resolved.

The focus on the 14-19 cohort grew in significance, from the 1990s, with the debate focusing in part on a unified or a segregated curriculum (Chitty, 2009; Hodgson and Spours, 2008) and the extent to which the curriculum offer should embrace academic and general education subjects, as well as vocational elements, through the establishment of a *British Baccalaureate* (Finegold et al., 1990). The national policy context was ambiguous. Despite the TVEI initiative, the Conservative Party's White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (DES/DoE, 1991) confirmed tripartism, reproducing the segregated provision that had characterised the school system in the 1950s and 1960s. It did not promote a common 14-19 approach and instead consolidated three distinct 'tracks' as routes to qualifications, with different forms of assessment, GCE A levels, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). This confirmed the notion of three types of students: academic, vocational and occupational/practical. Furthermore, structurally, the introduction of the National Curriculum in schools, from 1988, plus the incorporation of colleges, from 1993, confirmed a separation between schools and post-compulsory provision that further attenuated the concept of a 14-19 sector of education.

The debate continued, nevertheless. The ensuing policy contradictions and competing agendas surrounding the recognition of a distinct 14-19 cohort were exemplified by publication in the year before the general election, of the *Dearing Report* (1996) on qualifications for 16-19 year olds, and the Conservative White Paper *Learning to Compete: Education and Training for 14-19 Year Olds* (DfEE, 1996). The former confirmed three 'tracks' from the age of 16 and introduced the notion of an Entry Level. The latter was the first White Paper to recognise 14-19 as a possible discrete category, with continuity between pre- and post-16 pathways and the suggestion of an overarching award. However, it was mainly the recommendations from the Dearing Report that prevailed, confirming a divide at 16 years.

The growth of the vocational curriculum and the birth of NVQs

Profound curricular and pedagogical change in the FES paralleled the structural changes in its governance. Against a background of post-Fordism, a new lexicon emerged in policy documents. With the promise of a modernised *knowledge* economy, in the context of a perceived *low skills equilibrium,* the need for a *flexible workforce*, and for *lifelong up-skilling* emerged as the new policy orthodoxies for post-compulsory education and training. Despite significant contrary evidence (Ainley, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2006; Keep 2009; Lawy, 2010; Unwin, 2006; Yeomans, 1998; Young, 2005), Britain's industrial advance was seen to be held back by a *skills shortage,* out of which sprang the notion of the *skills gap,* which could best be filled by training courses to develop the *competences* required for the current available jobs.

From the 1970s, FE colleges increased their vocational provision significantly, particularly at Level 2 and above, as City and Guilds and, from 1974, Business Education Council (BEC) and Technician Education Council (TEC) courses expanded into new occupational areas. Students could undertake vocational courses in an unprecedented number of occupational areas, assessed either by externally set examinations or, in the case of BEC, through locally marked and externally moderated assignments. The approach taken by BEC was pedagogically innovative (Bailey and Unwin, 2008) with cross-modular assignments and formative

assessment, but it also aligned itself with the MSC by focusing strongly on the *core skills* required for the workplace.

The TEC introduced policies that resulted in far-reaching pedagogical change, by requiring the units to be written in the form of *learning objectives*, and assessment to be based on the extent to which *prescribed outcomes* were achieved. Bailey and Unwin (2008) argued that many of those opposed to the changes voiced strong reservations because of the failure of the *learning outcomes* approach to allow for development and independent thought, which had been key tenets of the general studies elements of vocational courses. Despite these reservations, the focus on outcomes prevailed, pre-figuring the competence-based approach to assessment, and the future of vocational training. The day-release model gradually declined, as did the requirement for a general studies component, which by the mid-1980s disappeared altogether, to be replaced by *core skills*, which were to become examined separately, as pre-determined competences relating to the workplace.

Following a *Review of Vocational Qualifications* (DES, 1986), the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established to rationalise the rapidly increasing numbers of vocational qualifications, and to develop a national qualifications framework (NQF). The NVQ approach built on the work of the TEC in developing prescribed learning objectives for its units. NVQs were initially intended to accredit what people actually did in the workplace, by identifying occupational competences, and were not designed to capture potential or development. However, the NVQ approach was adopted for courses where students had no direct involvement in the workplace. As Wolf (1995: 3) argued: 'Britain became the first country to introduce a competence-based assessment as the sole and mandatory method for a large section of its education and training system'. This approach to training and assessment has come to dominate vocational provision, and subjects such as personal effectiveness. It was the NVQ approach that formed the basis of the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF), developed by 2008.

The early advocates for the pedagogy of NVQs argued that the approach was progressive, because the locus of control was with the learner rather than the

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teacher, the individual being seen as an autonomous learner. Jessup (1991: 4) argued that: 'If anyone can exercise control over the process of learning, it is the individual. It is only the learner who can make sense of the inputs he or she receives.' The initiative made possible the accreditation of prior learning (APL) whereby individuals could produce evidence that they already met the required competences: this was particularly relevant for adults in the workplace, and in this sense enabled them to identify which units they needed to complete.

Ironically, Jessup's use of the lexicon of *autonomy* and *individual* resonated with the practices that were seen as progressive in education, such as student-centred learning or independent learning, which dominated access modes of learning, based on developmental or transformational pedagogical approaches. However, this lexicon of individualism, central to neoliberal approaches, was used in the promotion of NVQs to promulgate a behaviourist, not a developmental approach to learning (Ecclestone, 2002; Hyland, 1994; Wolf, 1995; Yeomans, 1998; Young, in Burke (ed.), 1995). Steedman and Hawkins (1994) argued that the introduction of the NVQ in bricklaying had actually reduced the generic competence of trainees, because they had only been taught to perform certain narrowly specified tasks, without proper grounding in the core knowledge and skills that underpin these.

The competence-based approach was quickly adopted for classroom-based NVQs, despite being contested by researchers. For the next decade much educational discourse focused on the significance of testing and assessment. Sadler (1987: 192) noted that the competence-based approach led to the temptation to use a narrow evidence base: 'A preoccupation with objective testing encourages the substitution of surrogate or indirect measures for the real thing.' Hyland (1996) identified the difficulty in meeting the requirement that occupational competence had to be demonstrated in context. In looking at the application of competence-based approaches to the professions and its pedagogic shortcomings, Gonczi (1994: 34) noted the approach was 'not concerned with the connections between the tasks and ignores the possibility that the coming together of tasks could lead to their transformation…the whole is not greater than the sum of the parts.' He noted further that the narrower the evidence base, the less it could be generalised to the

performance of other tasks. Contesting the effectiveness of an approach which segmented learning, Young (Young in Burke (ed.), 1995: 178*)* argued that 'modularisation and learning outcomes approaches to curriculum content are not an adequate basis on their own, for an alternative to the existing organisation of educational knowledge'. The *Beaumont Review of 100 NVQs and SVQs* (1995), found significant weaknesses in NVQs, as preparation for employment.

More recent literatures have continued to argue that NVQs do not promote meaningful learning. Torrance et al. (2005) argued that the practice of assessment had moved from assessment *of* learning, through assessment *for* learning, to assessment *as* learning, with assessment procedures and practices dominating the learning experience, and *criteria compliance* replacing learning.   Far from promoting an orientation towards student autonomy, he argued that the techniques helped to produce students who were *more* dependent on their tutors and assessors rather than less dependent. Recognising that assessment modes did not have to be behaviourist, Ecclestone (2007: 18) argued that:

> Assessment regimes can privilege broad or narrow learning outcomes, external, introjected, identified, intrinsic or interested motivation, procedural or critical autonomy. They can also reinforce old learning identities or encourage new ones, and offer comfortable, familiar approaches or risky, challenging ones. However, socio-political concerns about disengagement from formal education amongst particular groups have institutionalized formative assessment practices that raise achievement rather than develop deep engagement with subject knowledge and skills.

Wheelahan (2007: 648), argued, adopting Bernstein's terminology (op.cit.), that the competence-based approach

> fundamentally transforms the nature of knowledge by delocating it from the vertical discourse ... and relocating it closer to horizontal discourse. This denies students access to the systems of meaning present in vertical discourse and makes it difficult for them to select relevant knowledge in unfamiliar contexts or to engage in the critical enquiry.

Despite these reservations, the competence-based approach became the main way of accrediting work-based learning qualifications at Level 1. As Ainley (2007) and Pring (2009) argued, because of their unitised approach, NVQs could be readily used to measure performance, a key plank of the neoliberal approach. Counting units of completion became the mechanism for determining successful achievement, and continue to do so, despite concerns articulated at government level: the House of Commons Select Committee Report *From Baker to Balls,* HC 422 (2010) highlighted the negative consequences of *teaching to the test* as a consequence of an outcomes-based approach to assessment.

Employment Training for young people

At the same time that vocational courses in colleges were being developed, the employment training programmes centrally funded by the DoE were reaching an increasing number of unemployed young people. In the late 1970s, the *Holland Report* (1977) commissioned by the newly established MSC, proposed a training scheme for young people with low qualifications who were the most vulnerable to unemployment, and recommended that work experience and work preparation, as well as basic skills be included as part of the programme. The Youth Opportunities Programme (YOPs) launched in 1978, was seen initially by Raffe (1981) as innovative. By 1982, half a million school leavers had signed up for it. However, the programme floundered because the funding was very short-term, and it did not lead to employment, becoming described as training without jobs (Finn, 1987; Ainley and Allen, 2007). The MSCs *New Training Initiative* (1981) signalled the replacement of YOPs with the introduction of the similarly much discredited Youth Training Scheme (YTS), which attempted to involve employers in short-term training programmes. But this also led to few sustainable jobs and was perceived as providing cheap labour for employers (Chitty, 2009; Hall, 1994). Payne (2000) cites Gleeson (1990) who found that following YTS, *skill* had become so watered down that personal-effectiveness training for disadvantaged youth did not offer either marketable skills, or a general education in citizenship. It could not offer a critical insight into the world of work, economy, policy and society. By 1988, the local TECs had taken over responsibility for the national employment training programmes.

The changing nature of general education programmes

In the mid-1970s, the DES established the Further Education Unit (FEU) and encouraged the development of general education provision for school leavers who had underachieved, by offering an alternative to the privatised employment training programmes. Spours *et al.* (2009), argued that the general education programmes at pre-GCSE level advocated by the FEU, starting with A Basis for Choice (ABC), were pioneering because they established the principles of a pre-vocational education based on occupational interests, that would prepare students for choosing a career path. This, and subsequent programmes, also introduced the newly emerging notions of *skills,* including *employability,* for the 40 per cent of young people who had failed to achieve any useful qualifications at school. Referred to as the *new vocationalism,* and purporting to adopt progressive student-centred approaches, Bates et al. (1998), argued that, although these programmes focused on general skills for employment rather than subject or vocational specialism, they nevertheless reinforced the academic and vocational divide. ABC, Unified Vocational Preparation (UVP), City and Guilds 365 and the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE), all had at their core the need to prepare young people for working life when jobs were becoming scarce. All encouraged cross-disciplinary opportunities, purported to focus on student needs and used formative assessment approaches alongside competence-based assessment approaches. ABC in particular had a stated initial aim to retain a general education element in the programme.

However, radical critics saw these new vocationalist courses, with the emphasis on core skills, as socialising young people to accept unemployment, and of falsely conflating the needs of industry with the needs of the students (Ainley, 2007; Avis, 1983; James and Biesta, 2007). The programmes at Level 1 were all based on similar notions of developing skills, conceptualised remedially as individual deficits that needed to be rectified, rather than a focus on developing capabilities. Like the work-based programmes, discussed above, qualifications came to be seen as essential, and, increasingly, became a proxy for learning (Ainley, 2007; Pring, 2009).

Although intended as a vocational preparation programme up to Level 3, CPVE became seen as a course for the less able students, including students with learning difficulties, which effectively undermined its value. Colleges increasingly came to be seen as the places that would take these less able students (Hall, 1994). This complex perceptual conundrum, whereby inclusive practice encountered discriminatory perceptions from stakeholders continues as a shadowy sub-text in the provision below Level 2. The vocational courses, the academic courses and the Government's employment training schemes were often located in different college departments, and effectively colleges reproduced the three tracks of practical, vocational and academic provision (Green, 1999; Hall, 1994), with Level 1 seen as pre-vocational.

GNVQ was introduced ten years after TVEI. The programme was designed for the middle track of general qualifications, rather than as an occupational qualification, and was offered from Levels 1-3. The tensions between outcomes-based assessment and progressive approaches became evident early on. Yeomans (1998), argued that the model had significant technical difficulties and that the attempt to assess everything through an outcomes-based approach was an example of *historical amnesia*, ignoring the evidence. Bates et al. (1998) argued that in the GNVQ programme, despite progressive claims of negotiation, the students had little formal influence over the selection of knowledge, or very much opportunity for genuine negotiation because of the prescriptive assessment model. The course had little purchase at Level 1, and with the demise from 1998 of TVEI and CPVE, no middle-track course was available at that level.

An enduring legacy from the curricular debates of the 1980s and the 1990s was the notion of a common set of *core skills* to apply to all vocational courses, designed to offset the perceived narrowness of NVQs and to increase economic competitiveness. The NCVQ identified six core skills: communication, application of number, information and communication technology (ICT), working with others, improving performance and problem solving. As Hodgson and Spours (2002) argued, core skills were initially developed as a form of remediation for those who did not have the skills, qualifications or experience to enter the labour market or

undertake a Level 2 course. However, they were also to be adopted at Level 3 as a way of establishing vocational and academic equivalence. Following the *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds* (Dearing, 1996), three core skills, communication, application of number and ICT, (later to become Key Skills), were introduced into A Level as Curriculum 2000. As with GNVQ and the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE), the attempt to assess the core skills as separate, segmented strands was found problematic and subsequently abandoned.

Examining bodies gradually severed connections with universities and became Awarding Bodies. They increasingly adopted an outcomes-based approach to their courses, and teachers were required to train students to meet prescribed standards (James and Biesta, 2007). When from the late 1980s, assessment came to dominate the curriculum, the question became not what or how students learnt, but about what could be reliably and validly measured. As Higham and Yeomans (2011: 6) argued: 'a significant consequence of the economising of 14-19 policy has been an emaciated curriculum debate in which cultural, social, political and personal curricular aims have been neglected'.

From the late 1990, the three different kinds of programmes discussed above, and generated from different standpoints, arrived at a common policy settlement about the type of provision that was appropriate for young people who had under-achieved at school. This settlement was to remain unchallenged for the succeeding decades. Provision at Level 1 came to mean a programme based on three separate curricular strands: basic skills, personal and social development (PSD) and a pre-vocational course or taster. This segmentation continued despite the fact that this approach had been problematized, short-lived and found unsatisfactory at higher levels.

Essentially, by the late 1990s, the settlement around provision below Level 2 promoted the type of pedagogical approach and curriculum model that Bernstein (1990, 1999 and 2000) argued could compound educational disadvantage. He found that the concepts of everyday life and the mundane were enshrined in the concrete assumptions to be found in practical and low level vocational courses. By

contrast, the esoteric language and specialist language assumptions found in academic courses open up wider opportunities for reflective thinking and higher level skills: 'The distinction between esoteric and mundane knowledge is the means through which society navigates between the concerns of everyday life (the mundane) and a transcendental realm' (Bernstein, 2000:29). He argued that *restrictive codes* were enshrined in lower level practical courses, whereas *elaborated codes* characterised academic courses. His elaboration of the difference between the *formal* language of academic study and *public language,* are helpful in our understanding of the stratification of achievement. His concepts of a *vertical discourse*, where *elaborated codes* are used, and *a horizontal discourse* where *restrictive codes* are used, are helpful in exploring the nature of the programmes on level 1 provision, compared with academic subjects and higher levels. As Thompson (2009) and Wheelahan (2007) argued, the competence-based assessment model used in NVQs exemplifies a *horizontal discourse* rather than a *vertical discourse* and does not encourage transferability to other contexts. This had profound implications for the Foundation Learning Programme design, which is discussed further in Chapter Two.

Equity and attitudes

Despite overt negativity from Margaret Thatcher and John Major to issues of equality (Gillborn, 1999; Tomlinson, 2008), this was an eventful period for formal equality of opportunity policy, helped by LAs such as the Inner London Education Authority, and committed individuals. By 1988, two-thirds of LAs had developed equality of opportunities policies. By the late 1990s, girls in school continued a clear trajectory, starting in the 1950s, first matching and then out-performing boys in public examinations and in participation in Higher Education, though like students of minority heritage, few were to be found in Red Brick universities (Arnott et al., 1999; Tomlinson, 2008). However, these gains were not reflected in the progress of students who under-achieved: gains made in schools were mainly made by middle-class children and the success did not trickle down to poorer communities (Ball, 2008; Chitty, 2009; Pring, 2009; Tomlinson, 2005).

In the FES in the 1980s colleges developed equalities policies with guidance from the FEU. The provision expanded with second chance courses for adults in work-related provision and in general education. Funding from the European Social Fund enabled affirmative action to be taken. Black access courses were followed by women-only access courses, using progressive methods that tailored the provision specifically to meet requirements of women returners (Coats, 1994). However, targeted equalities funding was mostly aimed at adults at Level 2 and above, not young people at Level 1. A significant gain for students from disadvantaged backgrounds was achieved when the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 placed responsibility for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on the FEFC. The John Tomlinson Report, *Inclusive Learning* (FEFC, 1996), confirmed a commitment to the social model of disability, providing a clear steer for colleges in planning and delivering additional learning support (ALS), based on an assessment of individual need.

Formal equalities legislation from the 1970s stemmed from a form of liberalism which aimed to protect individuals with specific characteristics: it did not claim to rectify the disadvantage of other cohorts. Class was not a specific characteristic. Contemporaneous studies show an increasing discourse about young people who were perceived as an *underclass*. Neoliberal commentators such as Charles Murray, (1994), and cited by Tomlinson, (2008), used this discourse as a way of establishing that responsibility lay with the individual rather than structures of class or social stratification, in a culture where unemployment, crime and illegitimacy were accompanied by comfortable benefits. MacDonald (1997), in a study of young school-leavers between 1989 and 1994, contested the term underclass and argued that, although the demographic matched that of Murray's *underclass,* young people did want to work:

> They were extraordinarily dogged and enterprising in their search for work amidst the economic wreckage of their local labour market. They remained attached to remarkably durable, mainstream attitudes which valued work as the key source of self-respect, as the principal identifier of personal identity. (ibid: 195)

MacDonald concluded that rather than being an underclass, many of these young people were socially excluded and denied opportunities to participate. Hodgson, in Hayton, ed. (1999) identified that the term *social inclusion* was increasingly used in policy discourse, alongside terms such as *disaffected* and *non-participating*, describing the growth in the numbers of young people who were in various ways marginalised. Hatcher in Sikes and Vincent (1998), and Leney in Hayton et al., (1999) argued that the focus on projects, such as specific improvement programmes, rather than a focus on structural disadvantage, was one of the reasons that New Labour's social justice policies did not impact on those most in need.

The formal equalities policies in education said little about under-achievers: their effectiveness was seen in the extent to which people from one of the minorities climbed the ladder, and little was known about the invisible cohort at Level 1, often from poor socio-economic backgrounds, that did not have a social movement to advocate on their behalf. Despite the raft of new training programmes, Pierce and Hillman (1998) found that, in 1997, around eight per cent of school leavers were non-participants, but even when they did participate, they failed to achieve a Level 2 qualification. They found that success in GCSE was the greatest predictor of success, but few school leavers achieved this level.

The further education policy landscape was markedly different from the period from 1944-1976, with significant expansion of the FES, including second chance opportunities for adults who had previously left school as underachievers. However, the possibility of meaningful opportunities for students around Level 1 was becoming a chimera: the promise of a flexible 14-19 route withered away with the incorporation of colleges and the development of the National Curriculum. The new vocationalism, despite promising progressivism and alternative forms of assessment, finally converged with the general education programmes and the employment training programmes, resulting in a settlement of three separate strands of provision, with a narrow, competence-based assessment approach for the vocational and PSD strands. Equalities policy did not focus on discrimination on

the basis of class or socio-economic factors, so the cohorts of young people from impoverished backgrounds did not have a voice.

1997-2010: The New Labour Government and the Third Way

The double-shuffle

Essentially, the die had been cast by 1997 for the FES, and for the Level 1 provision. The hollowing out of the welfare state, which had started in earnest in Margaret Thatcher's government, continued unabated. Two key policy narratives under New Labour are identified by Keep (in Hodgson et al. 2011) as central to the Third Way. Firstly, that globalisation is an unstoppable competitive force, resulting in a reactive focus on training and skills development, and secondly, that the use of international benchmarks and de-regulated flexible markets were the best way to achieve economic success. The first of these narratives constituted a reinforcement and continuation of the adaptive neoliberal approach of the previous administration, but the international comparisons, using data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) became increasingly important for successive New Labour administrations, justifying in particular the emphasis on education, qualifications and credentialism as the solutions to economic challenges.

Writing about New Labour's Third Way, Hall (2005) conceptualised these narratives as a *double-shuffle*. He argued that the Third Way promulgated a duality of policy narratives, whereby, what he described as the neoliberal strand of policy, with a focus on national audits, centralised performativity measures and competition, dominated the sub-ordinate social democratic strand, which purported to promote social justice. In this way, New Labour policy-makers attempted to maintain traditional working class and public sector middle class support, while at the same time implementing neoliberal measures. Hall described how, in a process of slow but sure *transformism*, New Labour's social democratic policies always remained subordinate to, and dependent upon, the dominant neoliberal policies and were constantly being reformed into it. Thus earlier policy commitment to equality and collective social action was replaced by reform, fairness and choice, which, despite

the rhetoric, in fact resulted in increased inequality and social exclusion (Green, 2006)

Newman (2001) argued that through its model of *adaptive* neoliberalism, New Labour chose to use taxation, not for re-distribution of educational resources to counteract disadvantage, but to focus on improving the ladder of opportunity. This approach advantaged those with educational, cultural and social capital, at the expense of those from impoverished backgrounds. The approach also represented a perverse understanding of the political philosophy of Rawls (1999), who, in his work on social justice in public policy, advocated that national policies should disadvantage the disadvantaged least, not enable the most privileged to become even more advantaged.

Hall (op.cit.) argued that an essential feature of New Labour's project, its *transformism,* was to change the *habitus* of the public sector, by changing their behaviour, not necessarily their minds. It focused on making into a new kind of *common sense*, those habits and practices required by the free market, whereby the role of the state is not to support the less fortunate or less powerful, but to help individuals themselves to provide for their own social and educational needs. Those who cannot are to be targeted and means-tested. Both Newman (ibid.) and Hall (ibid.) identified how, during the process of modernisation, people working in the public sector themselves became the object, not the subject of NPM and were conceptualised as part of the problem.

The neoliberal discourse and the Third Way

Coffield et al. (2008) highlighted New Labour's economic focus as, increasingly, education policy drew on theories relating to human capital and the labour market. Olssen et al. (2004), argued that the post-compulsory educational policy emphasised investment as a private, rather than a public good, because of the emphasis on the individual, rather than the state. This economic emphasis, whereby responsibility for social mobility was transferred from state to individuals and families was clearly articulated in New Labour's Green Paper, *The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain* (DfEE, 1998: 1):

> Learning is the key to prosperity: for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century.

The Green Paper formally introduced concepts of lifelong learning, the learning age, and the constant upskilling of the labour force, 'in order to transform Britain from a low-skill, low-wage economy into a high-skill, high-wage and technically advanced economy' (Chitty, 2009: 225). The early, swift attempts to encourage greater individual responsibility through the introduction of Individual Learning Accounts floundered by 2001, in a climate of fraud, (Chitty, 2009), but the shift from state to individual responsibility, so that individuals funded their own training, subsequently became established with the introduction of student loans.

During New Labour's second term, the Leitch Report (2006) stressed an economic link between the labour market, qualifications and economic benefit, which continued to dominate vocational policy, despite being roundly contested by economists Wolf (2002 and 2006) and Jenkins et al. (2006). The Leitch Report recommended a fully demand-led approach, with an end to the supply-side planning of provision, without, apparently, any recognition of the continuing irony that employers had little substantial involvement with vocational qualifications. The New Labour Government made explicit use of the disappointing international comparisons from the OECD, in order to exhort education and training organisations to perform better through increasing qualification success. Higham

and Yeomans (2011: 6) noted the effective 'underplaying of the realities of their lives, aspirations and motivations,' as the human capital emphasis tended to construct 14-19-year-olds as rationalistic, economic individuals.

A particularly problematic aspect of New Labour's Third Way was the conflation of qualification and educational achievement. Tony Blair's much quoted mantra *education, education, education* came to mean *qualification, qualification, qualification*, further confirming the settlement of an economic, rather than an educational purpose for the FES. The conflation of qualification with attitudes, skill and knowledge and understanding reached its apotheosis in 2010 when Qualification Success Rates (QSRs) became both performance indicators and the main basis of funding. This was arguably made possible by the pedagogical settlement of competence-based assessment for vocational subjects in which, as Stanton (2008) argued, assessment is *of learning* rather than a formative tool *for learning*, and that in order to make vocational qualifications acceptable, the artificial notion of levels of equivalence came to distort the basis of the vocational content. The perception that qualifications equalled achievement was structurally embedded by the adoption of a qualifications framework, in which levels of vocational qualifications were considered equivalent to academic qualifications. Higham and Yeomans (2011) argued that a key feature of the period was the ever-tightening bond between curriculum and qualifications. Isaacs (2013) makes reference to the conundrum that bedevils vocationally-related provision for young people in the UK:

> the assumption that vocational education motivates the less able and the disengaged, coupled with the insistence that vocational education must allow learners to progress to the most selective programmes on offer in higher education (ibid : 279).

These contradictions have never been satisfactorily resolved since they contributed to the negativity about CPVE in the 1980s (Hall, 1994).

Staff responses to centralised curriculum change: mediation

The performance management culture that was implemented as part of NPM, (Newman, op.cit.), and continues to dominate the sector, significantly impacted on FE staff, challenging their professional autonomy. In a period of relentless reductions in funding, known euphemistically as *efficiencies*, within a target-driven culture, managers and lecturers had to respond to constantly changing policy levers, in particular the meeting of annual performance targets. Those lecturers and managers who had worked in the sector since the 1980s have seen their professional autonomy significantly eroded. Despite the findings of the Foster Review (2005) confirming the negative impact on college staff of the burden of bureaucracy, provision continued to centralised, and by 2010, demand-led funding, with a sole focus on accreditation success for measurement of performance, dominated provision for 16-19 year olds.

Avis (2009a); Bathmaker (2005); Briggs (2005); Coffield et al. (2008); Hall (2005); Higham (2003); Hoyle and Wallace (2005); Shain and Gleeson (1999); Pring et al*.* (2009); Spours et al. (2007) and Wheelahan (2007 and 2010), all argued that, despite the negative impacts of performativity measures and multiple curriculum changes, many members of staff continued to preserve some sense of professionalism through their commitment to individual students and to second chance education. They maintained their sense of professionalism by finding ways to adapt, translate or mediate and to be creative in meeting policy lever and performativity requirements, while at the same time striving to meet the needs of students. This essentially pragmatic response was noted even during the periods in the 1990s when changes to staff terms and conditions following incorporation, led to political unrest and resistance.

Soon after the incorporation of FE colleges, Hyland (1996) found that the change to a competence-based curriculum resulted in de-professionalisation of teachers, who were expected to *deliver* a curriculum in which the outcomes were prescribed, rather than to *teach* students. Esland (1996) categorised lecturers as *embracers, dissenters or pragmatists* as they responded to the changes. Similarly, Shain and

Gleeson (1999) conceptualised lecturers' as those of *rejection and resistance*, and as *compliance* or *strategic compliance*, played out in the form of struggles between managers and lecturers, over issues such as terms and conditions.

Since 2003 the literatures have focused strongly on staff agency and identity, rather than on resistance to conditions of service, as the reformed landscape became *transformed* with a reluctant settlement around staff conditions and performance (Hall, op.cit.). Hoyle and Wallace (2005) found managerialism a mass distraction, and they used the term *mediation* to describe ways in which staff made adaptations to accord with their own professional values, a kind of *principled infidelity*, so that they gave priority to the interests of staff and pupils over those of policy makers. Gleeson and Knight (2006) explored the dualism between structure and agency. They found many examples of creative mediation, but also showed how externally imposed structural changes to programmes and expectations could restrict opportunities for such activity. They raised issues of agency, structure and power, by arguing that professionals had a significant ethical role to play in mediating public policy, and through this mediation, were more likely to find their authority and legitimacy. Coffield et al. (2008:152) argued that:

> strategic compliance has developed over time, so that the emphasis became less of a struggle between tutors and managers, and more of a struggle between institutions and the system of accountability and changing political priorities.

In exploring staff responses to implementing curriculum change, in this case, GNVQ, Higham (2003) identified three types of approach, which reflected the backgrounds and experience of staff. The *implementation approach, the adaptation approach* and *the assimilation approach*. These approaches reflected the degree to which staff teams either exhibited a close adherence to the curriculum framework or had consciously attempted to reinterpret the GNVQ specifications in order to integrate it into their own ways of working.

Spours et al. (2007), using the concepts of *translation and mediation* in relation to policy levers in FE, found that in *acts of translation* managers were able to find the space to reconcile policy levers with local and national demands.

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The social justice discourse and the third way

In previous administrations, issues of equity were largely tangential to the main education and training policy developments, and were not included in the first FEFC inspection criteria in 1993. However, from 1997, aspects of equity and social justice became foregrounded in policy rhetoric. The New Labour Government was anxious to differentiate its purposes from the previous administration, by developing a policy approach that purported to combine neoliberal approaches with greater social justice. The terms social exclusion, social mobility and social justice were constant mantras during New Labour's administration, and, from 1997 were used in parallel with the formal equalities policies. The national policies intertwined two distinct approaches to equality from 1997: that of the political philosopher Rawls (1999) with notions of social justice as fairness, with the continuing influence of Europe and the strongly liberal rights agenda, which focused on protecting individuals from discrimination. It was this latter tradition that was translated into formal equalities legislation in Britain and the former that dominated the language of New Labour's educational policies.

New Labour's interpretation of equity and justice foregrounded social mobility by widening and extending the *opportunities* for those most able to benefit from them, rather than tackling fundamental structural inequalities. Merit was measured in terms of credentialism, with the accretion of qualifications seen as enabling students to rise up the qualification ladder. The New Labour focus on social mobility in the FES policies continued the meritocratic approach to equity, as warned against by Young (1958), and it became embroiled with the neoliberal focus on human capital.

New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) succeeded Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government's *Action for the Cities* Programme established in 1987. Initially, ineptly named the Underclass Task Force (Ainley and Allen, 2010), the SEU made explicit its mission to tackle social exclusion in education by focusing on under-representation by certain groups of students. Following the recommendations in the Kennedy Report (1997), targets to increase participation by groups seen as under-represented became central to national FES policy: policy

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levers rewarded colleges for increasing participation from specific post-codes in order to identify students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, these national funding levers targeted provision at Level 2 or above, not Level 1, seeing Level 2 as the minimum level for employment.

Colley and Hodkinson (2001) argued that the SEU's strategic policy document *Bridging the Gap* (SEU, 1999) suggested that some groups were more deserving than others. Those who did not take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them were seen as not deserving. This perception arguably contributed to the continuation and legitimisation of the term *underclass,* with little recognition of the barriers that face young people from educationally disadvantaged communities in acquiring this human capital.

From 2006, the New Labour policy documents changed the focus from bridging the gap through increased participation, to *Closing the Gap* through qualification success. Coffield et al. (2008) identified that this focus flowed from the European Commission's requirement that there needed to be a better balance between the qualifications achieved by the most disadvantaged and those achieved by the most privileged. The criteria used for Ofsted inspections in the FES, came to include the evaluation of success rates by race, gender and disability. National post-16 headline data include show an improving picture for students in all of these equalities' groups, apart from those students on apprenticeships although, some minority groups such as those from Black-African heritage, from Bangladesh and white British boys continued to lag behind other groups.

However, headline national data for provision at level 1 have never been transparent, as national statistical data before 2010 were largely confined to provision at Level 2 and above. When from 2010, national headline statistical data included Level 1, they included success rates on all provision at Level 1 and below, including students on Entry Level and Pre-Entry Level courses, where 100 per cent achievements were likely. Thus success rates on Level 1 courses were obscured.

The formal equalities legislation following the introduction of the Human Rights Act (1998), included groups with additional *protected characteristics*. However, these

protected characteristics did not specifically extend to those discriminated against on the basis of class and poverty. This omission has contributed to the continued invisibility of this group.

Changes to governance

Lumby and Foskett in Raffe and Spours (eds.) (2007) described this period as one of *turbulence masquerading as change*, because, despite much national policy activity, little in fact changed significantly on the ground. The structural changes to the governance of the FES following the incorporation of colleges did not bring about significant improvement in terms of the cohesiveness of the sector: rather they have contributed to the continuation of a divided and divisive sector, with vocational training continuing to be less valued than academic provision (Chitty, 2009).

It looked, in 1995, as though far-reaching changes to the governance of the FES would end the historical split between work-based training, employment-related training, and vocational and academic courses. The education and employment departments were combined with the Department of Trade and Industry to become the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). However from 2001, the department was split into the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Work and Pensions. The FEFC and the TECs were, from 2001, combined and funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). However, in 2008, the New Labour government announced the reversal of a unified LSC, and government departments were subsequently returned to a divided system, with two funding bodies, one for 16-19 year olds, the Young People's Funding Agency (YPLA) and one for adults, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

Following the 2010 general election, the Conservation-Liberal Coalition government announced more changes. The Education Act 2011 (DfE, 2011e), resulted in the abolition of the YPLA, as from 2012, 16-19 year olds in colleges became funded by the Education Funding Agency (EFA), with LAs assuming responsibility for commissioning local provision up to the age of 19. Adults and all apprenticeships, continued to be funded and commissioned by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), an

arms-length quango, reporting to the Department for Business, Innovation and Science (BIS). Colleges and Independent Learning Providers had to respond to the very different requirements of these funding arrangements, and to the frequent changes of officials. Significantly, the EFA no longer had a quality function beyond that of monitoring qualification success rates (QSRs) with powers to discontinue funding where provision fell below the minimum thresholds. Although the increased importance of LAs indicated an acknowledgment of the growing debates about localism, funding for the FES remained national and centralised, leaving uncertainty and ambiguity about the responsibility for the quality of the provision.

The continuing 14-19 debate

From the start of its administration, the contradictions inherent in New Labour's Third Way and the imperative of gaining electoral advantage, contributed to the continuing divide between academic and vocational qualifications. The Labour Party lost the opportunity to reform schooling to provide greater equity when it jettisoned its own proposals to abolish private schools (Chitty, 2009). By responding to the *Angst* of the middle classes and further strengthening the role of GCE A levels, the New Labour administration perpetuated the tripartite divide of qualifications and confirmed the low level status of pre-vocational courses. The consultation paper *Qualifying for Success* (DfEE, 1997) privileged the Dearing Review (1996) and re-assured the middle class voters that GCE A levels were secure (Chitty, 2009; Hodgson and Spours, 2008). The policy attempted to place greater value on vocational qualifications at Level 3, and did not support a unified 14-19 curriculum. The paper also signalled the move towards an enlargement of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the inclusion of a wider range of qualifications, including Key Skills and, for the first time, Entry-Level provision (Chitty, 2009; Pring et al., 2009). The recognition of an Entry Level represented a potentially positive step in the recognition of under-achieving school leavers, confirming progression routes, but, significantly, it also legitimised a track-based rather than a curriculum-based approach.

The increasing significance of English and mathematics.

Concern about the persistently low national levels of literacy and numeracy has resulted in a number of initiatives in the last 20 years (Hodgson and Spours, 2008) to address this area: core skills, which became variously Key Skills, Basic Skills, Skills for Life and, most recently, Functional Skills. Following the Moser Report (DfEE, 1999), which highlighted low levels literacy and numeracy skills amongst adults, and the three-yearly findings of PISA, where significant numbers of young people compared less well with other nations, the government invested heavily in national initiatives to raise standards. Since the introduction of the *Skills for Life* strategy (DfES, 2001), qualifications and standards have been closely associated with notional levels of skills in literacy and numeracy, and funding linked to success in achieving qualifications in these areas. The strategy resulted in the development of a Skills for Life Curriculum from Pre-entry to Level 2. This was not originally conceived as a curriculum, but as a conceptual model of developmental stages, based on the way that children learnt to read and write and developed skills of number.

Whereas the methodology for adult literacy and numeracy during the late 1970s and 1980s had stressed the importance of placing topics for learning within a meaningful context, the new strategy, accompanied by millions of pounds of investment in worksheets and materials, moved the teaching of literacy back into the classroom with a focus on grammar. The strategy largely ignored consideration of any specific difficulties that students might have with text or number. External tests were introduced and used as a national measure of success in meeting targets to improve the nation's competence in English and mathematics. However, the multiple-choice Skills for Life numeracy test only included arithmetic, and the literacy test simply consisted of multiple choice answers to short paragraphs: entrants were excused the need to spell, transcribe, listen, compose or speak.

By 2008, the strategy had cost 5 billion pounds (NAO, 2008). In a study of fifty-three workplaces where employees received literacy and numeracy provision, Wolf et al. (2010: 1) found that:

> Contrary to policy-makers' expectations, employers were not concerned about employees' literacy levels, and supported provision largely as a way of providing general development opportunities. Learners, who made small literacy gains at best, did not change their behaviour in ways which were likely to affect productivity. Once subsidies ended, employers were unwilling to support further provision at full cost. This provides further evidence that basic skills tuition does not have an immediate impact on performance.

Despite the substantial and sustained financial input for more than 10 years, a report by BIS (2012) showed that there had been little change in literacy skills at level 1 since 2003, and that numeracy skills of adults had declined. Moreover, despite the increased focus on literacy and numeracy in schools, young people continued to leave school with low levels of formal attainment in these subjects.

Key Skills of communication and numeracy and ICT, a legacy of the core skills developed for the YTS programmes in 1983, had been developed in 2000 for students on GCE A Level Courses, and on vocational courses, as well as for apprentices. Unwin and Wellington (2001) found, from talking to young people and apprentices, that the provenance of Key Skills in terms of their vocational significance could not be established, and that the arrangements for assessment militated against *situatedness* or *embeddedness.* Inspection reports from the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and Ofsted have consistently shown weaknesses in provision for both for Skills for Life and Key Skills. These included insufficient contextual relevance, an overdependence on worksheets as evidence of learning and too little specialist expertise.

Overlapping with the *Skills for Life* strategy and the development of Key Skills was the development of Functional Skills. In response to the Tomlinson Report (2004), the White Paper, *Getting on in Business, Getting on at Work* (DCSF, 2005), announced the development of Functional Skills. The policy paper *Delivering 14–19 Reform: Next Steps* (DCSF, 2008) stated that Functional Skills in English, mathematics and ICT would replace Key Skills in post-compulsory provision. Significantly, they were to be included in the specialised 14-19 Diplomas introduced in 2008. Isaacs (2013) argued that policy officials responsible for policy formation

for the 14-19 Diplomas had briefings on previous policy failures in GNVQ, and, were specifically advised about the potential *hurdling* effect of Functional Skills, but that this had been ignored. She explained that (ibid: 279)

> The policymakers at both the QCA and the DfES (subsequently DCSF) suffered from policy amnesia bordering on deliberate blindness and an unwillingness to take seriously any warnings from past developments because the idea that the diploma would successfully bridge the vocational/academic divide was sacrosanct.

Despite the increasing body of evidence of policy failure, Functional Skills were included in the 14-19 Diplomas, and also as one of the three required strands of Foundation Learning.

Provision at Level 1

From 1997, the settlement about the course provision at Level 1 changed little, with three separate curricular strands. The much publicised national curriculum changes, such as the introduction of curriculum 2000 and GNVQs, dominated the higher levels of provision, particularly Level 3. Following the gradual demise of TVEI, City and Guilds 365 and CPVE, NVQ training became the common pre-vocational route at Level 1 in colleges, and ILPs were funded, initially by the TECs, for a short Lifeskills Programme or for Employment Training, usually a short NVQ programme. The Lifeskills Programmes were short courses of 12 weeks, specifically aimed at school leavers who were not yet ready for an NVQ training programme. They studied basic skills, personal and employability skills, depending on their needs.

In 2003, the LSC introduced Entry to Employment (E2E), a pre-vocational programme specifically for young people not ready for a Level 2 vocational qualification or for employment. All students were initially expected to follow basic skills and personal effectiveness programmes, and could include vocational qualifications as well as work preparation and work experience. The programme design was flexible, based on individual objectives, with variations in programme length according to needs. Progression to employment with training was one of four possible aims.

The ILPs were, from their inception, funded on the basis of *outcomes,* in particular success in finding employment and other progression data. However, before 2010 this outcomes-based funding formula did not apply to colleges, where E2E provision often consisted of NVQ at Level 1, plus basic skills, or General Vocational courses that consisted of vocational tasters at Entry Level 3 or Level 1. It was common to have two points of entry a year in colleges for the General Vocational courses and more flexible roll-on/roll-off provision in ILPS. Funding of a notional 22 weeks of up to 16 hours a week, was significantly less than that for provision at Levels 2 and 3, although a disadvantage weighting factor applied. Pring et al. (2009) argued that students on these lower level courses had always been less advantageously funded than those on higher level courses. Simmonds (2009) argued that the level 1 programme focused on 'trainability' rather than the preparation for a meaningful career in the knowledge economy. Similarly Atkins (2010) found that level 1 vocational provision limited rather than expanded horizons. Thompson (2010) in a study of E2E provision, questioned whether market-driven forces were appropriate for the type of provision best suited to the cohort of students.

Young people who underachieved at Level 1

Around the time of the introduction of Foundational Learning, a report funded by Demos, Birdwell et al. (2011, provided a description of the situation for school leavers who had underachieved, that was striking similarity to that identified by Mary Morse 40 years earlier. The authors identified a *youth penalty* for 16-17 year olds, because they lacked work experience, but also had to fit themselves into a bureaucratic system of education and training rather than having a system based on their needs. The Demos report (ibid: 14) found that:

> Rather than being feckless and workshy, these young people were often eager to work, and ambitious for their futures, but a lack of guidance left many with unrealistic aspirations and few good qualifications. These young people found it hard to imagine a middle ground on which they would be able to use their talents while earning a living.

The report confirmed a landscape in 2010 where employment opportunities for under-achieving school leavers were limited to low paid, entry-level jobs in the

service sectors, often short term. Adequate careers advice was lacking and the education programmes did not meet the educational needs of the students. The lifetime return on low-level educational courses, particularly NVQs, with little relevance for employment, was poor compared with higher levels of qualification.

In a longitudinal study of young people who were NEET between 1999 and 2010, Schoon (2014) argued that the findings pointed to the role of multiple deprivations and lack of local opportunities in shaping the life chances of young people, and did not support the assumption of an inter-generational transmission of a 'culture of worklessness.'

Data from the OECD (2010) showed that almost all other developed countries had more young people staying on in education both after 16 and after 20 than the UK, and a greater proportion progressed to higher levels. A report for the work foundation (Wright et al., 2010) found the UK system to be failing those with low and intermediate skills the most. The report recommended that the government make this a priority by providing better employment opportunities and closer links with the labour market. Following a report from the NAO (2004) identifying failures to provide a universal service, the Connexions Service, which had focused strongly on supporting young people who were at risk of becoming NEET, was returned to the LAs in 2008, and was in transition at this point. It was within this socio-economic context that foundation learning was introduced nationally.

The Foundation Learning programme.

Despite the government's strong economic focus on preparation for employment, the Foundation Learning Programme did not include funding for work experience. Organisations could only offer qualifications included on the newly developed QCF. The programme was implemented with a prescriptive design emanating from the settlement of the 1980s and 1990s, with three separately examined strands. Funding was based on the successful completion of qualifications. Further details about this are outlined in Chapter 2.

Chapter Summary

This exploration of the historical background to the introduction of Foundation Learning traced the way in which educational structures and policies, combined with stereotyped negative assumptions, continued to marginalise underachieving school leavers, who from 1944, had minimal options for further education and training on leaving school. It argued that, despite its social democratic intentions, the 1944 Education Act perpetuated a system of education based on a narrow interpretation of equity, in which merit was evaluated in terms of academic achievement. Little account was taken of socio-economic background. The slow change to a partial comprehensive secondary school structure, the ROSLA, the introduction of CSE and finally GCSE, improved the opportunities for many young people in secondary schools to participate and achieve qualifications. However, grammar schools continued in some areas, and internal comprehensive school structures often papered over the blatant structural divisions of a tripartite system, through internal arrangements that continued to set, stream or divide. One of the key recommendations in the Newsom Report (op.cit.), that proportionately greater resource should be allocated to children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, was not adopted by policy-makers.

The development of MSC-funded employment training courses from the mid-1970s, arose primarily because of growing unemployment amongst school leavers, resulting in particular from the decline of heavy manufacturing industries, and a consequential substantial loss of entry-level youth jobs. The resource allocations for the MSC-funded employment training programmes were low. The programmes were short and proved to be of limited value in enabling school leavers to find sustained employment, characterised as training without jobs.

The late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s marked significant expansion of the FES. However, the growth of second chance opportunities for adults and the expansion of full and part-time academic and vocational courses mainly occurred at level 2 and above. Policy generation at Level 1 was informed by intense pedagogical debates, ranging from progressive and constructivist perspectives to behaviourist approaches. This discourse encompassed pedagogical perspectives which focused

on the one hand, on the continuing importance of subject knowledge and understanding, alongside practical skills, and, on the other hand, perspectives that focused on the newly emerging concept of *competences*, that could be assessed in the work-place through NVQs.

Negative assumptions about young people and their abilities, and an increasing focus on the remediation of deficits, overshadowed these debates, so that from the late 1990s, the broader purposes of education around level 1 reached a settlement whereby courses were subordinated to an economic instrumentalism and a narrow definition of skills required for employment. Curriculum design consisted of three separate curricular strands: social and personal effectiveness; basic skills and occupational tasters. The outcome-based approaches to assessment became the dominant mode for occupational/vocational elements of courses, enshrining the *horizontal discourse* and *restrictive codes* that Bernstein (op.cit.) argued perpetuated educational disadvantage.

I have shown how, from 1997, despite previous failures and evidence that employers did not value the provision, and that it led to nil or even negative economic returns, NVQ Level 1 programmes continued to be funded both in colleges and in ILPs. Much of the national focus in the FES, centred on qualifications at Level 3, with unsuccessful attempts to establish equivalences and parity of esteem between vocational qualifications and A Levels.

Under New Labour's Third Way, two strands of educational policy, conceptualised by Hall (op.cit.) as the *double-shuffle*, operated in tandem. The dominant, adaptive neoliberal policy strand increased under New Labour (Pring et al. 2009) with the growth in policy leavers to include funding, targets and performance measures as well as national targets and inspection. The sub-ordinate social democratic strand, recognised the growing exclusion of young people from poorer backgrounds and encouraged social mobility, seeing accreditation as the key to progression. The desire to compete internationally in terms of qualifications, resulted in a policy culture of credentialism, in which qualifications came to be seen as the mechanism for social mobility. This policy focus became particularly restrictive and

bureaucratic in the Foundation Learning programme when the highly prescriptive programme requirements were combined with a funding and performance policy that focused exclusively on QSRs.

Emerging research questions

The historical overview confirmed my initial hypothesis that the Foundation Learning programme was impoverished, and that little had changed relatively in terms of improved life chances for underachieving school leavers since the Newsom Report (DES, 1963). I wanted to understand how the policy would achieve its stated aim to improve progression to a Level 2 course. I decided to explore the sense that managers and lecturers made of the change from E2E to Foundation Learning, what implementation meant for their organisations, and the extent to which, in a context where compliance with policy requirements was financially rewarded, they used some form of mediation in their policy enactment in order to improve the provision. The key research questions emerging at this stage were:

- How did managers and lecturers perceive, make sense of, and enact, the change to Foundation Learning and the Study Programme?

- How did policy enactment, in their specific local contexts, affect their organisations and the programmes offered to students?

- To what extent did managers and lecturers mediate the requirements in order to improve the provision for students?

In order to develop the detail of the research questions I needed to explore in more depth the generation, formation, design and expectations of the Foundation Learning programme and its successor, the Study Programme. This is the main focus of chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO: POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND FORMATION: FOUNDATION LEARNING AND THE STUDY PROGRAMME

Introduction

Chapter One traced the historical background to the provision for under-achieving school leavers from 1944, leading up to the introduction of Foundation Learning in 2010. The first part of this chapter traces its genesis, introduction and subsequent implementation in greater detail. It places the programme more precisely within the Further Education Sector (FES), and provides more details about the structure of the programme and its funding. The second part of the chapter traces the policy formation and introduction of the Study Programme.

I argued in the historical overview that the nature of the provision for under-achieving school leavers had been neglected since 1993, following the intensity of pedagogical debates in the 1980s. The focus on the 14-19 agenda and the discourse around the equivalence between vocational and academic provision, resulted in the dominance in national media on qualifications at Level 3. The policy levers used in the FES to encourage greater participation from under-represented groups rewarded increases in participation at Level 2, not Level 1. Since the incorporation of Colleges, and despite the increasing emphasis in policy documentation on social justice and social mobility through increased participation, the situation for school leavers without the requisite credentials to improve their life chances remained as relatively bleak as it had fifty years earlier. I argued that this bleak outlook stemmed not just from a significant diminution in entry-level employment opportunities, but also from a continuing failing in educational policy formation. I highlighted the way in which successive governments restated, through their policy documents, the need to provide programmes suitable for the growing cohort of young people who were unemployed, underemployed or who were effectively warehoused at the lower levels in terms of training and employment (Allen and Ainley, 2010; Atkins, 2010; Hayward and Williams, 2011; Simmonds, 2009; Thompson, 2010). I argued that a settlement reached during the 1990s, that the purpose of education was fundamentally instrumental, preparing

students for the labour market. The key to finding better paid employment and improving life-chances was seen as gaining qualifications.

I embarked on my contemporaneous study without knowledge of the impending demise of Foundation Learning, and subsequently decided to extend my research to include the Study Programme. I argue in this chapter that many of the policy imperatives that had dominated the centralised Foundation Learning requirements, continued to dominate the Study Programme. Policy-makers were highly selective in their response to the *Wolf Report* (DfE, 2011a) and, apparently, paid little heed to readily available evidence, including that from other government departments.

The Further Education Context in 2010

The Foundation Learning programme was introduced in August 2010, following the election of the Coalition Government. At that time, more 16-18 year olds were studying in further education organisations than in school sixth forms. The further education landscape consisted of around 1300 organisations, with enrolments ranging from single figures to around 116,000 (Ofsted 2011b). Of these, around 400 were General Further Education Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges offering a mix of vocational courses and GCE A Levels, with vocational courses largely predominating in GFEs. Around 900 organisations were Independent Learning Providers, some third sector organisations charities, some commercial, offering apprenticeships, as well as vocational and pre-vocational training courses.

Foundation Learning had been introduced within the context of New Labour Government's 14-19 strategy, in which Local Partnership Boards had been developed to encourage greater co-operation among educational organisations. Foundation Learning was planned for implementation in schools, colleges and ILPs, alongside the 14-19 Diplomas. In 2010, the new Coalition Government changed the performance criteria for schools, privileging GCSE results over vocational courses. Although Foundation Learning continued to be offered in schools at pre-entry level, it became less common in schools at Level 1, as they responded to the changed performance criteria, although it continued to be offered at Entry Levels for

students with high needs.

The introduction of Foundation Learning coincided with the start of a period of accelerated change in the governance of the FES, which was in a period of transition throughout the life of Foundation Learning. The YPLA had just taken over from the LSC for the funding of provision, and was due to be replaced in 2012 by the EFA. The LSC and the YPLA had been responsible for the quality of the provision and for its development. From 2012, the quality role was marginalised, as the EFA became responsible for the funding for students up to 19, or 25 for students with high needs, and the local authorities (LAs) assumed responsibility for the commissioning of provision.

The change to demand-led funding for 16-19 provision was new for colleges, but not for ILPs, which, as private training providers or third sector organisations, had, from the time of their inception in the late 1970s and 1980s, been funded on the basis of outcomes. On the E2E programme, sustained employment outcomes had been the most advantageously funded, and other outcomes such as the achievement of objectives and of qualifications attracted lower levels of funding. Since 1993, Colleges had been funded on a formula based on a combination of enrolment, participation and achievement, and schools had been funded on a per capita basis, and continued to be so on the Foundation Learning programme. The expansion of vocational provision and the availability of courses at all levels had been significant since 2000, although in 2010, not all GFE colleges provided progression routes from Level 1 in all subjects. Course availability varied significantly across localities. Apprenticeship provision was also variable, with little available for 16-18 year olds. Careers guidance had been in flux following the demise of the Connexions Service Partnerships in 2008, and was about to be re-launched as the National Careers Service from 2012, and provided by schools. The Labour government's intention to raise the participation age (RPA) to 17 from 2013 and to 18 from 2015 had also been announced in the 2008 Education and Skills Act.

The Introduction of the Foundation Learning Programme

The generation of the Foundation Learning policy

Prior to the introduction of the Foundation Learning programme, students who were not eligible for an apprenticeship programme or a Level 2 course, were mainly funded for Entry to Employment (E2E). The number on the programme nationally, according to the LSC grant letter 2009/10, was relatively low at seventy-five thousand, although this number is likely to have applied only to the students in ILPs; students on programmes in Colleges were counted as part of the 16-19 provision as a whole, where students were studying level 1 vocational courses, and these numbers had not been not disaggregated.

The E2E programme was developed by the LSC in direct response to the *Cassels Report* (2001) on Modern Apprenticeships. The Report recommended that the LSC provide a pre-employment course to cater for young people not ready to enter apprenticeship or other employment, and suggested the name Entry to Employment. The Report recommended that training organisations offer a range of occupational and social training, selecting the most appropriate mix for each trainee, and should normally include basic skills. In the case of young people not ready to progress to an apprenticeship, the Report suggested that the students be offered programmes devised to result in settled employment. The Report also recommended that young people undertaking E2E programmes should do so on the basis of a decision specifically endorsed by a member of the Connexions Service, so that their progress would be monitored by a Connexions Specialist Adviser.

The E2E programme was introduced by the LSC in 2003, replacing the Lifeskills re-engagement programme that had been provided by ILPs, and encompassing NVQ and General Vocational courses that had been offered in colleges. The programme was developed with two distinct focuses: employment preparation, which could include NVQ training, and courses of re-engagement and mentoring. Thus the programme formally recognised and acknowledged the diversity of the cohort.

In ILPs, the funding level for E2E was based on a maximum of a notional 22-week programme of 16 hours a week, and payment was heavily dependent on

employment outcomes; employment with training was the most advantageously funded outcome. Although four possible outcomes were described in the guidance on entitlement from the LSC (2004), the expectations over time were focused particularly on employment. Few providers were able to prepare all students adequately for sustained employment in 22 weeks: around 50 per cent of students achieved that goal during the life of the programme, a percentage seen as low by Wolf (DES, 2011a), although, given the high levels of unemployment and limited availability of entry-level jobs, this evaluation is questionable. Progression to further training, achievement of individual objectives and qualification success were outcomes that attracted lower levels of funding, and, as the opportunities for entry-level jobs further reduced during that decade, these outcomes became an increasingly important source of funding for the ILPs.

The generation of the Foundation Learning programme did not arise initially from perceptions of what came to be described as the failure of E2E, (Wolf, op.cit.), but as a consequence of the *Tomlinson Report* (2004) and the discourse around provision for 14-19 year olds. The New Labour government announced the proposed introduction of a Foundation Learning Tier in the White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* (DfES, 2005). The White Paper highlighted in particular the low-staying on rates of 17 year olds in the UK compared with other developed countries. It emphasised vision the need to improve the opportunities for learning for young people who were disengaged, and had not reached Level 2. At the same time the New Labour government restated the commitment to GCSE and A Levels as the benchmarks understood by the public, while reinforcing the commitment to focus on the achievement of vocational qualifications as a route to success.

The Foundation Learning Tier, was formally introduced in the White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES, 2006). It purported to build on the vision of the 14-19 White Paper (op.cit.) by including Entry Level and Level 1 provision within an overarching national qualification framework, the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF). The parliamentary under-secretary of state for skills, Phil Hope (2006: 3) acknowledged that 'too many of our young people get stuck in an endless cycle of low skills, low skilled jobs and low life chances.' He saw the QCF

as a key mechanism to provide students with opportunities to make progress and break the cycle of low achievement. The Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the LSC were jointly charged by Hope with the implementation of the Foundation Learning Tier, with an expectation for full implementation in 2010.

In the *Guide to Foundation Learning*, the Department for Children Skills and Families (DCSF, 2009: 4) stated that:

> Some 25 per cent of young people (approximately 150,000 each year) do not achieve Level 2 qualifications by the age of 19. Although this figure is continually improving, there is some work to do to meet the target of 90 per cent of 19-year-olds achieving Level 2 by 2020. Achieving Level 2 by age 19 substantially improves life chances. It not only increases employability and access to better paid jobs, but it also helps prevent social exclusion and is associated with better outcomes in a range of areas, such as health. Foundation Learning provides schools, colleges and other providers with new and more coherent options for engaging learners working at Entry Level and Level 1, with the aim of increasing the number of young people achieving Level 2 by age 19.

The basis of these targets and the claims made for them in improving life-chances were refuted by researchers, including Birdwell et al. (2011); Jenkins et al. (2006) and Wolf (2002), all of whom challenged the saliency of the association between subsequent income and vocational qualification level. Nevertheless, the Foundation Learning programme did usher in an important change. The proposals were intended, for the first time, to include learners below Level 2 within a coherent national framework of qualifications.

The Foundation Learning Programme Aim

It was clear by 2008 that progression to a positive destination was the overarching aim of the Foundation Learning Programme. In their information leaflet, the QCA (2008) identified that the Foundation Learning Tier would:

• enable learning providers to create programmes that will engage learners, supported by qualifications that meet their needs;

- provide clear progression pathways that will help learners progress towards Level 2 and achieve qualifications, employment or independent living, establish more flexible and coherent qualifications that recognise achievement at Entry level and Level 1;

- increase access to accreditation to help motivate and reward learners by formally recognising their achievements within the QCF encourage providers to work together to deliver learning programmes at Entry level and level 1 and identify appropriate local and regional opportunities for progression;

- ensure that all vocational qualifications at Entry level and level 1 of the QCF meet the needs of employers through consultation with sector skills councils, provide clear post-16 funding arrangements that support the aims of the FLT.

The initial intention was to focus the programme within the 14-19 local strategic partnerships, in the hope that students would be signposted to the provision locally that best matched their needs, and would help them to progress within levels. The key principles for providers were articulated by QCA and LSC in terms of the following requirements:

- Requirement 1. Personalised Learning: Providers must demonstrate that they are working towards increased and improved personalisation of learning, whereby approaches to learning encourage ownership, autonomy and control.

- Requirement 2. Recognition of Achievement and Progression: Providers must have processes and systems to offer recognition of achievement (including prior learning and achievement) from the outset of the learner's journey, using qualifications from the QCF. Providers will be expected to demonstrate success for learners in their achievements, identify meaningful progression destinations, track learner achievement and onward progress of learners over time.

- Requirement 3. Coherent Progression Pathways: Providers must demonstrate that learners have access to a coherent integrated curriculum offer which includes vocational knowledge, skills and understanding; Functional Skills; and Personal and Social Development Skills.

- Requirement 4. Effective Initial Assessment and On-going Review: Providers must demonstrate that their processes and systems for initial assessment and on-going review will support successful progress through the Progression Pathways.

- Requirement 5. Reaching Priority Learners: Providers must demonstrate that they have effective strategies for reaching priority learners and motivating them to succeed.

- Requirement 6. Partnerships: Providers must show how they work in partnership with support agencies, employers and other providers to implement Progression Pathways.

- Requirement 7. Support for Learners: Providers will need to show how support for learners is used to improve access to, and progression through, the learning related to identified needs of learners.

- Requirement 8. Organisation and Management: Providers need to demonstrate that they have high standards within their organisation, appropriate organisational structure and effective organisational processes to implement the Progression Pathways successfully.

These overarching aims reflected a pedagogical model based on a progressive, constructivist approach, using terminology such as personalisation, ownership and autonomy. The programme encouraged organisations to take account of local opportunities, with a vision that encompassed the engagement of learners from application to a progressive destination. In its aspiration the programme reflected a strongly social democratic stance, but as became clear, the specific programme requirements and the funding arrangements reflected a very different stance, in which credentialism was paramount.

It is worth noting that these aims and requirements have remarkable similarities to those published for E2E as published in the guidance from the LSC (2004), summarising expectations of processes that similarly encompass the learning journey from application to destination. These expectations included the following components: referral and recruitment; initial assessment and induction; an

entitlement curriculum of three core strands: basic and/or Key Skills, personal and social development, vocational development; accreditation of learning if applicable; a review of learners' progress; progression and aftercare.

The Pilot Phase

Foundation Learning Tier was piloted in 2008/09 anticipating moving into implementation phase in 2009/10, and becoming fully operational in 2010/11.

The organising structures and progression routes within the pilots, were the *Progression Pathways*, which of consisted of qualifications on the QCF from Entry level and Level 1, that led to pre-determined future tracks/destinations. These destinations were: supported employment, independent living, specialised diplomas, GCSE/A levels or apprenticeships. Following the evaluation of the pilots the term 'Tier' was dropped, as were the specified *Progression Pathways.*

In a presentation for providers and champions by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS, 2010) the programme requirements were presented as *Characteristics of Effective Learning* and the reference to specific *Progression Pathways* had been replaced by the term *Coherent Learning Programmes*, which became known as *Personalised Learning Programmes* allowing for more flexibility over choice of units, by using a pick and mix approach. The use of the units available on the QCF now had a stronger profile in the presentations from LSIS and QCA, as the number of qualifications meeting the QCF requirements and *listed* on their database had increased. Significantly, the early guidance which required *subject and vocational knowledge and understanding* changed, as the reference to *subject,* and sometimes *understanding,* was dropped in the presentations.

Programme design

The Foundation Learning programme design confirmed the settlement that had dominated pre-vocational programmes since the 1980s: three strands of provision, personal and social development (PSD); Functional Skills including ICT; vocational qualifications (VQs).

The Foundation Learning programme was distinct from previous programme designs, by excluding work experience, and by the adoption of the qualifications on the QCF as a requirement for funding. Whereas NVQ accreditation consisted of separate units, all of which had to be completed to gain the qualification, the QCF introduced modes of accreditation where credits could be gained from very small units, so that students could achieve quickly and accumulate credits. The four sizes of qualifications in the QCF consisted of: individual Units; Awards (1-12 credits); Certificates (13-36 credits); Diplomas (37 or more credits.) This was seen as an inclusive measure, designed, in part, in consideration of students with high needs or adults who had never previously achieved any accredited qualifications.

In these early stages, the expectations were very prescriptive, and all students, apart from those on lower Entry Levels, were expected to study all three strands, taking qualifications listed in the Foundation Learning Qualifications catalogue, only allowed to study those from the National Qualification Framework (NQF) if there were gaps in the QCF.

The use of the overarching modes of achievement, the Award, Certificate and the Diploma refers back to the lexicon of the Tomlinson Report (2004) which sought to reconcile the competing values attached to different types of learning in a unified Diploma. Despite the adoption of the terminology, the modes of achievement did not intend to capture and encompass a range of different **types** of learning, as envisaged in the Tomlinson proposals, but was based on the number of credits achieved.

The model raised pedagogical challenges that are common with modular or unit-based approaches to accreditation, where all the units of credit offered at each level are of the same value, and a student can start with any unit. This approach does not allow for sequential learning, and is not developmental. As implemented on the QCF it did not assume any synoptic understanding on the part of students, nor any accumulative development of practical skills, so the students were reliant on the professional skills, knowledge and understanding of the lecturers for their development. On the other hand, the small units of accreditation on the QCF,

made it possible to recognise *spiky profiles*, which meant that learners could take units of credit at different levels, and take a programme reflecting any differences in previous attainment in specific subjects. This was seen as a way to motivate and personalise the programme for individuals, including students with high needs, or adults who had never previously achieved, who were thought to benefit from *bite size* units.

QCF Diplomas were the most advantageously funded. A condition of funding was that students were entered for Units, Awards, Certificates or Diplomas immediately following their initial assessment, and their learning aims had to be agreed on the Individual Learner Record (ILR) at the start of the programme. Funding followed the achievement of the agreed qualification aim, so initial guidance and planning became highly significant.

The requirement to include three strands of provision meant that two of these, PSD and Vocational Qualifications (VQs), were competence-based, using outcomes-based approaches as the sole method of assessment. This approach enshrined a behaviourist pedagogy that did not sit easily with the stated aims of the programme, and the principles, which suggested a more expansive, constructivist approach. The requirement to offer Functional Skills, which at Levels 1 and Levels 2 were externally examined, was a significant change replacing portfolio-based Key Skills, or Skills for Life qualifications that had dominated the sector for more than a decade.   The new external examinations were based on a problem-solving approach, but the scenarios used were not vocationally contextualised. Successive Ofsted and ALI reports had identified the positive benefits for students of contextualised assignments linked to the vocational requirements. Assessment of Entry Level 3 in Functional Skills consisted of assignments, one of which was nationally-devised, and two centre-devised.

A notable omission in the Foundation Learning requirements, and where the policy marked a significant rupture with E2E, was funding for work experience. Since employment had been the main outcome and a major source of income for ILPs, the change to qualification success as the source of funding marked a major shift.

For many colleges, the overall change was less dramatic, since much of the provision at Level 1 had been NVQ programmes or general courses with accredited vocational tasters.

The Foundation Learning funding formula

The particular form of *demand-led* funding formula introduced by the LSC in 2009 was arguably the most arcane and bureaucratic since the incorporation of Colleges in 1993. Following incorporation, Colleges had received funding for three stages of programme: initial guidance, on-programme costs and achievement. 14-16 year olds in schools continued to be funded on a cohort basis, through the Dedicated Schools Grant, and the formula did not apply to them. The funding for ILPs, and for employment training programmes had, since the inception of the Manpower Services Commission, been based on outcomes. This was the case even when they offered the same subjects and courses as colleges. The *demand-led* funding formula, originated from the recommendations in the Leitch Review (2006) and was applied to all *learner responsive* programmes up to level 3 in GFEs and ILPs, and funding became based primarily on qualification success.

The funding formula, as set out in the LSC Funding Guidance (2009), introduced the concept of Standard Learner Numbers (SLN) a volume of measure that replaced the National Base Rate as the first element in the new funding formula. The YPLA funding guidance (2010) presents the funding formulas as follows:

Table 1: Funding Formula for Foundation Learning

Funding	=	SLN	x	National funding rate per SLN	x	Provider Factor	+	Additional learning support

Every enrolment had an SLN value, based on the sum of the SLNs of the qualifications taken. SLNs were either set by the YPLA (listed), or determined by the actual course duration (unlisted). The SLN values were published as guided learning hours (glh), called SLN glh.

However expressed, the key changes were that Qualification Success Rates (QSRs) at all levels would be the primary source of income generation and that the qualifications *listed* on the QCF attracted funding based on the notional contact hours required to *deliver* the qualification. The funding formula advantaged long qualifications, with single units of credit the least.

From the outset it was not clear how the new Foundation Learning arrangements would articulate with the new 14-19 Diplomas, also offered at Level 1. Initially, the proposal was that, if studied in school, one of the Foundation Learning Progression Pathways would lead to Level 1 specialised 14-19 Diplomas. But where colleges were already offering full Level 1 VQs, it was not clear why they would want to change to a specialised 14-19 Diploma. The conundrum was resolved when, in 2010, the incoming Coalition Government announced that schools' performance and point scores would privilege GCSE results, reducing the incentive for schools to offer vocational courses, including Foundation Learning, and by 2011, 14-19 Diplomas had become history.

Over time, the requirement for students to follow all three strands had become amended according to need, but in the first year of implementation this was the expectation. Following lobbying by ILPs, *flexibilities* were allowed for ILPs (YPLA, 2011) as, increasingly the programme was seen not to meet all students' needs. These changes proved to be problematic as they had to be negotiated with the LA and/or the YPLA or its successor the Education Funding Agency (EFA), and not all officials or staff in ILPs were aware of these.

Foundation Learning policy generation and formation resulted in a programme design which was dominated by an extreme example of what Hall (2005), described as the dominant neoliberal policy strand, with a focus on measurement of performance, as qualification success rates became the basis of funding. The centralised curriculum, with the sole focus on accreditation, and a lack sequential development, confirmed a behaviourist pedagogical approach that reflected the *horizontal discourse* and *restricted codes* that served to reinforce educational disadvantage (Bernstein 1990, 1999 and 2000), compounding the consequences for

students of a previous lack of educational capital. The provenance of the QCF as the social democratic mechanism for social mobility, was therefore problematic from the design stage, despite the requirements set out jointly by the LSC and the QCA (2008) that providers should work towards personalisation of learning, whereby approaches to learning encouraged ownership, autonomy and control.

The introduction of the Study Programme

During the period of the research visits, the Department for Education (DfE) announced the change to the Study Programme for all 16-19 provision, to be based on the recommendations in the *Wolf Report* (DfE, 2011a). The perspectives from the four organisations that formed the basis of this study, showed that the enactment of the centralised Foundation Learning policy had resulted in significantly different consequences for them. It was also evident that the QCF was not lubricating social mobility, and was in fact leading to additional barriers for certain cohorts of young people who had underachieved at school. I therefore decided to explore the early perspectives of managers in the four organisations about the change to the Study Programme to determine the extent to which it looked as though it would reduce the achievement gap and enable progression.

The background to the development of the Study Programme

One of the Coalition Government's Secretary of State's first actions, after the election in 2010, was to ask Professor Wolf to review 14-19 vocational education. Michael Gove commissioned the review in October 2010 and, after barely six months, the *Review of Vocational Education-the Wolf Report* (DfE, 2011a) was published. The commissioning of the review did not stem from perceived shortcomings of Foundation Learning, which had barely started, but from a growing concern about vocational provision at all levels. The mainly positive evaluation of the pilots (DfE, 2011c) had largely focused on schools, which were not subject to the funding formula.

Professor Wolf's review included reference to previous research, including her own work, where she had challenged assertions about the value of Vocational Qualifications (VQs), citing the low economic returns, and the weak links with

employers (Jenkins et al., 2006; Wolf et al., 2010). An increasing number of reports had identified the growing inequality in employment and educational opportunities for young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Discourses about education increasingly included concern about social justice and social mobility, and were evident in major policy documents in 2008 and 2009 from the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative Party, while in opposition, published a Green Paper on vocational education and training, *Building Skills, Transforming Lives: A Training and Apprenticeship Revolution* (2008), where, in the foreword, David Cameron stated:

> For too long, Britain has been trapped in the mind-set that opportunity must end at the school gates - that if you have not proved yourself by the age of sixteen then you might as well join the scrapheap. Only that can explain why we sit back and accept the fact that over three-quarters of a million young people are not in any sort of education, employment or training. What this Green Paper sets out is a modern vision for skills and training. One where real apprenticeships - based in the workplace not the classroom - are expanded and companies are put in control, so they can plug their skills gaps. One where new providers can enter the FES to expand choice, raise standards and help get more people into work and training. One where colleges and training providers are freed from pointless bureaucracy and are able to provide the courses people and businesses want. And one where funding follows the learner, not the other way round.

The report identified that young people who had left school with very few formal qualifications had no *approachable* way back into learning, and were required to take qualifications for everything, which they could find daunting. The proposals in the Green Paper were that the cohort should move into positive learning or work experience, with small steps back into education and short courses to enhance self-confidence and basic employability. The recommendations suggested that locally-based training providers, including FE colleges, were best placed to understand the needs of the local economies and community groups.

A policy paper from the Liberal Democrats *Equity and Excellence: Policies for 5-19 education in England's schools and colleges* (2009), also identified the

consequences of poverty for under-achieving school leavers. The paper proposed an inclusive 14-19 approach, with LAs responsible for local commissioning, and the introduction of a General Diploma to include both GCE A levels and vocational qualifications. It stated that 14 year olds should have the right to transfer to a college or work-related learning provider, and promoted the creation of a climbing frame for learning, rather than a ladder, allowing students to move sideways or mix academic and practical learning. All students would be required to achieve basic levels of literacy and numeracy and, as in schools, funding should follow the student, and colleges should receive parity of funding with schools.

Professor Wolf's recommendations included reregulation and organisations were no longer required to use the QCF, but, significantly she did not make specific recommendations about pedagogical approaches. Fuller and Unwin (2011) noted that the scope of the brief from Michael Gove did not include the content or design of vocational qualifications. This limitation to the scope of the research would perhaps account for the relatively muted references to competence-based assessment in the QCF. The literatures cited in Chapter One, including research by Professor Wolf had provided a powerful critique of this approach, but little of this specific aspect is included in the recommendations.

The *Wolf Report* (op.cit.) was highly critical of the state of vocational education, estimating that hundreds of thousands of students followed courses which did not offered a successful pathway into employment or higher education. Professor Wolf pointed out that national policy had been designed, for many years, to increase participation, and retain the whole cohort in education or training throughout the upper secondary phase. The increase in participation had not resolved the problems. She described young people as 'churning between education and short-term employment in an attempt to find either a course which offers a real chance for progress, or a permanent job, and finding neither' (op.cit: 7).

Professor Wolf highlighted the complexity and bureaucratic nature of the arrangements for 14-19 vocational education, which she found 'sclerotic, expensive, centralised and over-detailed' (op.cit.: 21). She described as a

bureaucratic triangle the confusion about the roles of Sector Skills Councils, Awarding Bodies and Ofqual in determining which qualifications could be taught. She identified the jungle whereby the numbers of Awarding Bodies offering approved qualifications rose from 98 in 2002 to 144 in 2009 and found the connections between employers and qualifications weak, having been diluted and attenuated by the frequent changes to governance. Professor Wolf was highly critical of the QCF. She found that the funding arrangements, in particular the funding by qualifications, led to *gaming and perverse incentives* to offer the easiest qualification in order to ensure success and maximise income, and also created incentives for Awarding Bodies to make passing easy.

Wolf memorably stated in the Report (op.cit.: 82), that 'young people are being deceived, and placed on tracks without their full understanding or consent'. This was a powerful criticism, which was used by the Secretary of State, when introducing the changes (DfE, 2012: 2):

> She (Professor Wolf) starts by confronting us with some stark truths. Far too many 14-16 year olds are doing courses with little or no value because performance tables incentivise schools to offer these inadequate qualifications. As a result between a quarter and a third of young people between the ages of 16-19 are, right now, either doing nothing at all or pursuing courses which offer no route to higher levels of education or the prospect of meaningful employment. She is correct to say these young people are being deceived and that this is not just unacceptable but morally wrong.

When reviewing the arrangements for Foundation Learning, Professor Wolf was not optimistic about its success, noting the bureaucracy and potential overload for teachers, the funding focus on qualifications, the emphasis on small qualifications and the failure to provide useful learning programmes particularly for those most disengaged. She concluded that thinking needed to be more holistic: 'the current arrangements focus management attention on funding opportunities and hurdles, and away from the construction of learning programmes that actually help young people' (op.cit.: 94).

The recommendations made by Professor Wolf effectively marked the end of a unified 14-19 approach, as her recommendations focused on provision at 16+: 'In this new world, does it make sense to continue thinking in terms of 14-16 and 16-19 as quite distinct phases? I think it does' (op.cit.: 106). Professor Wolf claimed in the report that the overwhelming majority of respondents to the Report were in agreement that there should be no substantial degree of specialisation before the end of Key Stage 4. This claim reflected the report from the DFE (2010), which argued that vocational training at Key Stage 4 did not encourage engagement or lead to better outcomes in post-16 provision. Professor Wolf recommended that 14 year olds be enabled to transfer to FE providers, but that, as in schools, only twenty per cent of time be allocated to vocational or practical training.

Professor Wolf challenged the Tomlinson Committee Report (2004) and the recommendation in the Liberal Democrat's policy (2009) to offer an overarching leaving certificate to encompass both academic and vocational qualifications, when she maintained (op.cit.: 8) that:

> In recent years, both academic and vocational education in England have been bedevilled by well-meaning attempts to pretend that everything is worth the same as everything else. Students and families all know this is nonsense.

She recommended the adoption of a baccalaureate at Key Stage 4, but this was very different from that proposed by Finegold et al. (1990), and recommended in the Tomlinson Committee Report, because Professor Wolf's conception of a baccalaureate consisted solely of specific academic GCSEs, not a mix of qualification types within a unified Diploma.

Of the twenty-seven recommendations in the Report (op.cit.), ten had specific relevance for provision at Level 1. Professor Wolf recommended that the funding should follow the student; that there should be no restrictions on the student in terms of type or level of programme; that the DfE should evaluate models for supplying genuine work experience; students should include at least one occupational qualification of substantial size which offers clear potential for progression; that providers should be free to offer any qualifications from a

recognised and regulated awarding body; students not ready for a substantial vocational courses should have a programme of work experience and maths and English; students under 19, who did not have GSCE A*-C in English and/or maths should be required, as part of their programme, to pursue a course which led either directly to, or represented progress towards these. Key Skills qualifications could not be considered a suitable stepping stone.

Professor Wolf placed her recommendations for change firmly within the context of the labour market. At the launch of the consultation for the Study Programme (DfE, 2011d: 3) she stated:

> Today, changing demand from employers led to a collapse in the youth labour market well in advance of the 2008 financial crisis and the following recession, while ever more young people aspire to higher levels of education. Our 16-19 provision has not kept pace with this massive change. There are close to one and a quarter million 16 and 17 year olds in England today; and far too many of them are not following coherent programmes of study. I am delighted that the government accepted my recommendation that they should do so, and that 16-19 funding should be reformed accordingly. I am also delighted that the government agrees on the importance of maths and English, which are the most important vocational as well as the most important academic skills of all, and therefore need to be central to the design of post-16 education.

Neither the Conservative Party Green Paper (2008) nor the Liberal Party Policy Paper (2009) had foregrounded English and mathematics as a major issue, although both recognised that students should continue to study them, if they had been unsuccessful in school. Professor Wolf, however, ratcheted up their significance, asserting that these were essential subjects, for which success at A*-C GCSE was the benchmark. Her central rationale was that these areas had been neglected, and their importance not recognised sufficiently as essential components of school leaving certification: 'no other developed country allows, let alone effectively encourages, its young people to neglect mathematics and their own language in this way' (op.cit: 170). She described Key Skills provision as valueless in terms of progression, and Functional Skills as 'conceptually incoherent' (op.cit.: 171). She

recommended that alternative qualifications be used instead of Functional Skills, and cited free standing mathematics qualifications as an example of more appropriate qualifications. However this option was not available below Level 2.

Professor Wolf identified significant concerns about provision below Level 2, in particular the funding incentive in the Foundation Learning arrangements, to amass qualifications, irrespective of their intrinsic value or the value to the students; the limited opportunities for work experience and insufficient focus on English and mathematics. In her foreword to the response to the consultation document she stated (DfE, 2012: 3) that: 'Providers were driven down a route of amassing as many formal certificates as possible, and of prioritising easy options over challenging ones. There were no incentives to think in over-arching programme terms, and no rewards for innovation'.

Significantly, Professor Wolf's foreword to the findings of the consultation touched on the need for de-centralisation and localism, which would suggest partnerships for transition to FE provision (ibid: 2):

> Provision…cannot and should not be designed and dictated centrally. Programmes need to be developed by colleges, schools and providers in response to the interests of and ambitions of their clientele, and in response to local needs and demands.

The Study Programme aims

The Study Programme policy was developed in response to the recommendations in the *Wolf Report* (op.cit.), and a national consultation exercise (DfE, 2012). Its formation was swift, compared with the 5 years of formation of Foundation Learning.

The aim of The Study Programme, as set out by the DfE (2012: 3), was:

> *to maximise the potential of young people to progress onto higher education and/or skilled employment by ensuring that vocational routes to higher education and employment are seen as high quality and a genuine alternative to academic routes.*

This aim was to be achieved through the following three objectives:

- Improving the value of post-16 qualifications so that higher numbers of students achieve high-quality and valuable vocational qualifications which enable progression to higher levels of study and skilled employment.

- Raising standards in post-16 English and mathematics so that higher numbers of students study English and mathematics (level 2) and work towards achieving GCSE A*-C in these subjects.

- Improving young people's employability skills by increasing the number of students who experience the workplace and participate in other activity of value which does not necessarily lead to qualifications but enables progression into employment.

It is significant that the policy makers' lexicon changed from 'learners' to 'students', and, when describing their aims and objectives, was markedly different from that used in the Foundation Learning policy documents. Provision below Level 2 was less visible, not seen as a distinct category, but as part of an overall framework. The stated aims of the Study Programme reflected a shift away from the stress on the opportunity offered from Pre-Entry Level to Level 1 and 2 to an aspiration to progress towards higher education or skilled employment by studying substantial qualifications. Since the Study Programme model applied to all 16-19 provision, this ambitious lexicon is perhaps understandable, but, nevertheless, it had less of an emphasis on *approachable* learning opportunities for disengaged young people, as suggested by David Cameron (2008), than to an assumption of a clear career trajectory.

The Study Programme design

The Study Programme design principles were set out in the Government response to consultation and plans for implementation (DfE, 2012), and stated that all students should be given the opportunity to follow a course that:

- Provides progression to a level higher than that of their prior attainment.

- Includes qualification(s) that are of sufficient size and rigour to stretch the student and are clearly linked to suitable progression. opportunities in training, employment or higher levels of education.

- Requires students to work towards GCSE A*- C grade in Maths and English (or other qualifications that will act as a stepping stone for achievement of these qualifications in time).

- Allows for meaningful work experience related to the vocational area of the Study Programme, which develops employability skills and/or creates potential employment options.

- Includes **other activities** unrelated to qualifications that develop the skills, attitudes and confidence that support progression.

The central component, the substantial VQ, represented a determination to assign to history the consequences of the accreditation of small units of qualification on the QCF, that had resulted in *unit gaming*, with *perverse incentives* for lecturers and Awarding Organisations to offer easier qualifications. The relaxation of the requirement to offer qualifications on the QCF signalled its likely demise, as well as the optimistic hope that qualifications would be more linked to the skills required in industry and commerce. However, many funded VQs continued to be competence-based.

The inclusion of work-experience as a main aim was presented as a positive change, although the meaning of *purposeful* had still to be fully defined at the start of the programme. All programmes for 16-19 year olds had to include some external work-experience. This requirement applied to schools as well as GFE colleges and Sixth Form Colleges, so the challenge to find a substantially increased number of suitable external work experience placements was significant.

The amount of funding for the non-qualification activity element was not sufficient for an hour of standard class contact time, and did not allow for the inclusion of general education subjects. It did not reflect the emphasis on localism that Wolf had endorsed. However, it represented a chink of light, as the suggestions for its

use included approaches such as entrepreneurship and enterprise, a significant change from the pedagogical approach of the competence-based VQs.

The fourth requirement, to work towards GCSE in English and mathematics, or acceptable stepping stone qualifications, meant Functional Skills for students with low prior achievement, because no suitable free standing qualifications were available at lower levels. The requirement to work towards GCSE English and mathematics was to become a condition of funding for all students on courses from September 2014.

The assumption that all students who had under-achieved at school should follow a vocational programme was reinforced by the policy decision not to fund GCSE retakes other than English and mathematics as part of the Study Programme. No other qualifications, including industry specific qualifications could be funded.

The Study Programme funding

The *Funding Guidance* of June 2013 (EFA, 2013), published shortly before the programmes started, explained that the funding methodology provided a nationally consistent method of calculating funding for all institutions that provided 16 to 19 courses, using the following formula:

Table 2: Study Programme Funding Formula

Student Numbers	x	National Funding rate	x	Retention Rate	x	Programme cost weighting	+	Disadvantage Funding	+	Area Cost Uplift	=	Total Program Funding

The formula was based on:

a. the number of students,

b. a national funding rate per student,

c. retention factor,

d. programme cost weighting,

e. area cost allowance, and

f. disadvantage.

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Additional Learning Support (ALS) was subsumed in the new formula as Disadvantage Funding, which included post-codes and the number of students in the previous year who had enrolled with low English and mathematics scores. All students were required to have one main aim that could be either a qualification or an employment destination, with funding dependent on retention. The funding was based on the completion of the agreed programme of learning, and allocated at a proportionate rate for shorter programmes. No programmes below two weeks could be funded. The same basic principles and funding arrangements applied to all three levels of provision for 16-19 year olds: it seemed that, young people on programmes below level 2 would, from 2014, be funded equitably compared with other levels, in terms of programme size and duration.

The inclusion of non-qualification activity as part of a student's programme confirmed the focus on employability, or other forms of preparation for work, and was clarified in the funding guidance (EFA, 2013: 11) as follows:

> Non-qualification activity should be based on a tutor's or teacher's assessment of a student's needs and abilities but may include tutorials, coaching and/or mentoring or other taught courses. The aim of non-qualification activity is to improve student employability skills and enable them to participate in other activity of value which does not necessarily lead to qualifications but enables them to progress. This is particularly important for students studying at level 2 and below.

Accountability arrangements

With the withdrawal of funding by qualification success, the EFA introduced retention, based on programme completion, rather than qualification success as the main performance measure.

The EFA further explained (ibid, 2013) that organisations would be accountable for the quality of the Study Programme that they offered their students through:

- Reformed 16-19 performance tables that provide clear and easily understood measures of student achievement. A core principle of the Study Programme is that they support and encourage progression to the next level of education or employment.

- The publication of student destinations (further education, higher education or employment) after their study.

- Publication of data on GCSEs (including those who have achieved English and maths) and other Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications in addition to the already published annual data on A level results and other level 3 qualifications.

- An Ofsted inspection framework that, from September 2013, would pay particular attention to the quality and coherence of the Study Programme and how successfully they prepare students for further study or employment.

- Robust minimum standards that all 16-19 providers will be expected to meet with financial penalties, intervention and, ultimately closure, for those failing to meet them.

These measures represented an increase in the arrangements to audit and measure the performance of organisations.

Foundation Learning and the Study Programme: Comparison of Design

Key Similarities

The Foundation Learning programme and the Study Programme both consisted of national, centralised requirements, with progression to a higher level of qualification a main aim. Both emphasised the requirement for a personalised programme, with wrap-around guidance and support, and early decision-making about the programme to be followed. They required VQs, where students were able to benefit from them, and both assumed in their programme designs that students who had under-achieved at school would follow a vocational programme. Both included Functional Skills as a strand. Organisations incurred a financial penalty if students with a qualification aim left early because of finding employment.

Key Differences

The headline difference between the two programmes was an abandonment of demand-led funding based on qualification success: the Study Programme funding was based on the completion of an agreed programme of learning for individual

students.   Retention became the main performance measure, with financial penalties for early leaving without programme completion. The full-time programme hours were funded on the assumption of an agreed minimum, which meant a significant increase at Level 1 and below, and a significant reduction at Level 3. No programmes below 2 weeks could be funded. The requirement to select qualifications from the QCF was relaxed, but students had to be entered for a substantial VQ, which was to be the main aim for most students. Those not ready for a substantial vocational qualification could have work experience as a main aim. PSD was no longer a requirement and work experience became a mandatory requirement for all students, with an expectation that some would be with an external employer. All students, from 2014, had to be entered for a GCSE English and mathematics programme, or a stepping stone qualification that would lead to a qualification at A*- C in those subjects. A small amount of funding was allocated for 'local' non-qualification activity which could include tutorial activity or entrepreneurial activity. PSD was no longer a requirement, and retakes in GCSEs other than English and mathematics could no longer be funded, neither could other qualifications, including specialist occupational qualifications.

Chapter Summary

The first part of this chapter argued that the aims of Foundation Learning were presented by policy-makers as progressive, and sprang from the New Labour government's socially democratic aim to improve life chances through education. However, the programme design continued the settlement of the 1990s, with three segmented strands. Two of these strands enshrined a particularly complex form of outcomes-based assessment adopted for the QCF, despite literatures from the 1990s questioning the value of NVQs, and as Bernstein (op.cit.) argued, perpetuating educational disadvantage. The third strand, Functional Skills, had been known to be problematic (Isaacs, 2013).

In the second part of this chapter I have shown how the *Wolf Report* (op.cit.), provided a powerful indictment of the Foundation Learning Programme, making weighty recommendations for change. The Study Programme purported to be a response to that Report's recommendations, but, in reality, continued aspects of

policy that had undermined perceptions of Foundation Learning. It ignored recommendations such as need for greater localism, and reservations about Functional Skills. Its introduction, specifically for 16-19 year olds, represented a backward step for the 14-19 agenda.

Two underpinning themes emerged from this chapter. Firstly, the ambiguities, ironies and antinomies that had characterised policy making and implementation since 1944, became even more evident during New Labour Government's Third Way and the Coalition Government's policies. Secondly, the failure of policy-makers to learn from research evidence in their generation and formation of educational policy, continued.

These themes, combined with my understanding of the origins and structures of both programmes contributed, in the next chapter, to the refinement of the research aims and the development of the questions deployed when interviewing participants in the four sub-case organisations.

CHAPTER THREE: **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

Introduction

This chapter locates the research methodology within the underpinning research aims, building on the perspectives of the previous two chapters. I justify my adoption of a case study approach and the instruments used for data collection and analysis, as well as the conceptual perspectives that informed that analysis.

Research Aims

The purpose of the thesis was to explore the perceptions and understandings of managers and lecturers in the Further Education Sector (FES) of Foundation Learning and the Study Programme, with a specific focus on the extent to which the provision enabled progression. Following the historical overview of the background to these programmes, three specific aspects were identified as the basis of the exploration:

1. the consequences of policy implementation in four sub-cases, in respect of their organisational mission, strategic aims, provision and student cohorts;

2. the participants' perceptions of the curriculum and associated pedagogies, and the extent to which they mediated in order to improve the provision for students.

3. the extent to which managers and lecturers perceived the programmes as enabling vertical progression;

Shaping the research questions: theoretical perspectives

My historical overview traced a continuity of failure by successive governments to provide successful educational programmes for the diverse cohort of young people who had underachieved at school. By 2010, when Foundation Learning was introduced, some 40 per cent of young people had not met the standard expected of a school leaver. I argued that the history of the FES in terms of its policy and governance and the pedagogical assumptions, had been characterised by ambiguities, lost opportunities, ironies and competing policy agendas, which had contributed to the marginalisation of school leavers who had underachieved at school. I found that in many respects their comparative life chances in 2010 bore a

strong resemblance to those identified by Newsom in *Half our Future* (DES, 1963).

I made reference, in the the historical overview, to the discourses that had emerged from the literatures. Four theoretical perspectives enabled me better to understand how the Foundation Learning policy, as I had perceived it, came to be impoverished. These included theoretical perspectives about policy and pedagogy, as well as the ways in which members of staff in the FES responded to curriculum change. I decided to adopt the concept of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, 2005) and the associated terminology of *dominant neoliberal* and *subordinate social democratic strands,* as the lens through which to explore the consequences of policy enactment for the four organisations, taking account of their specific circumstances and contexts. This meant exploring the impact of the centralised curriculum, the funding methodology, and the performance measures, which could be seen as the dominant neoliberal strands of policy, and the extent to which the educational programmes enabled positive progression through the Qualification and Curriculum Framework (QCF) and associated compensatory arrangements, which could be seen as the subordinate social democratic strand.

When analysing responses to the educational programmes, I made use of the pedagogical concepts developed by Bernstein (op.cit.) of *restrictive and elaborated codes* and *formal* and *public language,* as well as the concepts of *vertical and horizontal discourse,* which proved useful tools when looking at the pedagogic approaches to the three strands of the Foundation Learning programme. I also acknowledged the powerful concept of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) when considering the ways in which students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are marginalised because of their lack of linguistic and educational capital, and I linked this to the ways in which the curriculum reproduced educational disadvantage.

The literatures in the historical overview had highlighted the different ways in which members of staff in the Further Education Sector (FES) had responded to policy changes. After my first visit, it became clear that participants' responses were grounded in their backgrounds, so I decided to explore ways in which

educational background, previous training, commercial or industrial experience, pedagogic memory and experience of the sector shaped the sense participants made of the policy requirements in their specific contexts, and the extent to which they mediated to improve the programme for the students. To aid my understanding of participants' responses to curriculum change, I made use of the categories of *implementation, adaptation and assimilation* in the typology developed by Higham (2003).

Each of the above perspectives is weighty, and merits a separate study, but the historical overview suggested that the failure of the programmes did not rest with just one element, but was the consequence of a cluster of elements. These elements included the failure to learn from previous ineffective policies; the prescriptive, centralised nature of the policy; contestable assertions that accretion of qualifications alone can improve life chances; negative perceptions about the capabilities of students and the narrowness of the pedagogical range adopted in the programme design.

I submitted my initial research proposal in 2010, just as Foundation Learning was about to be implemented nationally. My purpose was to carry out a contemporaneous study, with two stages of visits, to explore the perspectives and perceptions of practitioners to the Foundation Learning programme. After the *Wolf Report* (DfE 2011a) was published, and the DfE subsequently announced the change from Foundation Learning to the Study Programme from August 2013, my research plan expanded to include the participants' initial perceptions of the Study Programme, and encompassed a third phase of visits in September 2013.

Research Questions

The overarching research questions underpinning the first two stages of visits were:

1. How did managers and lecturers perceive, and make sense of the change to Foundation Learning?
2. How did policy enactment impact on the organisational structures, and the provision for students in the different contexts?

3. How did managers and lecturers perceive and respond to the changed educational requirements?

4. To what extent did managers and lecturers make accommodations or mediations in order to improve the provision for the students?

5. To what extent did the Foundation Learning policy enable students to progress?

The third stage of visits explored ways managers' perceptions and understandings of the change to the Study Programme. The key questions at the interviews were:

1. How did policy enactment impact on the organisational structures, and on the provision for students?

2. How did managers perceive and respond to the changed educational requirements?

3. To what extent did managers consider that the Study Programme would enable students to progress to a Level 2 course?

Research Methods

The rationale for a case-study approach

When planning this study, I initially considered conducting a survey, which would have included a range of different settings across the country, because I wanted to find out how managers and lecturers had responded to the new programme.

However, once the *Wolf Report* (op.cit,) had been published, I reconsidered my research approach. My original proposal, to explore perspectives and perceptions of college staff from a large number of GFE colleges and Independent Learning Providers (ILPs), using questionnaires and a small sample of visits, ran the risk of mirroring the approach. I therefore decided to adopt an approach that looked in much greater depth at a small number of different organisations, in a diversity of contexts. That would enable me to elicit a range of viewpoints and to compare in greater depth how managers and lecturers had responded to policy and curriculum change, and how these had impacted on their provision.

Reflecting on the ironies and ambiguities that I had identified in the first two chapters, I decided to adopt an interpretative stance, using mainly *how* and *why*

questions about the programme. In order to do this I chose a case study approach involving four sub-cases in the FES. I found the work of Yin (2009) particularly helpful in my decision-making. He argues that a case study is particularly advantageous when asking *how* or *why* questions about a contemporary state of events over which the investigator has little or no control. This exactly reflected my situation, and I took account of a range of other perspectives about the use of case studies when planning my approach.

Cohen et al. (2011: 298-9) describe a case study as providing: 'a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles'. They suggest further that a strength of case studies is that they observe effects in real life contexts, recognising that 'context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects, and that in-depth understanding is required to do justice to the case'. They argue that a case study approach is different from other forms of social enquiry such as surveys, because it concentrates on naturally occurring situations. A case study is defined by Robson (2000: 178) as: 'a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.' Ritchie and Lewis (eds.) (2010: 52) see the defining features of a case study as being 'a multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context.' These perspectives all emphasise the value of presenting real-life situations, in different contexts, using many viewpoints.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that case studies may offer working hypotheses into other case studies, depending on what they call *fittingness,* which describes the degree of transferability and congruence between the contexts. They further suggest that it is necessary when using a case study approach to provide sufficient contextual information for the reader to understand the findings. This background information could include historical, political and demographic information as appropriate to the study. Such an information base provides a *thick description* (Geertz, 1973), of the experiences and perceptions of the respondents. I have provided this contextual information through the historical overview in Chapter

One and more specific, factual information about the programmes in Chapter Two and the FES context in 2010. I have also provided contextual information about the circumstances of the four case-study organisations.

Cohen et al. (op.cit.: 290) argue that case studies strive to 'portray what it is like to be in a particular situation…combining subjective and objective data'. Although a case study approach is essentially interpretative, and differs epistemologically from a positivist approach which focuses on objective knowledge, knowable externally, the division between an interpretative approach and a positivist approach has increasingly been challenged in practice. Bourdieu (1990) proposed a research model which included both subjective and objective approaches so that triangulation is possible, and Pring (2000) described as a false dualism the separation of qualitative and quantitative methods. My research focuses on the understandings of participants and the meanings they construct, as they make sense of their experiences of curriculum change. The data are mainly qualitative, although I also made use of quantitative data with reference to variations in participation, success and progression rates in the organisations. I also made use of the relevant contemporary policy documentation, such as the policy requirements for each programme, and research findings that informed my understanding of the programmes and the sector.

I decided to adopt a case study approach that allowed for the inclusion of more than one unit of the case (Yin, op.cit). In order to provide a *thick description* (ibid.) my first two chapters contained rich detail, including a comprehensive historical background that traces the ways in which the political, socio-economic and pedagogical landscapes have shaped the provision for under-achieving school leavers. I provided contextual information about the FE sector and for the four organisations that formed the sub-cases, with the expectation that each setting would have both replicable and contrasting elements, depending on their environments and mission.

Researcher bias

Within the research community, the suitability of case studies as a reliable basis for research has been contested, with researcher bias being a major consideration, because the case study can become a circular argument, simply a fulfilment of the researcher's initial prejudices or suspicions. Yin (op.cit.) identifies this as a particular possibility because a case study investigator has to understand the issues beforehand, and the basis of the case is therefore known.

I was very much aware of this, because my initial interest in exploring the impact of Foundation Learning arose from my perception of the curriculum as impoverished. In selecting an interpretative approach, I sought to limit the possibility of researcher bias by using open-ended, *why* and *how* questions, allowing participants to present their own perspectives, describing how they understood and made sense of the changes in their specific contexts. I decided to structure the interview questions in relation to the national guidance requirements for Foundation Learning programme itself, and, subsequently, the Study Programme. These requirements are set out in Chapter Two. This framework would allow for the emergence of data independent of my initial concerns about this area of provision. By focusing on the ways in which participants had responded to, and made sense of, the policy requirements within their own contexts, I established from the outset a clearly objective agenda.

Additionally, in my final selection of the four sub-cases case I selected one General Further Education College (GFE) and one Independent Learning Provider (ILP), which I knew from the inspection reports had been seen as good or better in relation to Level 1 provision, and one GFE and one ILP where the history had been of satisfactory results. I also took into account of the very different financial contexts of small, charity-based organisations where Foundation Learning was the main programme, and much larger organisations where Level 1 provision might have similar numbers of enrolments, but where the provision formed a smaller percentage of the overall income. In selecting the sub-cases in this way, I anticipated the emergence of data that would reflect a range of perceptions about the Foundation Learning programme.

Generalisation

A further contested aspect of case studies has been the extent to which they allow for generalisation. During the 1980s and 1990s, debates about generalisation were common (Bassey, 1999; Robson, 2002; Yin, 2004 and 2009), but twenty years later a settlement was reached which acknowledges ways in which generalisations could be made from a case study, because case study researchers are able to focus on the uniqueness of a situation. Cohen et al. (op.cit.: 284) draw on recent perspectives to show that a 'case study, like a single experiment, contributes to the expansion and generalisation of theory which can help researchers to understand other similar cases'.

I suggest that my case study would allow for the generation of just such further discussion and debate, because, by using a staged a approach, the data would provide a series of snapshots of how the participants on the ground experienced policy change, and why they responded in the ways that they did. This data could be utilised by other researchers investigating similar cases.

Yin (op.cit.: 38) suggests that 'the mode of generalisation should be analytic, not in the statistical sense, but in relation to the underlying theoretical background'. I have made use of the themes and theoretical perspectives emerging from chapters one and two, to confirm the underpinning questions and the question schedule for the respondents.

The organisational context

Foundation Learning was fully implemented in August 2010, after the change in May 2010 from the New Labour Government to the Coalition Government. Foundation Learning had been introduced within the context of New Labour's 14-19 local strategy, in which Local Partnership Boards had been developed to encourage co-operation between organisations offering provision for 14-19 year olds, although the implementation varied significantly between partnerships. Foundation Learning was funded in schools, colleges and ILPs. After the election, the Coalition Government swiftly changed the performance criteria for schools, privileging GCSE results over vocational courses, and consequently it became less

common in schools at Level 1, although it was offered at lower levels. The governance of the sector was in a period of transition and turbulence throughout the life of Foundation Learning. The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) had just taken over from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the funding of provision up to the age of 19, and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) assumed responsibility for adult provision. From 2012 the Education Funding Agency (EFA) replaced the YPLA, becoming a funding conduit, as the local authorities (LAs) took over responsibility for the commissioning of provision.

The change to demand-led funding was new for colleges, but not for ILPs, which from the time of their inception in the 1980s had been funded on the basis of outcomes. With E2E funding in ILPs, employment outcomes had been privileged, and other outcomes such as the achievement of objectives and of qualifications generated much less income. Colleges had been funded on a combination of participation and QSRs, and schools were funded more generously on a per capita basis. The expansion of vocational provision and the availability of courses at all levels had been significant since 2000, although not all colleges provided progression routes in all subject areas. Course availability varied significantly across localities and organisations. Very few apprenticeships were available for 16-18 year olds and pre-apprenticeship programmes were no longer funded.

This period marked the acceleration of a gradual process of budget reductions since incorporation in 1993, and from 2010, applied particularly to the Adult Skills Budget (ASB) and ESOL courses, as well as to changes in the funding formula allocation for additional learning support (ALS).

The use, since 2000, of a combination of centralised funding methodologies and policy levers to incentivise organisations to meet national targets had led to a culture of *strategic compliance* (Coffield et al., 2008). Inspection frameworks had changed significantly since 1993, and, over time, focused much more closely on the implementation of funding streams, rather than the strengths of different subjects in the FES, which had been a key focus of the FEFC inspections. This changed marked a gradual shift from an inspection framework focused primarily on the

quality of educational provision nationally, to one which focuses on the extent to which individual organisations comply with national funding requirements.

Unit of analysis

I selected two GFE colleges and two ILPs as the units of analysis. I had previously had professional contact with a senior manager in each organisation, and also had some prior knowledge of their level 1 work. One GFE college and one ILP had very strong track records of achievements at Level 1 and below, and one GFE college and one ILP had been found satisfactory for overall effectiveness in their most recent Ofsted inspection.

I selected four organisations located in different environments, taking into account the historical overview in Chapter One, which identified ways in which local 14-19 Partnership Board arrangements were variable. Three of the organisations had previously offered an E2E programme, and one ILP had been funded until 2009 through an European Social Fund contract to offer level 1 provision. Both colleges had sufficient range of provision at Entry Level 3 and Level 1 to be able to compare approaches to Foundation Learning across different subjects and by different members of staff. Alpha College was a medium-sized semi-rural college with two main sites, and, although attracting more students of minority ethnic heritage than in the population as a whole, had a mainly white student population. Foundation Learning was offered on two sites. Beta College was a large urban college, with an extensive travel-to-learn catchment, and a highly diverse population, both in terms of race and ethnicity and median income levels. ESOL provision was extensive. Foundation Learning was offered on two sites with provision at Level 1 and at Entry Level 3 in a range of subjects.

Gamma ILP was a small charitable centre, located in an urban area with pockets of affluence and extreme poverty. It had a long history of niche provision, leading to specialist vocational qualifications mainly at Level 1. It had been founded with a mission to serve the local population, and had significant involvement with local schools, including link courses. Delta ILP was a medium-sized charitable centre and had a similarly long history of niche provision for young people from poor socio-

economic backgrounds, who were not ready to take a long specialist qualification. The centre was located in a highly diverse area of multiple deprivation, and referrals were principally from the local youth justice teams, the Connexions Service and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Data sources and instruments used

My research data was generated from two main sources: policy documentation and research findings, and semi-structured interviews. These documents, combined with the background information in chapters one and two, provided me with the basis for the broad topics in the semi-structured interviews. I used the stated policy aims, requirements and specifications of the two educational programmes when exploring the perspectives of the participants.

The policy documentation that I made use of when exploring the background to Foundation Learning, included the DfES White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills* (2005) and DfES White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (2006). I also made use of a number of guidance documents from the Department for Children, Skills and Families (DCSF), the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the LSC and the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

The policy documentation that I used to explore the introduction of The Study Programme included the Cabinet Office Report (2011) *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility*; the Coalition White Paper *New Challenges, New Chances* (BIS, 2011); the *Wolf Report* (op.cit.), the Conservative Party Green Paper (2008) *Building Skills, transforming lives: A training and Apprenticeship Revolution;* the Liberal Democrats' Policy Paper (2009) *Equity and Excellence. Policies for 5-19 education in England's schools and colleges,* and specific Education Funding Agency (EFA) guidance documents.

The use of interviews

Yin (op.cit.) argues that the interviews used for case studies are guided conversations rather than structured queries, and that in an in-depth interview it is

possible to ask interviewees about matters of fact as well as their own opinions and insights. The four constant features of an in-depth interview identified by Legard et al. in Ritchie and Lewis (eds.) (2010) for case-studies, are, firstly, that it is intended to combine structure with flexibility; secondly that it is interactive by nature, so that material is generated by the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee; thirdly that the researcher uses probes and other techniques to explore and achieve an answer in sufficient depth; and fourthly the interview is generative, in that new knowledge is likely to be created. I decided to use in-depth interviews as my primary source of data because I wanted to explore the perceptions and understandings of the participants as they made sense of the policy change and enacted the policy. My previous knowledge of the topic would enable me to identify, and be sensitive to, significant data that emerged.

In formulating the questions, I took account of my own experience in interviewing, including, most recently, as an HMI in the FES, where I have found that open questions usually elicit the most helpful responses, when I am seeking perceptions and understandings. However, I also needed sometimes to ask a more closed question when requiring a specific response. I therefore adopted the approach advocated by Yin (op.cit.) for case studies, by using mainly *how* and *why* lead questions, with probes where required. I asked a former, very experienced college Principal to test the questions, and the probes, and I made adjustments, following those suggestions.

The staged approach to data collection

My study was contemporaneous, enabling me to have two stages of visits. This allowed more data to emerge during a period of significant change to the governance of the FES. The staged approach to the research began with a scoping visits to each of the four sub-cases. At those visits we agreed the research plan, with the timescale of the visits and the detail of the possible interviews. We agreed that individual interviews would take place, lasting around one hour, and that the lecturers would be representative of the range of provision. Where time and timetabling constraints excluded individual interviews, we agreed group interviews.

This staged approach is shown diagrammatically below.

Table 3. The Staged Interview Schedule

DATES	ALPHA GFE	BETA GFE	GAMMA ILP	DELTA ILP
STAGE ONE				
July 2012	Scoping Visit	Scoping Visit	Scoping Visit	Scoping Visit
October 2012	4 Managers 12 Lecturers	4 Managers 6 Lecturers	1 Manager 1 Lecturer	2 Managers 1 lecturer
STAGE TWO				
March 2013	4 Managers 2 Lecturers	2 Managers 2 lecturers*	1 Manager 1 Lecturer**	2 Managers 1 lecturer
STAGE THREE				
September 2013	4 Managers	2 Managers	2 Managers	2 Managers

* I was not able to interview any 'trades' lecturers as planned, because of staffing changes. Entry Level 3 courses had not recruited.

** I was not able to interview other lecturers as initially envisaged, because of timetabling constraints and external visits.

Although I was not able to interview as many lecturers as initially planned, the number of visits generated substantial amounts of data, and the overall range proved sufficiently diverse for my purpose.

I interviewed 38 participants, 23 lecturers and 15 managers. I decided not to interview students, because my focus was an organisational comparison of policy changes and the consequences for practitioners. I conducted interviews with managers and lecturers in relation to Foundation Learning, and with managers only in relation to the Study Programme. Some managers were interviewed twice for Foundation Learning, and once to explore the change to the Study Programme.

Where, in one GFE college and one ILP there had been a change of senior leadership, the new manager was interviewed once. The Foundation Learning visits were carried out between July 2012 and March 2013, and the visits to explore the managers' perspectives and perceptions of introduction of the Study Programme, took place in September 2013.

Qualitative data collection

Arthur and Nazroo, in Ritchie and Lewis (eds.) (2010) argue that studies with a particular emphasis on comparison will require more structure than a single case, in order to provide points of comparison. I obtained information at each interview about the role, qualifications and experience of the participants, so that I could analyse and compare the relative importance of experience and professional formation. In order to be able to compare the findings from each centre, I asked the managers general questions about the consequences of the enactment of the policy in relation to the organisation and to the provision, as well as exploring local and regional contexts. I then explored perceptions and understandings about the Foundation Learning educational policy requirements: initial assessment and choice; three strands of provision; the vocational strand; functional skills; personal and social development; progression at the end of the programme.

With the lecturers, I focused on their perceptions of policy change for their roles as lecturers, before exploring specific curricular aspects of the programme. The questions were not always discussed strictly in the same order, and in some cases, for example, with very new lecturers, or where lecturers only taught Functional Skills or the Vocational Qualification (VQ), I reduced the span of questions. No matter what the order of the questions at the interviews, I have presented the data in a similar order for ease of comparison. I interviewed some managers for brief updates at the second phase, not a full interview. These updates were added to the summaries, so that I had a record of any changes in perception or organisational arrangements. I used full in-depth, semi-structured interviews with managers for perceptions about the Study Programme.

The question schedule for the interviews is attached as Appendix A.

Ethical considerations

I agreed that the identities of each organisation and each individual within each organisation would be strictly confidential, with different names. I agreed to delete any electronic records and to anonymise the transcripts. For transparency, I provided each organisation with an outline of my research aims, and for the interviews, I presented the participants with an outline of the main questions I would be asking. At the end of each interview I summarised the responses with the interviewee(s) allowing time for any amendments, and checking that this was an accurate record of the discussion.

The participants were made aware that I was appointed as Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) in the FES, and I made it clear that my purpose as a researcher differed from that of an inspector. I explained that I wanted to explore the impact for practitioners of the introduction of Foundation Learning, and that I was not making any judgements about their performance. I clarified that I was seeking, through a form of professional engagement, to listen to their perspectives and understand how they made sense of the policy change in their specific circumstances. I undertook not to be involved in any future inspection activity with the four sub-cases, and I registered each organisation as a conflict of interest with Ofsted.

Transparency of role as researcher

I was aware that my knowledge of the Foundation Learning programme prior to, and during the period of the research visits, was not insignificant, so I had insider information. I inspected Foundation Learning provision, and I had also led a national survey (Ofsted, 2011) which had focused on Foundation Learning provision for students with high needs. The findings from this survey had identified significant shortcomings in the programme. Similarly, I had prior knowledge of the Study Programme. In July 2013, I had carried out a brief survey of ten organisations, that involved all types of college and ILPs, which focused on the change to Study Programmes at all levels of provision, not just Level 1. The purpose of this survey had been to prepare a presentation for HMI about the change to the Study Programmes, so I had a sound understanding of the new programme. I found these experiences very helpful as background information, but I recognised the

importance of limiting the extent to which this insider knowledge became intrusive during the interviews. As with limiting researcher bias, I found two strategies helpful: firstly, I was very clear about the difference between the activity of inspection and that of a researcher; this enabled me to clarify and discuss my purpose with the interviewees. Secondly, the presentation of the range of questions with the interviewees, before, or at the start of the interviews made the line of enquiry clear. Additionally, in my questioning, I found the use of the introductory phrase 'tell me about', with a focus on *how* and *why* follow up questions, very productive, because the interviewee was in charge of the responses.

Analysis and presentation of data

The interviews generated significant amounts of raw data. In order to analyse the results, I adopted a simple and transparent coding system, using ABCD for each organisation and numbering the participants. This coding is included as Appendix B. In order to make the data manageable I stored it in relation to responses to each question and in each sub-case separately. I made particular use of the summaries of each interview, which covered responses to the key questions and helped with comparisons between the sub-cases.

My approach to the presentation of the data was modified in response to the findings. I intended initially to present the data thematically. Using the themes that emerged from the first two chapters, I prepared a pro-forma to capture the findings in relation to the following broad aspects: centralised performativity measures; social mobility; equity; mediation; specific contexts in their localities; the expansion/reduction of provision; perceptions of the curriculum/pedagogy. My draft text after the first visit was based on these themes. However, it became evident as I completed my first phase of visits that the nuances of difference, and the powerful testimony and voices of the individual participants would be diminished by this approach. I decided, therefore, to present the data by sub-cases, rather than thematically.

After my first visit to Alpha College, I found significant differences in response from participants whose perceptions and understandings were grounded in their previous training and experience. I therefore modified my analysis of the data to reflect an emerging picture whereby the responses of the participants could be categorised as vocational, transitional or inclusive, depending on their professional formation and experience. This analysis is included at the start of each section of interviews. It was partly this categorisation, plus the type of courses that lecturers were teaching, that governed my presentation of the cases, as I needed to find a way to group the responses together to avoid excessive repetition and length.

The responses of the most experienced participants reflected their use of what I have termed pedagogic memory or pedagogic pragmatism, as they were able to draw on their professional knowledge and previous experiences to in order to mediate on behalf of the students where they found shortfalls in the Foundation Learning requirements. These responses reflected the findings of Higham (2003), when he categorised course teams in relation to the extent to which they responded to the changed curriculum in relation to GNVQ, using the terms *implementation, adaptation or assimilation.* I made use of this categorisation in presenting and summarising the findings of the cases.

I found on the first day of the first stage of visits, that many participants' responses indicated striking differences between their perceptions of the structural consequences of policy change and of the pedagogical perspectives. The responses of the managers were, understandably, more focused on the organisational impacts of the policy changes, although their perceptions about the nature of the Foundation learning curriculum were also often very insightful. In order to capture this, I presented the perspectives of managers in each sub-case first, followed by the perspectives of lecturers. I further divided the data in two main sections: firstly, the structural aspects, which encapsulated headline **policy** aspects and the consequences for the organisation and its provision, and, secondly, the **pedagogical** aspects, which captured the educational consequences.

The perspectives of participants in response to Foundation Learning, and to the introduction of the Study Programme, are presented separately, enabling comparisons between organisations.

The summaries at the end of the presentation of each sub-case include analyses in relation to the *double shuffle* (Hall, 2005), the implications of the dominance of a pedagogy that contributes to a *horizontal discourse and restrictive codes* (Bernstein, 1990, 1999 and 2000), and the extent to which participants, in their responses to curriculum change were able to *mediate* (Higham, 2003) in order to improve the Foundation Learning programme.

Changes to the research implementation plan

Beta College and Delta ILP both underwent restructuring during the planned visit schedule. The senior managers changed during the time of the research, and my main initial contacts left both organisations. This meant that I was not able to carry out the number of planned interviews in the second stage, with 'trades' lecturing staff in Beta College that I had initially planned, because of restructuring and staff changes. Similarly, because of timetabling constraints, where lecturers were on fractional timetables, or on external visits, I was also only able to interview one lecturer in Gamma ILP and two lecturers in Delta ILP, both newly in post. Nevertheless, I found I had sufficient data for a comparative study of the four organisations. The demise of Foundation Learning, which I initially thought would be a disadvantage, proved helpful, because the intertwining perceptual, structural and pedagogical themes emerging from the Foundation Learning interviews as constituting barriers to progress, appeared to be reproduced in some respects in the proposed Study Programme, illustrating the continuing marginalisation of the cohort. I interviewed managers only in relation to the Study Programme in all of the organisations, as the programme had only just started. This interview was an addition to my original research plan, when I first agreed the schedule of visits.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I outlined my rationale for adopting an interpretative, qualitative approach to my empirical research. I summarised key perspectives about a case-study approach, and found the work of a range of researchers helpful in clarifying

its uses for the exploration in some depth of the perspectives of participants. I explained the basis of my selection of the four sub-cases, and the rationale for choosing a semi-structured approach to interviewing, which was to be the main source of data collection. I explained how, in adopting this approach to the interviews I was able to share these questions with participants at the start of the interviews. This enabled greater transparency and also limited researcher bias. I developed most of my lead interview questions in relation to the Foundation Learning and the Study Programme requirements, so that they were as objective as possible. I was clear that the identity of the sub-case organisations and the individuals be anonymised and would remain confidential.

In order to simplify the data analysis, I developed the interview questions so that they reflected both the structural consequences of policy enactment, and those that related to pedagogy. This enabled me to make use of the theoretical perspectives in relation to these aspects, so that I could understand how the participants made sense of the changes to the provision. It also enabled me to explore what implementation meant for each organisation, and to make direct comparisons about how they responded.

I clarified my decision to present the data separately in relation to the four sub-cases, so that the powerful and insightful testimony of the participants in each organisation could be voiced clearly.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FOUR SUB-CASE ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings from the research carried out between July 2012 and September 2013. The findings represent a contemporaneous exploration of the ways in which the Foundation Learning programmes and the Study programme were perceived and enacted by managers and lecturers in the Further Education Sector (FES). Four institutions were selected as cases: two General Further Education Colleges (GFEs), Alpha College, a medium sized college and Beta College a large college, and two Independent Learning Providers (ILPs), Gamma ILP and Delta ILP. In 2009/2010, the academic year prior to the national implementation of the Foundation Learning policy, both GFEs provided Entry to Employment (E2E) courses, and Level 1 specialist vocational courses in four specialist subject areas, plus general non-specialist vocational studies taster courses, referred to as General Foundation Level (GFL). Both GFEs offered Foundation Learning on two main sites, which covered wide travel-to-learn areas, one rural, the other urban. In 2010 both ILPs only offered Foundation Learning, based in one location. Three organisations were located in large and diverse conurbations, the other with a combined rural and urban catchment.

Each organisation was was visited in two phases to explore staff perceptions of Foundation Learning, and once to capture very early perceptions of the Study Programme. I made use of additional understanding gained from my day job as an HMI, which involved contributions to Ofsted surveys about Foundation Learning and the Study Programme, conversations with officials, as well as inspections of Foundation Learning in different institutions.

I had found on Ofsted inspections that members of staff, understandably, tended to see HMI as agents of the government of the day, and assumed that they should be seen to respond positively to national requirements and their implementation. Rarely did they raise objections or reservations about national policies. On inspection surveys I had found that members of staff tended to be more open, and

identified some of the challenges they faced. On the visits for this research, with many hour-long, semi-structured interviews, I found it was possible to explore in greater depth how national policy changes, together with local circumstances, impacted differently on institutions, and in one case finally resulted in closure. I found also an underbelly of dissatisfaction about the pedagogical shortcomings inherent in the structure and approach of qualifications that is rarely aired on inspections, where the focus is on how policy requirements are implemented and how well teachers teach, and less commonly on the value of what students are required to learn.

Essential to my engagement with the organisations was an absolute guarantee of anonymity for individuals and the organisations. I have therefore anonymised the responses, and given the organisations coded names. This has allowed for powerful narratives about the impact of policy on the experiences of managers and lecturers, that might not otherwise have emerged.

The rationale for the presentation of the data

It became clear from the first scoping visits that each institution had a distinct response to the Foundation Learning programme, reflecting the different contexts and missions, and the relative significance of the programme for their provision. This divergence of response continued with the introduction of the Study Programme. I have therefore presented the findings from the four organisations separately, bringing out the distinctiveness of the impact of the policy changes for each institution.

Each case is presented in two main sections: Foundation Learning followed by a much shorter section on the Study Programme. This is followed by a very brief summary of the participants' perspectives. The chapter finishes with a comparative summary of the perspectives for the participants in the four sub-cases, capturing the complexity of differences and similarities.

As described in more detail in Chapter Three, I made use of an in-depth, semi-structured approach to interviews, asking the same initial questions, with prompts as required, at each interview. I had found, from my experience as Her Majesty's

Inspector (HMI), that the sense people make of their situation can be revealed, at least partially, by the narratives they used to describe themselves and their situations, so I started each interview with an open question asking the participants about their experience of the student cohort, and ways in which the Foundation Learning policy compared with the previous provision.

It became clear from the early visits to the organisations that the participants' perceptions as they enacted the policy change were complex and multi-layered. A common factor that emerged was the distinction in perception between the structural impacts for the organisation, and the consequences of enactment for the experience of the students in terms of the requirements of the educational programme. I found it was not uncommon for managers and lecturers to see benefits or disadvantages for their provision, but to hold very different views about the curriculum. This reflected what I described in the introductory chapters as the tensions, ambiguities and ironies in provision around Level 1, exemplifying the dominant and subordinate strands of New Labour's Third Way (Hall, 2005), and its continuation in the Coalition Government policies.

I have therefore presented the findings of each of the four cases in two sections: the **structural consequences** of policy change and enactment for the provision, which largely captured the responses to the first set of questions, and the **educational consequences** of the policy change and enactment, which largely captured the second set of questions. These are attached as Appendix B.

These main sections are sub-divided broadly in response to the key questions. The sub-divisions are more variable in response to the perspectives of lecturers, depending their experience, which range from more than 30 years in the sector to first-time appointments. In Delta ILP, for example, the two lecturers were both very new to the organisation at the time of the interview, so not all questions applied.

The data produced from the semi-structured interviews were extensive. I therefore presented the perspectives of the respondents in groups, rather than individually. The perspectives of the managers are presented first, because they described in

detail the structural consequences for their organisations of the enactment of the national policies. The perspectives of the lecturers in the two colleges are grouped together to reflect the different aspects of the Foundation Learning programme, and the different cohorts of students. In the two colleges these groupings included:

- Entry Level 3 and Level 1 **specialist** programmes where students study one vocational subject, plus Functional Skills and Personal and Social Development (PSD) Units, Awards or Certificates.

- Entry level 3 and Level 1 **GFL** programmes where students take units from two or more vocational sectors, plus Functional Skills and PSD units. The former E2E programme at Level 3 usually converted to a GFL course.

- Functional Skills and PSD qualifications as part of the overall Foundation Level programme

A note on terminology

I am mindful of the conflation of the terms pedagogy and curriculum in much literature about education, and for the purpose of presenting and comparing the findings from the four sub-cases, I define my usage of the key contested terms as follows: I use **educational** or **educational programme** when referring to the experience of the students, from initial application to opportunities for progression. I use the term **curriculum** in reference to *what* is taught or supervised. I use the term **pedagogy** in relation to the **orientation** of the approach used by the Awarding Bodies and by the lecturers in their approach to the Foundation Learning curriculum: that is *how* lecturers teach and interpret the curricular requirements.

I am mindful also of the variations in usage of terms related to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), where, as Young (2008) pointed out, learning outcomes and competences are often used interchangeably. I use the terms **competence-based training, competence-based assessment,** or **outcomes-based qualifications,** depending on the context. These terms all refer to a model in which assessment of students' competence is based on meeting **prescribed outcomes**, evidenced against **prescribed criteria** set by the awarding body. Verbatim quotations from

participants may reflect a slightly different terminology, but I have not amended this where the meaning is clear.

In exploring participants' perceptions about the Foundation Learning programme, I made use of the consensus in recent literatures (Allais, 2012; Illeris, 2009; Young, 2008), about the two key orientations in relation to what I understand as a learning theory continuum: **constructivism** at one end of the spectrum and **behaviourism** at the other.   Constructivism encompasses a variety of progressive and humanist approaches and embraces theoretical perspectives such as cognitivism, social learning and student-centred learning, which together are concerned with the context for learning: how students learn; how they accommodate new knowledge, and how they reproduce their knowledge or understanding.   The behaviourist orientation, on the other hand, is concerned with perceptible change in behaviours, and particularly in this context, the demonstration and evidence of achievement of prescribed criteria to meet specified outcomes.

In reality, I know from my own practice, and from observations of teaching during my day job, that elements of both constructivism and behaviourism are commonly found in the practice of experienced lecturers, and are used here as tendencies or orientations, rather than absolutes.   In broad brush-strokes, the Foundation Learning programme design was conceptually orientated towards the behaviourist end of the learning theory continuum, whereas the E2E programme was conceptually orientated towards the humanist end of the spectrum in its design, albeit combined with an outcomes based approach to funding and a behaviourist approach where NVQs were included. The vocational qualifications (VQs) and the personal and social development (PSD) qualifications listed on the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) are all competence-based and orientated towards the behaviourist end of the learning theory continuum.

It became evident, early in the research, that the participants' responses to questions about the Foundation Learning Programme and Awarding Body requirements were grounded in their backgrounds and experiences as lecturers and managers.   In order to capture this difference in tendencies or orientation, I

adopted the following terms to distinguish participants, describing them, where appropriate, as mainly vocational, transitional or inclusive, and indicating length of experience where appropriate.

- Vocational participants are those whose previous training, teaching and commercial/industrial experience has mainly been on occupational courses and whose current role is to manage or teach on vocational provision.

- Transitional participants are those whose initial training and main teaching experience is different from their current teaching or management role. This refers to those with an academic qualification and now teaching on a vocational strand, or those with a vocational background lecturing on PSD or Functional Skills provision.

- Inclusive participants are those whose background and experience has mainly involved working with students below Level 2 on programmes such as the engagement strand of E2E, where the pedagogical stance has been constructivist and the curriculum or teaching methods are primarily based on responding to the perceived learning needs of individual students, rather than focusing on prescribed outcomes.

Where the participants are described as very experienced they have been involved in education and training for ten years or more, where they are described as new, they are either new to teaching, or have been recently appointed to teach on the programme.

I have used the term students throughout, although I have respected the use of the term *clients* by Delta ILP respondents, since this betokens a significant difference in the way that the participants perceived their cohorts.

CASE ONE: ALPHA GENERAL COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Context

In 2010, Alpha College was a medium-sized GFE college located in an area with a population of 635,000, comprising both urban and rural populations. It had two main urban sites as well as a rural site that specialised in land-based provision and a small amount of provision on an industrial site. The economic environment was generally favourable, although the region also included significant areas of deprivation. The proportion of young people leaving school with below five or more GCSEs including mathematics and English was around the national average. In the county as a whole 4.8 per cent of the population were of minority ethnic heritage, whereas the proportion in the college was 7 per cent. The provision ranged from Foundation Level to Higher Education. The college had around 3,500 full-time students, of whom a third were on foundation level courses. Of these, around 300 were 16-18 years old. The college had a strong record of providing successful discrete courses for young people with very high needs. Around 100 16-18 year olds were studying on the GFL courses or a specialist Level 1 qualification.

I interviewed lecturers in the following subject areas: administration, construction, countryside management, hairdressing, health and social care, horse care, horticulture, small animal care, travel and tourism On the long specialist courses, many lecturers taught PSD and Functional Skills as well as the VQs, although this practice varied by faculty and some lecturers continued to teach only the VQs.

Table 4: Summary of Previous Experience and Training of Participants.

Alpha GFE	Years in FES			Qualification		Teaching Qualifications			Other Experience	
Current Role	≤5	6-10	11-20+	*Ac.	*Voc.	PGCE or cert ed.	PTLLS CTTLS DTTLS	Level 4 L/N or ESOL	E2E or Entry	**Ind. or **Com
Lecturers	5	2	5	3	11	8	4	2	5	7
Managers		2	4	5	1	6	0	1	4	0

*Ac = academic *Voc. = vocational as main subject route.

** Ind. = Industrial Experience,   Comm. = Commercial Experience

FOUNDATION LEARNING: THE PERSPECTIVES OF MANAGERS

The principal (A1), vice principal (A2), Foundation Learning manager (A3), quality manager (A4), manager for 14-16 provision (A5) and student services manager (A6) were interviewed. Four managers came from inclusive backgrounds, and two from transitional backgrounds.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The lexicon of the managers was largely positive on both phases of visits. The change to Foundation Learning had acted as a "catalyst" (A1) for the strategic developments they had been planning since 2008, which included an increase in the number of vocational subjects at Entry Level 3 and Level 1. The introduction of Foundation Learning for 14-19 year olds in schools and colleges, and the very strong national emphasis on progression had helped them to further this strategic aim. The principal explained that:

> "Foundation Learning raised the profile nationally of the provision below Level 2 and coincided with our own mission to improve social mobility, by creating learning pathways from Entry levels to Level 3 and above. This means our students on the Entry Level courses have many more possible subject options for progression". (A1)

By 2012 the college had doubled to eight the number of subject areas which offered specialist Level 1 courses, providing additional progression routes for students. By 2011/12 the performance on the provision had improved, with no significant differences in relation to race, gender or disability. As previously, students studying the occupational courses were very successful in finding employment after taking a Level 1 or an Entry Level 3 course.

The managers explained that the introduction of Foundation Learning had resulted in significant changes for the GFL course, which replaced the previous E2E funding. This had become a general taster course at Entry Level 3 with progression available to a general or specialist vocational course at Level 1. Previously their E2E course had not offered any vocational qualifications. The Foundation Learning manager, new to the College, perceived this development as positive, because "the previous

programme didn't really lead anywhere" (A3). However, the vice-principal commented that, although it was an improvement in some respects "the concentration on accreditation is overly prescriptive for some students, who used to enjoy work experience" (A2).

The college had been involved in the early pilots of Foundation Learning and the quality manager had been a Foundation Learning champion. She had fulfilled a regional role in the two years before the new programme started, so had a good understanding of the requirements. Even so, she found that the implementation in 2010 had not run smoothly, because schools and colleges were uncertain about which qualifications could be used when the Qualification and Curriculum Framework (QCF) was introduced, because of the constant revisions to the programme and a confusing start. The emphasis in the briefings from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was on "numbers and counting from the start" (A4).

The local context

The managers were strongly involved in local strategic planning. Despite the loss of funding from 2010, the 14-19 strategic partnership continued to operate in the determination of provision. The principal explained:

> "We had initially planned to offer Entry Level 3 and Level 1 on a shared basis with the local schools, but after the election in 2010, the Government changed the performance measures for schools, at the same time as the introduction of Foundation Learning. This had proved very beneficial for us, because many local schools concentrated on GCSEs and therefore decided to reduce the number Foundation Learning courses at Level One. This meant we were able to recruit more students" (A1).

Only one other GFE college was located in the immediate travel-to-learn area, and the managers entered into a mutual agreement about which subjects they would offer to maximise opportunities for students, signposting provision in the other college if appropriate.

The national policy to raise the participation age (RPA) from September 2013, could potentially have undermined this expansion at Level 1, but the situation continued to be positive for the college because of the effectiveness of the regional and local partnerships. The managers explained, on the second phase of visits, that these discussions had resulted in productive local agreements about 16+ provision. Each organisation had agreed to focus on specific GCE A Levels and academic and occupational VQs, as well reaching agreements about possible joint delivery on some courses. The college also had agreements with local schools to provide 14-16 link provision. The 14-16 manager explained how they benefited from being able to offer occupational tasters and, as importantly, from "a more relaxed funding arrangement" (A5), as the link course were funded by student cohort, not on the basis of QSRs. Many of the students on the 14-16 provision subsequently attended college courses.

The staffing establishment and staff conditions

Despite the participants' very positive account of the impact for the college's provision of the introduction of Foundation Learning, the policy enactment had not been without internal structural consequences. The principal described the turbulence in staffing:

> "The expansion of the Entry Level 3 and Level 1 portfolio meant an increased requirement for lecturers to teach Foundation Level students. Not all lecturers on Level 2 courses and above were prepared to do that, and, although we offered training, some lecturers decided they did not want to teach at that level, and left the college, following restructuring. The programme of redundancies was very unsettling for everyone, particularly for the lecturers" (A1).

However, despite this, the managers perceived the process as helpful overall in furthering their mission. The new lecturers had the relevant experience to teach on the Foundation Learning courses in four additional subject areas, which had enabled the possibility of progression in more subject areas.

The managers also recognised that the paper requirements for the PSD and VQs had increased significantly with the introduction of the small units on the QCF and

this had increased the workload for lecturing staff. It was not "clear how that increased bureaucracy benefits the students" (A2).

Funding methodology

The participants explained that the focus on accreditation in the Foundation Learning funding model had significant implications for the college's administrative and quality arrangements. The Individual Learner Record (ILR) needed amending, at significant cost. They had found it necessary to appoint additional tutorial staff to monitor students' progress. They also had to strengthen the performance management systems to track the progress of students and to hold staff accountable for their progress at course level, with individual targets linked to course performance. These changes, the VP found, had "positive consequences for students seen as at risk of dropping out, as we could identify these students at an early stage". However, she also recognised by the second visit that the strengthened arrangements had resulted in the "double edged" consequence of "helping to improve success rates, but had also increased the pressures on the lecturing staff " (A2).

When considering the impact of the Foundation Learning policy for the students, the managers perceived that the funding arrangements had brought benefits to students, but simultaneously had reduced their breadth of experience and limited the curriculum content. This, as the principal pointed out, could have longer-term consequences for students:

> "In many ways the ability to achieve credits early is empowering for students, but a significant disadvantage of the funding is the focus on qualifications at the expense of other valuable learning experiences" (A1).

The managers agreed that "Foundation Learning values what's creditable, rather than crediting what's valuable."

The principal regretted that, under the revised formula, the college's funding allocation for Additional Learning Support (ALS) had decreased whilst the expectations for English and mathematics were being raised. Many of the students on the GFL course had additional specific learning needs, such as dyslexia, and she

had been able to use the ALS core funding to ameliorate the situation by allocating more class contact hours than were generated by the qualifications. However, this had not been possible for the Level 1 specialist courses.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The managers explained that the emphasis on QSRs and the requirement to identify specific qualifications to be studied early in the programme, had a direct impact on the initial advice and guidance (IAG) policy. In order to generate funding, the guidance staff were tempted to play safe, because they, and the lecturers, had to ensure as far as possible that students were likely to achieve the qualifications; this sometimes created tensions in meeting the expectations of students and parents, as well as the financial imperative to gain accreditation. The student services manager pointed out that:

> "we have tightened up entry requirements, making sure both lecturers and guidance staff interview students. For some students it's meant we may have to offer a lower level qualification than the student requested, or a Certificate rather than a Diploma, as there are significant funding penalties if a course proves to be too difficult, and the students don't achieve or, more likely, drop out" (A6).

As with course selection, the managers identified tensions about personalisation because of the realities of funding and the need to balance a choice of units with the available contact hours. The funding generated did not allow enough staff contact time to offer students different units. Managers were very clear about the limits to personalisation on the GFL course, which had replaced E2E where individualised programmes had been an essential component of the programme. Students had to choose two from three vocational options, because it was too expensive to offer any more without a large numbers of students, as awarding bodies required a minimum number of entries for each unit.

Programme design

Despite the enthusiasm for a programme that encouraged progression, and included opportunities from Entry Level, the managers found that the Foundation

Learning programme design had "fundamental flaws in funding three qualifications, and excluding work experience, which had been helpful for the students on the E2E programme" (A2).

The three strands on the specialist Level 1 courses had meant excessive work loads, and so the PSD requirement was only offered for one hour a week. The number of contact hours generated by the funding limited the ability to offer broader experiences, because, as the VP pointed out, funding for enrichment had ceased in the second year of the programme.

The managers thought that the specialist vocational strand was the least affected by the policy change, as lecturers had previously been offering NVQ courses. However, they questioned the value of the vocational qualifications alone as preparation for employment in sectors such as engineering and pointed out that the current qualifications were not seen as challenging and "did not ensure that students met industry standards" (A1). In order to improve the students' chances of finding employment, lecturers entered students for the qualifications that the industries required, such as the Engineering Industry Operatives qualifications, because "that was effectively a licence to practise… Students need to be prepared to enter the industry, not just to meet awarding body criteria" (A1).

The aspect of the programme design that generated most frustration amongst the managers was the introduction of Functional Skills. A common concern was the coincidence of its introduction alongside all of the other changes, plus the nature of the external tests at Levels 1 and 2, which they thought were significantly harder than Key Skills. The student services manager thought:

> "the fact that the content in the examination scenarios is not related to occupations is unbelievable, after all the work on embedding that's gone on in the sector, particularly in Key Skills…it's as if this never happened. The Functional Skills approach is far too abstract for some students and perpetuates their sense of failure" (A6).

The managers identified tensions between the impact for students of the new arrangements and the acknowledgement that students needed to improve their

English and mathematics skills if they were to make progress. They stated that they entered many students for the Entry Level 3 course, because it was still assignment-based and had no external test, so students were more likely to succeed:

> "The practical implementation of examinations presents particular challenges for students with specific difficulties in engaging with text or number… Despite the requirements in the equality legislation, the examinations were not all accessible to candidates who required different font sizes" (A6).

They noted that the changed ALS formula meant a reduction overall in income at the same time that Functional Skills had become a requirement. As one manager commented, this revealed that "officials do not understand the challenge facing colleges to compensate for the low attainment of many students when leaving school" (A1).

The student services manager, who had herself previously taught on Literacy and Numeracy courses, expressed very strongly the view that

> "the arrangements for Functional Skills don't do what's on the tin. They're not based on functionality in the work-place or even everyday life… I'm not even sure why they needed to be separated from the vocational qualification… I can see it would be useful to have GCSE maths and English when studying at level 2 and above, but the current requirements put barriers in the way of students at lower levels, who cope perfectly well with the maths and English in their chosen occupations… I've always found it's the practical application that helps" (A6).

The managers thought that the PSD strand was useful in principle, particularly for the students on the GFL courses, but on the second phase of visits they had found that its value was undermined by the way in which development was seen as gaining units, rather than as a longer term process: personal and social development occurred over time, not in isolated silos. They highlighted an additional problematic issue with PSD:

> "The assumptions about the students that underpin PSD are inappropriate and disrespectful sometimes, such as the much publicised unit in the media, where students were required to demonstrate that they could use a public convenience…

We mainly use the employability units which are more appropriate for the students" (A2).

The QCF and competence-based approaches to assessment

The principal found that:

> "the over-reliance on competence-based approaches to assessment doesn't encourage the development of wider learning skills. Although a competence-based assessment might have its uses in specific occupational contexts, it's particularly deadening if students are only required to meet pre-prescribed criteria, that are just ticked off, and not stretching" (A1).

In order to overcome the shortcomings of vocational qualifications on the Level 3 provision, the managers had instigated approaches to the subjects "that encouraged more active learning through projects and entrepreneurial activities within the community" (A4). In addition to their vocational qualification all students had to work with students from different subject areas to complete staff-devised projects. It was being applied to Level 2 provision, but it had not been possible with staff changes, and the limited course hours, to implement this approach to the Entry Level 3 and Level 1 courses.

Managers perceived the QCF as ambiguous in its benefits for students. The possibility of achieving units of accreditation very quickly was seen as highly motivating for students who had very few previous qualifications. However, the emphasis on success rates meant that it was tempting for lecturers to choose less-demanding units and to use the criteria as the scheme of work and lesson plan:

> This made everything very formulaic, as the QCF model meant progress was measured by the number of units achieved, rather than the development of skills, knowledge and understanding. The NVQ approach limited students' opportunities to develop critical thinking or to be creative and reflective" (A2).

Vertical progression

The introduction of Foundation Learning had enabled managers to double the pathways for vertical progression, and they viewed this as very successful. However, by the second phase of visit they recognised that, despite this, the

progression possibilities opened up by the QCF had not yet led completely to an overturning of the prejudice within the college about students on Foundation Level courses:

> "Despite the changes in staffing it's taking time to overcome negative pre-conceptions about Foundation Level students... unfortunately, the prejudices are confirmed in some ways because the quality of the qualifications at level 1 in some subjects are perceived as poor" (A1).

The challenge facing the managers was to persuade lecturers on higher-level courses that students who were successful at Level 1, could perform as well at Level 2 as those with grade Ds at GCSE, coming straight from school. Although improving, the negative perceptual set of lecturers continued to be problematic in a few subjects.

Another significant weakness in the QFC structure identified by the managers was the way in which:

> "the model assumes that students at 16 years, or earlier, can be judged suitable for a specific vocational or academic pathway, on the basis of their school attainment. It's not uncommon for students to have underachieved because of personal circumstances, but the problem with the framework is that once on that vocational pathway it's difficult to change direction, and there's no lower level academic option on the QCF" (A1).

In order to overcome this, the Principal had successfully introduced a GCSE retake course for those students whose potential suggested an academic route might be appropriate, but whose previous low level of achievements would indicate a vocational course as the likely option.

At the second stage of visits managers found that the increasing requirement for Functional Skills qualifications had led to "a barrier to progression for some students" (A6), with tensions for staff in balancing the need to succeed with the longer term implications for the students. The Foundation Learning manager welcomed the fact that students who had very few formal qualifications could take an GFL Entry Level 3 course, with a second year of funding to take a Level 1 course.

The managers' response to the large gap between levels, particularly in Functional Skills, had been to encourage some cohorts of students to study for a second year below Level 2. However, they recognised that:

> "Having to study for another year at the same level could disadvantage those students who don't want, or couldn't afford, to spend another year studying at Level 1" (2)

The situation was further complicated because the adult budget was being significantly squeezed, as was the ALS budget, so students have fewer contact hours available for compensatory tuition and support.

The managers recognised that, although the change to Foundation learning had been very positive for them in widening the range of opportunities for progression, the requirements and funding reductions were also creating hurdles.

FOUNDATION LEARNING: THE PERSPECTIVES OF LECTURERS

The responses in this section are divided into two main sections: firstly, lecturers from vocational backgrounds teaching mainly on Level 1 vocational courses, and secondly, lecturers from inclusive or transitional backgrounds, teaching on GFL Vocational Studies Courses at Entry Level 3 and Level 1, which replaced E2E.

1. Vocational lecturers on long specialist Entry Level 3 and Level 1 courses

Of the seven lecturers interviewed, four had been lecturing for more than ten years. All had vocational backgrounds, and many had commercial or industrial experience. The vocational lecturers teaching on the specialist Level 1 courses were very experienced. Three were new to the college. The vocational subjects they taught included construction (A7) and (A8) horticulture (A18) hairdressing (A15) animal care (A10) countryside (A9) equine (A11).

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The lexicon of the vocational lecturers reflected that of the managers. All lecturers acknowledged and welcomed the expansion to the colleges portfolio of courses

below Level 2 that had been a consequence of the change to Foundation Learning. One lecturer commented that:

> "The strong focus on Level 1 in the college has raised our profile. We've never really felt our work was seen as being as valuable in the college as A Levels, but with Foundation Learning we've become more important" (A7).

However, all of the lecturers perceived aspects of the introduction of the QCF as problematic, where, for example, specialist qualifications offered by the industry, such as equine specialisms, could no longer be funded. All had found that the lack of clarity about which qualifications could be funded had been unhelpful, as qualifications eligible for funding were removed during the academic year and new qualifications were included very late, some after the programmes had started.

The lecturers thought the local policy context had been helpful because of the agreements with the local schools and colleges about which subjects they would offer. They pointed out that students came to the college, often travelling long distances, because they needed a qualification to help them to find work in that occupational area, which was their main aim.

The lecturers spoke positively about the introduction of unit accreditation for the students, most of whom had rarely achieved anything that they valued previously. The following responses were typical:

> "I like the fact that students can get credits early. It motivates them and they get stuck in quickly. It boosts their confidence. Many have not felt successful in anything else much before" (A18).

> "It means that 11 years of failure can be unpicked, as the students achieve, and the value judgements about them as failures are reduced" (A11).

Staff roles and working conditions

The lecturers were most concerned about the quotidian consequences of the introduction of Foundation Learning, and here the lexicon noticeably darkened. They all perceived the most challenging consequences of change as significant

pressure on time; the requirement to cover more within the course hours, and the excessive expectations from the Awarding Bodies, in particular the increased volume of paperwork associated with the QCF. One lecturer summed it up:

> "The biggest change is that we've to deliver more in less time. My students benefit most from working in a practical setting, but I now have to spend more time on the paperwork than previously, because of the Functional Skills, the unitisation of the vocational subjects as well as PSD, and the need to succeed on all of those… it's a lot to get through in only two days of class contact" (A18).

The reduction in funding following the change to Foundation Learning meant fewer lecturing hours. One lecturer had managed this by employing job coaches at lower rates than lecturers, saying:

> "That's the only way I can make sure the students have enough time to practise their skills, because they can have more time doing the practical work with someone occupationally competent" (A18).

Five of the lecturers had found that the college's restructuring had been unsettling or upsetting because some lecturers who had been made redundant had been very distressed. Four lecturers worried that the restructuring would continue, as the funding for adult courses was being reduced.

All of the lecturers found that a consequence of the new arrangements was that their own performance was much more closely monitored. As one explained:

> "We've to track the progress of students much more carefully and account for any uncompleted unit. It puts a lot of pressure on us all of the time…Foundation Learning just focuses on achievement and retention, with little time for anything else" (A 10).

They also found they had fewer formal opportunities to meet other teams for planning and development, especially where they were working on different sites. Where they were located on the same site they could have informal discussions.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The lecturers found that, over time, the IAG arrangements had become less flexible and more rigorous. Because of the funding arrangements they had to take extra care to make sure from the start that students were able to cope with the course they had applied for, and if in doubt, enter them for a less demanding course. Their views are summed up by one lecturer, who said:

> "Despite the flexibility for students to take different units, we can't offer much individual choice because the funding restrictions don't really allow for many optional units. We're allowed to run this course with relatively low numbers, around ten students, so additional choices are not feasible… The options for students are mainly limited in reality to the level of Functional Skills that they study" (A9).

Programme design

Lecturers' perceptions about the requirements for three accredited strands of the curriculum were mixed, and influenced by the way in which the courses were timetabled. The three specialist vocational lecturers who only taught on the vocational strand were sanguine about the arrangements, because they could continue as previously to focus on the vocational qualification and, as a construction lecturer said, "make sure the students develop the trade skills they need to find employment" (A7). However, they found that there was very little cross over between the three strands, because of limited time and opportunity for staff to meet to plan.

Where lecturers taught all three strands, they found the task much more daunting. The lecturers on the land-based courses tried to overcome the excessive requirements for paperwork, by cross-referencing the evidence for all the strands from the practical activities. However, one lecturer pointed out that "external verifiers from the Awarding Bodies would not all accept that evidence gained for one strand could be used for another" (A 18). This significantly increased her workload.

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The lecturers were unanimous in regretting the lack of funding for work experience. The very experienced lecturers had well-developed links with local employers who would offer work experience, because they knew the students would be reliable. The reduction in class contact hours made it impossible to arrange work experience, despite its value for the students.

All of the lecturers saw the vocational strand as the most useful strand for the students, and here the lexicon was largely positive. A construction lecturer expressed this clearly:

> "The main level 1 course and the occupational certificate is what helps them (students) to find employment. It's a job most of them want… If they have a good grasp of the basics, employers can train them up… Gaining certificates is important but so is getting ready to go to work" (A8).

He did not see an employability qualification as helpful in finding work. What helped the students to find work, was the practical experience he provided, and the standards he expected on the course:

> "On the two days in college, I expect them (the students) to be punctual, dress appropriately and work as a team, particularly on the projects we do for employers. They've got to be able to show that they've got what it takes to work on site… For many students who've avoided subjects they didn't like at school, and given up easily, staying on course and recognising the trade skills they've developed is very important" (A8).

Other very experienced lecturers, who also had very productive arrangements with local employers, expressed similar views. Many students progressed to employment on completing the course at Entry Level 3 and Level 1, because the lecturers knew the local employers well and worked with them, recommending students they knew would make good employees. One lecturer articulated very clearly what worked for students and benefited employers:

> "The students need lots of practical, hands on experience. They spend all of one day in the gardens, with realistic tasks… The job coach spends time making sure they're carrying out the tasks properly. This sometimes means lots of repetition

but they need to be able to work quickly and accurately and follow instructions… We encourage them to ask if they don't understand, and employers like that" (A18).

All of the lecturers voiced significant concerns about the Functional Skills strand, because many students had a track record of feeling a failure. They thought that Functional Skills were much harder than Key Skills, and the external on-line testing introduced an additional pressure. They suggested that if Functional Skills tests were related to the vocational areas, the students would always be able to see their relevance. One particularly disenchanted lecturer said of Functional Skills:

> "The requirements do not match the level of English and maths that students need. I've been working in the trade for 30 years and I've never had to use algebra, ever… As long as I don't have to teach it, I suppose it doesn't bother me. I sympathise with the students who are really good at the practical work, but have difficulties with Functional Skills requirements, which have nothing to do with their job competence" (A8).

Similar disenchantment was expressed about aspects of PSD, which, despite the hard work of the staff, had become marginal, particularly where it was taught separately from the vocational course, and by different staff. Many lecturers considered that some units made assumptions that the students lacked personal and social skills, ignoring the fact that some students had very good skills, but had just been turned off school. One lecturer, who taught all three strands, suggested it would be useful if PSD "were embedded into the practical work, where the focus was on developing all of the skills needed in the work-place" (A11). Another lecturer commented wrily that "funding work experience would be more useful than funding paper-based PSD units in employability" (A15).

The QCF and competence-based approaches to assessment

Despite the powerful testimony to the effectiveness of their vocational provision, lecturers also recognised curricular shortcomings in the unitised QCF model, because it did not encourage them to offer a challenging programme. One lecturer was particularly concerned that the QCF did not offer merit and distinctions:

> "The worst thing about the QCF is that it doesn't have merit and distinction. That's the carrot to make students work harder. It's much harder to provide challenge when they get the same qualification no matter how hard they work or how good they are. It limits ambition…Taking more units to get a Diploma is not as challenging as aiming for a distinction…More units of the same credit value means more work, not necessarily better skills or knowledge. It's more dependent on time than ability. Students can take the highest number of the easiest units and emerge with a better qualification than if they had taken longer to complete units that were harder" (A8).

In order to overcome this shortcoming in the QCF, the lecturer had devised his own internal college system of merit and distinction, so that he could motivate the students.

Another very experienced lecturer, new to the college, and offering a Level 1 course in hairdressing for the first time in the college, also found shortcomings in the awarding body criteria:

> "The students need customer-facing skills, which only come with practice, but they are not included in the criteria. The students need more time to learn about these and to practise them, otherwise they will have completed the qualification without the necessary skills to make them employable" (A15).

A lecturer on animal care courses found that the Level 1 qualification

> "does not provide enough underpinning theory. It's a poor preparation for Level 2, giving an unrealistic and misleading impression of the significant level of science required at higher levels. Too many students apply because they like animals, not realising that to be successful they need a really good grounding in science, not just enjoyment of looking after animals. They can get the Level 1, but struggle with the Level 2, so we can't always recommend that they progress, which is very upsetting sometimes" (A10).

Although they found shortcomings with the actual criteria, very few vocational lecturers voiced any explicit concerns or misgivings about the competence-based approach to the curriculum. Most had themselves been trained and gained their

qualifications through a competence-based qualification system. Many of the newer lecturers said they found it helpful. A typical comment was:

> "Having very clear criteria to work towards is very clear for everyone. Students know what is expected of them and so do we. That helps enormously with achievement. If they stay the course, and persevere, they always pass" (A9).

Another lecturer who had qualified less than five years earlier, commented:

> "I learnt like that when I was a student, and having clear assessment criteria was very helpful. As a fairly new lecturer, I know I have covered everything and it gives me great confidence" (A11).

However, although not explicitly challenging the basic concept of competence-based approaches to assessment, the lecturers' description of their practice showed implicit criticism of the quality of the criteria. They found having to tick off many small units of credit every week, with only a few hours of contact, was tedious and not helpful for students. The very experienced lecturers were the most vocal about this and explained that in reality they taught what they knew was required in the sector and often adapted or paid lip-service to the criteria if necessary, going beyond the requirements if they felt the students needed more information or skills development:

> "I know what employers want so I make sure we cover it, even though the criteria are not brilliant. I can always add the bits that are not there… We work closely with employers, so we can keep in touch with their requirements. That's what gets the students the jobs, not the qualification" (A8).

The lecturers described how they mediated by making good use of realistic opportunities, such as specific projects with local employers, in order to counterbalance the potentially deadening effect of just ticking off criteria mechanically. A lecturer in construction described how he asked local employers to set students real tasks that involved using the occupational skills they had developed. This gave the students a feel for the industry that could not be achieved just by completing skills in isolation. The lecturer in hairdressing had devised a buddying scheme whereby students on the Level 1 course observed a

student on a Level 2 course in the college's commercial salon, and discussed the types of communication approaches the student employed with different customers.

Vertical progression

The lecturers thought that the students who benefited most from the programme were those whose main aim was to find employment, rather than those who wanted to take a Level 2 qualification. The very experienced lecturers had very strong contacts with local employers, and knew them well. These employers would accept students having completed qualifications at Entry level 3 or Level 1, if they had been trained at the college. This was particularly helpful where they completed projects for an employer.

All of the lecturers thought that, since the introduction of Foundation Learning, vertical progression was becoming harder for the students whose attainment in English and mathematics continued to be below that required for a Level 2 course. In those subjects where a level 1 vocational qualification was not sufficient to find employment, these students often had to take another Level 1 course if they wanted to progress up the qualification ladder. The lecturers perceived this as particularly disadvantageous for those students who needed to work, had the occupational competence required for a Level 2, but might have to "tread water" for a year (A10).

2. The Lecturers on GFL Programmes at Entry Level 3 and Level 1

The five lecturers who taught on the GFL courses included three new to the college, and two who had lectured on the previous programme. Three lecturers came from inclusive backgrounds and two from a transitional background. Taster subjects included travel and tourism (A16), administration (A17) and caring for children (A14) and two lecturers taught PSD units and Functional Skills (A12) and (A13).

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The two lecturers who had taught on the previous E2E programme, had found the transition meant a major change, because the E2E programme had been an employment training programme, which was not accredited. The early stages of Foundation Learning had been confusing, as the requirements seemed to change, even though lecturers had been involved in the pilots. Nevertheless, they appreciated the fact that the college was developing more provision at lower levels, which had not been there previously, because it broadened the options for students.

A lecturer who had taught on the previous E2E programme said of the transition:

> "I was dreading it because it seemed that we would have to cover so much in so few hours. Previously we had a lot of freedom to respond to individual needs… The Foundation Learning programme, with its sole focus on qualifications was quite daunting. It was very confusing at first, with different messages about what we had to do to get funding" (A16).

The perceptions of lecturers about the value of this change were hugely variable. Their lexicon was mixed, ranging from a positive liking for the opportunity to take accredited courses, to finding that, despite some gains, the arrangements effectively narrowed student options, reducing possibilities for educational mobility.

A lecturer who had taught on the previous E2E programme said:

> "Many of our students haven't been successful in public examinations before. They are thrilled to have achieved something so quickly and proud of their achievements. Foundation Learning motivates the students and helps them to learn what's expected" (A13).

A transitional lecturer, who had also taught on the previous E2E programme and had been involved in deciding on possible units of accreditation as part of the pilot, said:

"Many students don't really know what they want to do when they apply, and having tasters gives them the opportunity to try new things as well as building up a CV with qualifications. I think this provision is more beneficial for the students than our E2E programme, which didn't leave them with any real achievements" (A12).

However, a lecturer from an inclusive background who had previously taught on the E2E programme voiced an alternative perspective:

"One size doesn't fit all. We need much more flexibility to respond to the very different backgrounds of students… A programme that's fully accredited doesn't suit those who've had long gaps in schooling or who had phobias about tests… Foundation learning has let students down really, because we said it would be different from school, but they have all that tedious paperwork to complete and still have to do Functional Skills… Our E2E programme was too relaxed and lacked structure in some ways, but at least it was different from school and that's why they're here. Some students need that transitional time… With E2E, we had a lot of freedom, but very little structure. Now we have too much structure and very little freedom"(A 13).

Staff roles and working conditions

The lecturers found the increased levels of paperwork irksome, particularly the pressure to complete everything to meet the Awarding Body requirements, because they were not able to pursue other topics in depth that would benefit students at a particular moment; they had to complete many small units very quickly.

All of the lecturers identified the way in which the changes in funding had led to increased pressures on their working lives. Managers monitored their work more closely now because of the need to succeed. They found that the focus on qualifications put them under a lot of pressure to complete units quickly, and that team meetings focused on attendance and achievement of credits. As they thought the college was due for an inspection, they also found an increase in the number of lesson observations, which added to these pressures. One lecturer summed it up:

"I can see why it's necessary to observe us so often, as students have to stay on the courses so that we can get funding, but I can't turn out a wow lesson all the time" (A 14).

Of most significance for the staffing had been the Foundation Learning requirement for accreditation. This meant external recruitment to find lecturers who were able and prepared to teach at Entry Level 3 or Level 1. Several lecturers described the way in which the resultant restructuring within the college had been unsettling, when lecturers who had previously taught on Level 2 or Level 3 courses were asked to teach on the Level 1 courses. Many did not want to do that, and had left the college. They explained that some lecturers had been in tears, as they didn't feel able to teach Foundation Level students. They knew that these lecturers really felt they worked best with higher level students and they couldn't see any point in forcing people to work with lower level students if they didn't want to.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The lecturers who were familiar with the E2E programme, where they had found they could genuinely personalise the programme for individual students, found Foundation Learning much more restricting:

"We had to identify levels and units that we could predict students would pass in the first few weeks. It's difficult to do that when students are already feeling a failure... It's hard to personalise because the funding doesn't allow enough contact time to offer minority options. The students have to fit in with what we offer. We don't have enough funding to offer a large number of choices, because student numbers are already small, around eight to ten" (A13).

Programme design

In relation to the programme design, all of the lecturers regretted the sole focus on three strands of accreditation, and the shift away from preparing students for employment through work experience. One inclusive lecturer summed it up:

"The funding doesn't recognise employment as success, doesn't fund work experience, and it's too focused on achieving credits rather than developing useful learning skills" (A13).

The experienced, inclusive lecturers found the paperwork requirements excessive, and the division of the programme into different segments artificial, because it was not how they understood that students learnt. The challenge was to try to overcome the "silo basis of the requirements" (A12), and to try to integrate the skills into the other strands, while managing the paperwork involved.

The specific aspect of the programme requirements that was of most concern for all the lecturers was Functional Skills. Although all of the lecturers recognised that the students would benefit from improving their English and mathematics, none thought that Functional Skills was the most appropriate approach. In particular, they found the failure to contextualise the examination problematic. One lecturer had been involved in the pilot for Functional Skills and said that, despite strenuous representations in meetings with officials, the request for contextualisation had not resulted in any changes. She explained:

"I was involved in the pilot and we all thought that the level 1 was far too hard compared with Key Skills, especially the external examination… It's fundamental with students who have been unsuccessful at school, that English and maths are made as practically relevant as possible. No-one heard us, as nothing changed… Many of the students have dyslexia, and the Awarding Bodies seem to have overlooked this. It's as if everyone learns in the same way. It's relatively easy to make adjustments for these students in the way the exam questions are asked, but it doesn't happen" (A 12).

Another lecturer explained the implications of the shortcomings in the external examinations:

"We enter most students for Entry Level 3 because the external examinations are often poorly worded and it's not always easy to guess which answer is considered correct. In maths, even if they can do the computation, they can't necessarily understand the question in the exam. The wording's far too complicated, sometimes more complicated than the response required" (A 13).

The lecturers were appreciative of the additional ALS hours allocated by the principal to the GFL courses. They knew that allocations had changed and that other courses had had reductions in the level of support provided. They valued the way in which managers had seen this group of students as a priority for support and had recognised that they required more time.

The QCF and competence-based approaches to assessment

Lecturers' responses to the competence-based PSD strand were more mixed. All of the lecturers agreed that the development of formal social skills was essential for the students, and were pleased the aspect could be funded, but for some lecturers there was a tension between the competence-based awarding body requirements, as expressed in the criteria on the QCF, and what they saw as the needs and capabilities of the students. One lecturer articulated clearly the tension between ticking PSD criteria and the reality of the complexity of human interactions:

> "Having to tick off all the criteria is easy, but it doesn't allow for the complexity of communication. I can tick off that a student has met the criteria but it's only at that time and in that context… Social interaction is much more complex. We need to focus on that all the time in our work with the students, not just in isolated units" (A12).

Perceptions of the competence-based vocational taster units were largely positive. The three lecturers teaching these units welcomed the fact that students could have the opportunity to try accredited units as tasters. Responses included the following:

> "I found this helped students to learn about the NVQ approach to assessment and to familiarise themselves with the processes…It's good that students can achieve quickly and this motivates them" (A16).

> "Students learnt how to use the criteria and could submit work several times in order to get everything right. I think it's useful to be able to choose the units that are relatively easy, because we can help students who struggle, so that all of those who stay on the course get a qualification" (A17).

Transitional lecturers teaching travel and tourism and administration units, without specific vocational training in the subject area, found the criteria provided them with the reassurance that they were doing what was required. They thought their own personal experience, of travel abroad and of day to day administration was sufficient to teach the students, and they didn't think they required any qualifications to teach the units, because the criteria were clear for everyone. They could be used for schemes of work and lesson plans, and also helped them to achieve their own personal targets.

An experienced lecturer teaching on the childcare units explained how she approached the taster:

> "Many of the students have not come from homes with positive mothering and I see the units as a way of helping them to develop their own awareness of its importance for child development… I use the topics as a way of providing the personal support the students need, and to help them to understand what good mothering is" (A14).

However, she also recognised that the units themselves were of little vocational relevance, but she thought the experience played an important role in helping the students to participate and feel part of the college. She was making use of the units to provide compensatory elements that they needed. However, the college did not offer a Level 1 qualification in health and social care, so students would have to build on the other taster courses if they were to progress to a Level 1 course.

Vertical progression

Lecturers had mixed views about the extent to which Foundation Learning had made vertical progression easier, reflecting the diversity of the student cohort and the different subject requirements. Three lecturers explained that, increasingly, for many students on the GFL programme, progression had become lateral, and meant a second year, taking a full specialist Level 1 qualification. They recognised that the individual taster units were of little value for employment, but were useful as a stepping stone to another year of funding: this was helpful for those students who still needed time both to mature and to improve their Functional Skills.

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However, two other lecturers thought that the negative views in the college about students on level 1 courses continued to be a factor in limiting progression, and the poor quality of qualifications on the QCF in Foundation had reinforced these perceptions. Not all students really needed, or could afford, to spend another year below Level 2. All of the lecturers found that the Functional Skills requirements had become more significant, and it was now more difficult for students with very good practical skills, but difficulties in English or mathematics, to progress to a higher level.

THE CHANGE TO THE STUDY PROGRAMME: PERSPECTIVES OF MANAGERS

Four managers participated in the interviews: the principal (A1) the VP (A2) the Foundation Learning manager (A3) and the manager for 16-19 provision (A19).

The Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The managers welcomed the change to the funding of a programme of learning rather than qualifications, and, in principle, the move to greater equity in the contact hours across the provision. They found that:

> "In the college as a whole, the required changes to provision at Entry Level 3 and Level 1 were less dramatic overall than those at other levels. We're continuing with the Level 1 vocational courses as well as the GFL Entry Level 3 and Level 1 courses, so that students can choose which vocational direction to take. We won't be offering any PSD qualifications on those courses, but all students would continue to study English and mathematics as appropriate... In some ways the requirements for the specialist full-time Level 1 subjects are a return to E2E, where students followed a vocational course and took English and mathematics qualifications. Then, we also had funding for enrichment activity as well" (A2).

Despite these positive headline consequences of the policy change, the managers explained that, although the changes in required programme hours advantaged students at Level 1, who had historically received lower rates of funding than other levels, the situation for the student cohort as a whole was more complex in reality.

For the college, the requirement for minimum programmed contact hours of 450 plus for courses below level 2 for 2013/14 rising to 540-600 for 2014/2015, would mean a significant increase in resource, since the contact hours for Foundation Learning courses had been between 280 and 360:

> "Theoretically, the increased requirements below Level 2 should be balanced out by the significant reduction in allocated hours for courses at Level 3, plus the funding formula protection arrangements built into the changes by the Education Funding Agency, but the reality is much more challenging… Not all lecturers at Level 3 want to teach at lower levels, and it's been a struggle to find them all timetables. This time many of the staffing changes and unrest have been at higher levels" (A1).

The necessity to monitor closely the performance on each course would remain, which, they recognised, put pressure on the lecturers throughout the year. The administrative staff had had to work hard to change the ILR once again, and it looked as though flexibilities would be challenging. They were waiting for more guidance on this.

The managers found that, as with Foundation Learning, the centralised requirements did not allow sufficient flexibility, and one size did not fit all.

> "Many of our students have long distances to travel, sometimes taking several buses. They have to leave very early. Because they work part-time, the requirement to study over three or four days can be problematic. The funding model disadvantages part-time provision, which reduces flexibility" (A2).

However, the cohort of students on Entry Level 3 and Level 1 courses who were able to study full-time, would benefit from the additional hours, and managers were positive about this, because many students needed more time to prepare properly to take a Level 2 course.

The local context

Local planning continued to be advantageous for the college, and with the coincidence of the implementation of RPA, they continued to work closely with local schools.

" We've worked very hard with the local strategic partnership members so that we can offer the students a wide choice locally, and are not competing. We've entered into local collaborative arrangements that include joint teaching. For example, a local school provides English and mathematics, and we teach the occupational qualification. This is very helpful, because of the increasing competition for appropriately qualified and experienced lecturers in these subjects" (A1).

Performance measures

The managers were not sure whether retention, the new key performance measure, made very much difference in reality, because students usually achieved the vocational qualification if they stayed on the programme. Performance measures still operated. As one manager pointed out:

"the additional accountability measures that are being introduced, including destinations, doesn't feel like a reduction in performance management. QSRs will still be a performance indicator, as Ofsted inspectors still look at the those, both in order to assess risk, and as a key part of the inspection judgements. Destinations will be included and the headline data of each organisation will be published, so that students can compare the provision at different centres" (A2).

An aspect of the new funding arrangements that managers found disappointing, was that the GCSE resit course, that they had introduced "as a conscious alternative to the vocational track for those students whose GCSE scores had been lower than anticipated" (A1), could no longer attract funding. The Study Programme policy was that only GCSE English and mathematics would be funded, not other GCSE subject retakes. The managers hoped to be able to continue to fund a long course out of the overall budget, but they recognised that the Study Programme policy, despite apparent greater flexibility, had "reinforced the assumption that those who had not achieved well at school would follow a vocational course" (A1).

Managers also pointed out that a negative consequence of the new funding arrangement was that the occupationally specific qualifications, such as the Engineering Industry Operatives qualifications, would no longer be fundable, even though, ironically, they were valued by employers and seen in some ways as a

licence to practise. They also observed that, as with Foundation Learning, the college would face a financial penalty if students with a main qualification aim left the course early, because they had found employment. This was "illogical, given the focus on employment as a positive outcome" (A19).

The principal explained that the aspects of funding they found particularly challenging were the consequences of the new disadvantage funding formula, which meant a reduction of around £800,000 in the ALS income. She was well aware of the irony of the funding arrangements: at the same time as the focus on English and maths had increased, the funding for ALS has decreased. She viewed the changes as "a significant departure from the good practice developed in the sector 20 year earlier" (A1) whereby individual students were entitled to proportionate support. She also pointed out that post-codes were not a reliable indicator of disability. In addition to those with specific difficulties in text or number, of growing concern were students who experienced fragile mental health, whose needs were unpredictable and who might need sporadic significant support to attend and be retained.

The managers explained that overall, despite the formula protection arrangements, the Study Programme funding and performance measures had resulted in a significant reduction in income.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

The changed programme requirements

The managers thought a significant change with the Study Programme was the requirement for students to study at a higher level than previously. This was straightforward for many students, but challenging for others, because "previous attainment is not necessarily a true reflection of ability" (A3). As with Foundation Learning, early decision-making was challenging for the students who had underachieved, since potential was not always evident in the early stages. The guidance staff still had to play safe so that the students were likely to be retained. The managers had decided to use their own assessments of English and mathematics to make sure students were on a course at an appropriate level, as

they had found that records of previous attainment did not always reflect the true levels of previous attainment.

The managers appreciated the fact that the Study Programme requirements included non-qualification hours on the full-time programmes, which, although not sufficient for a traditional enrichment programme, provided the opportunity to include "an enterprise approach which they had used successfully on the higher level programmes, and had wanted to implement at Level 1" (A 19). They had a well-tested model that included a programme of outside facilitators, as well as joint projects involving different subject areas. They were confident that they could implement that, as it did not require the standard staff contact hours, and the development work had already been substantially completed for the higher levels.

The managers found that the requirement for a substantial qualification was little different from the previous requirements, as all of their students had been on long courses. Although qualifications from the QCF were no longer a requirement, managers perceived that the pedagogical shortcomings they had identified in the mainly competence-based approaches would remain for most students as the courses continued to be NVQs:

> "Lecturers will continue to make sure students cover all they need to meet local employers' requirements, but the temptation to seek out the easiest substantial qualifications, won't really change… The value and quality of criteria used by the Awarding Bodies for the qualifications are still debatable" (A2).

The continuing and increasing emphasis on GCSE English and mathematics continued to be seen as double-edged. Managers saw the requirement as positive for those students who wanted to progress to Level 2, but for the cohort who had specific difficulties in engaging with text and /or number this could continue to be problematic, with the reduced funding for ALS and no change in Functional Skills:

> "The failure to contextualise English and mathematics into the Functional Skills qualifications will continue to disadvantage those students who learn best in practical contexts" (A2).

The Study Programme requirement for work-experience was locally challenging. The managers welcomed the inclusion of work experience in principle, but they thought it would be challenging to achieve external work placements for all 16-19 year-old students, as schools also had to find placements. They thought they would have sufficient internal opportunities to meet the requirements, as all of the occupational courses at higher levels had practical elements, and the students had opportunities to do project work during the year. In order to meet the more challenging requirements for external work experience they continued to use an external agency to find the placements on their behalf - an arrangement which had been successful on the higher level vocational courses. They planned to monitor the quality of placements very carefully as the requirements had increased significantly locally.

Vertical progression

Managers thought that the potential barriers to vertical progression that they had identified with Foundation Learning would continue:

> "Barriers will remain for the cohort of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds… The perceptions about low standards on some Level 1 courses will take time to change. The warehousing resulting from the difficulties in reaching the required standard in English and mathematics is still a reality… The differential in funding between that for 16-18 year olds and that for adults as continuing to disadvantage those students who needed longer to complete a full Level 1 qualification" (A1).

Increasingly, students were taking a second year of study at Entry level 3 or Level 1. For some students this was an advantage, as they needed more time to develop skills needed to progress. However, the managers were aware that such an arrangement did not always help those students who needed, for financial reasons, to find work as soon as possible, or where employers were demanding a Level 2 qualification. This was particularly the case in the more academic VQs, although less so for occupational qualifications. The lecturers had very strong strong links with employers who wanted to train their own staff, and would accept the students

because of the practical work, particularly in horticulture and construction, and this would not be affected by the changes.

Summary of the main consequences of policy changes

The participants' narratives illustrated the duality of policy that Hall (op.cit.) identified as the *double-shuffle*. Their lexicon, when describing the structural consequences for their provision, was very positive, seeing Foundation Learning as a catalyst for their strategic plan to develop more progression pathways, matching their social democratic mission and values. The productive arrangements with active local 14-19 strategic partnership furthered this ambition. Here the ambition of the QCF, to provide a ladder of progression from Entry Level upwards was well received, and the number of subject areas offering provision at level 1 doubled.

However, the lexicon of many participants was overtly critical about the impact of the funding methodology on the educational programme. They found the funding methodology, combined with the small units of accreditation on the QCF, had led to unacceptably increases in bureaucracy, and incentives to enter students for unchallenging courses and easier units, so that qualifications were increasingly seen as of little value. Although improving, participants found that perceptions by lecturers of students on Foundation Learning courses continued to be negative, and was not helped by the low level requirements of the vocational and PSD courses. Often, lecturers on the vocational courses found that the criteria did not reflect the requirements of the industry and lecturers on PSD courses found the segmented approach did not reflect the way that students learnt.   Many experienced participants found the programme overly prescriptive and considered that the behaviourist approach used for the QCF did not encourage wider learning skills. Their perceptions reflected the concepts developed by Bernstein (op.cit.) of a *horizontal discourse* and *restrictive codes*, which denied students the opportunities to benefit from the *vertical discourse* and *elaborated codes* that characterised higher level courses.

Through *mediation* the most experienced lecturers provided expansive learning opportunities to enable the development of the skills, attitudes required by employers. Focusing on professional formation, they helped many students find employment locally. Adopting Higham's typology (Higham, op.cit.), the experienced lecturers responded to curriculum change by *assimilation* or *accommodation*, paying lip-service to the criteria and tick-box approach to assessment. Lecturers new to teaching were more positive about the QCF and the associated pedagogy, although questioning the occupational provenance of some of the criteria. They had mostly themselves been trained through the NVQ route and had been trained as teachers using a competence-based route. They responded to the requirements through *implementation*, complying with the requirements, and seeing the use of clear criteria as helpful for themselves and for the students.

Over time, Functional Skills came to act as a hurdle, particularly for students who had specific difficulties with text or number, and where compensatory income had decreased. Increasingly more students were expected to take a second course at Level 1. The managers did not embrace the values enshrined in the programme, which focused on accreditation rather than the quality of the programme.

The managers did not think the change to the Study programme would make a fundamental difference to the opportunities for progression. The use of retention as the main performance indicator changed little, as retention was the main determinant of success at Level 1. The accountability measures were to be increased, not reduced. They thought the perceptual and structural barriers to progression for the most disadvantaged students would remain, particularly since their compensatory income had reduced very significantly under the revised Disadvantage Factor funding, at the same time as the importance of Functional Skills increased. The duality of purpose, the *double-shuffle* looked likely to continue to operate with the Study Programme. Although many students would benefit from the auspicious local context, the interconnections between the behaviourist pedagogy and the centralised funding methodology continued to disadvantage

those with least educational capital, and the hurdles to progression had not diminished in reality.

CASE TWO: BETA COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION
Context

Beta College was a large urban college, with dispersed sites across several local authorities. In 2010 Foundation Learning provision was offered on two sites. Despite some pockets of considerable affluence, one in ten residents had no formal qualifications and one in five lacked basic literacy and numeracy qualifications. Employment rates were lower than the national average. The college served a diverse population of over 1.44 million, with over 37 per cent of minority ethnic heritage. Many students did not have English as their first language and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision accounted for around 30 per cent of all students. Provision was available from Pre-Entry Level to Level 7, plus a Key Stage 4 engagement programme. Most students studied at Level 3, including vocational courses and a significant amount of A Level. The college had a strong record of providing successful discrete courses for young people with high needs. The college operated in a highly competitive context, with many local schools with sixth forms, several ILPs and three GFEs, within the travel-to-learn distance of the different sites. In 2010 the college offered four 22-week Entry Level 3 GFL courses, four Level 1 courses in administration, ICT, engineering and construction, and one GFL course at Level 1. At the time of the scoping visit, around 100 students were enrolled on Entry Level 3 and Level 1 provision. I interviewed lecturers in the following subject areas: administration, health and social care, ICT, travel and tourism, PSD, ESOL and Functional Skills.

Table 5: Summary of Previous Experience and Training of Participants**.**

Beta GFE	Years in FES			Qualification		Teaching Qualifications			Other Experience	
Current Role	≤5	6-10	11-20+	*Ac.	*Voc.	PGCE or cert ed.	PTLLS CTTLS DTTLS	Level 4 L/N or ESOL	E2E or Entry	**Ind. or **Com
Lecturers	4	2	2	4	4	8		3	1	4
Managers	0	1	3	2	2	4		1	1	1

*Ac = academic *Voc. = vocational as main subject route.

** Ind. = Industrial Experience,   Comm. = Commercial Experience

This section is divided into four sections, starting with the perspectives of the managers, and followed firstly by the perspectives of lecturers teaching on the GFL level 1 course, secondly by the academic vocational lecturers and thirdly by the Functional Skills /ESOL lecturers.

FOUNDATION LEARNING: PERSPECTIVES OF MANAGERS

The managers interviewed were the VP (B1), a faculty manager (B2), Foundation Learning manager (B3), manager responsible for 14-16 provision (B4). Two were from vocational backgrounds and two from academic backgrounds. The transitional manager for 14-16 responded in writing to the questions.

The Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment.

The provision

From the first phase of visits the managers were overwhelmingly negative about the impact of Foundation Learning on the provision at the college, which, by the second phase they perceived as resulting in "overall decline and stagnation" (B2). The greatest impact for the college's provision had been on the Entry Level 3 GFL programme, which in 2010 had provided four courses, with two start dates over the year. It had been aimed at school leavers with low attainment, and young people referred by the Connexions Services. The number of applications had dropped dramatically from 2010, and none of these courses enrolled sufficient numbers to run during 2012/13.

The VP explained that their key strategic management priorities from 2009/10 had been on expansion of Levels 3 and 4, and these had largely been achieved, but Foundation Learning provision had declined. With a highly diverse student body, the success rates in 2011/12 showed slightly lower success rates for white British male learners, compared with other groups of 16-18 year olds. The two trades vocational courses, engineering and construction had seen declining enrolments and QSRs. The two specialist academic vocational courses, ICT and administration had remained stable, as had the general Level 1 Vocational Studies course, although retention continued to be below the college average. She explained that:

"Our marketing intelligence shows that many students come from some of the most deprived post-codes in the county, with generational unemployment, and higher levels of NEET young people than in other, more affluent parts of their travel-to-learn areas… These students often live in challenging circumstances that means they have difficulties with regular attendance" (B1).

The managers perceived the main benefit for the students as the opportunity to achieve accredited units early in the programme, which had led to improved retention in the first term. Students could leave with evidence of successful study, although the managers observed that the qualifications didn't mean much to employers. Their lexicon became increasingly to reflect that of the market. One manager voiced the view that:

"Foundation Learning has meant an over-emphasis on outcomes at the expense of content and this leads to negativity about the students on courses below Level 2… The focus on qualification success is leading to an economic, rather than an educational culture, where qualifications have become commodified and are now of little exchange value" (B2).

The local context

The managers explained that, within their local context, where rates of attendance and retention were seen as major challenges, the focus on QSRs felt particularly harsh. They referred to Ofsted's survey on Urban Colleges (Ofsted 2012), which they thought reflected their local situation well, as they found that rates of attendance and retention continued to have an adverse impact on their QSRs. They still had a tail of poor attendance, particularly on the construction and engineering courses, where they had experienced major staffing difficulties.

When discussing the local demographic context, the managers explained that the local 14-19 strategic partnerships had decreased in significance in many of the areas in which they operated, at the same time as the competition increased for the most able students in preparation for RPA. They explained that the 14-19 strategy groups had not been helpful:

"We work across several local authority boundaries, which has always made strategic planning challenging. The disability sub-sections were the most active and this has helped with our provision for students with high needs, but even here very little's happened recently… We are now in an increasingly competitive position, because some local schools are expanding their 6th forms, and we have three other GFE colleges in our travel to learn area. One GFE has significantly better specialist resources for engineering and construction than we have, and two GFE's can offer progression to Level 3… The ILP closest to our centre which offers ICT and administration at Level 1 provides the same programme over 22 weeks, so students prefer that. We need more local planning so that we can agree which specialisms we should offer" (B2).

The managers pointed out also that local demographic analyses had to be reconciled with the fact that students often preferred to go to colleges in a locality where they were not known, could have a fresh start, and where the travel links were good.

They further explained that the competition for low level trades jobs was particularly challenging, in a locality with no major employers. In the academic vocational subjects, ICT and administration, the competition for entry-level jobs was acute, particularly in the office-related suites of qualifications. Those students were often in a better position after achieving a higher level qualification, because, although there were vacancies, the likelihood of finding employment with a level 1 qualifications was low; students often had to compete with graduates, well-qualified immigrants and people who had been made redundant, with more experience.

The biggest decline following the introduction of Foundation Learning had been on the GFL programmes, in which the local context had been highly significant. The manager of the 14-16 provision viewed this decline as:

"partly the result of the expansion in schools, but the GFL programme was not viewed positively by parents and students. They see little value in the qualifications and several parents and students referred to negative publicity about meaningless low level courses… the 14-16 taster programmes we offer leads to

similar level of qualifications as the GFL programme. A third of those students, who completed last year, had achieved well and progressed to FE to take trades courses at level 1, but many choose closer colleges, or we didn't offer a Level 1 or 2 programme in the subject they wanted. Two thirds of the cohort returned to the school as their provision was expanding" (B4).

The Foundation Learning manager identified changes in the Jobcentres as significant:

"I think a factor in the poor recruitment on the GFL courses was the loss of the Connexions service. The advisers who worked in the Jobcentres had a specific responsibility to support these students and help them to find placements in colleges. This source of referral has now dried up. A few years ago, we could fill our four courses, with recruitment twice a year… As the advisers in the Job Centres have moved on, contacts with us have decreased and we have far fewer referrals" (B3).

They further explained that they had employed a former Personal Adviser (PA) when the Connexions service had been closed down, but the focus in the college had been on progression through the college, particularly to HE. There seemed to be a gap in careers advice.

The staffing establishment and staff conditions

The managers perceived the introduction to Foundation Learning as chaotic, as the practical implications had not been thought through adequately. The constant changes to the QCF in the first year created significant difficulties for lecturers, who constantly had to make revisions as to what was being offered; some qualifications didn't appear on the QCF until well into the year, so the lecturers had to deliver qualifications without the time to digest them, and without being sure whether the courses would finally be accepted. This all added to the pressure on lecturers who, because of the reductions in course contact hours, also had increased work-loads.

The managers explained also that, increasingly, they were experiencing significant difficulties in recruiting the specialist staff they needed. In the 'trades' occupations, construction and engineering, they had experienced significant staff changes and

had found it hard to recruit well-qualified lecturers, as their facilities were not as extensive as a relatively close GFE, with much bigger specialist departments. This had resulted in lower success rates in those subjects. It was also becoming more challenging to recruit well-experienced Functional Skills teachers.

The managers perceived that the increase performance monitoring of teaching staff was stressful for lecturers:

> "The lecturers are now under considerable pressure to make sure students achieve their qualifications, but they have to achieve this with fewer contact hours… Unfortunately, much closer, monthly monitoring hasn't resulted in significantly improved success rates. Students have been retained for longer, but annualised rates of retention have not improved… In some ways it would be better for us if the students dropped out in the first few weeks, because they wouldn't count on our QSR data" (B2).

Funding methodology

The managers perceived the demand-led approach to funding as the most complex funding arrangements they had ever experienced. They found that:

> "the notional contact hours generated by the qualifications are minimal, and with the requirement for three separate strands, it's very difficult to meet all the requirements in the limited contact hours available… A major difficulty is the way the funding's determined. The notional funding hours generated by individual qualifications and listed on the QCF, aren't sufficient to meet the needs of the students, but the guidance teams are under pressure to enter students for as many qualifications as they could in order to maximise income" (B3).

Several managers thought that the Awarding Bodies, were the only organisations in that had benefited, as examinations costs had rocketed. Although some of the listed course hours had been relaxed, the managers perceived the process of application for more course hours as overly bureaucratic and time-consuming.

The managers found the reductions in the ALS budgets as particularly problematic, given the numbers of students who had specific difficulties with text or number, many of whom had not been diagnosed at school as requiring specialist help:

> "Increasingly, only those pupils with very significant difficulties are being diagnosed and supported in schools, because schools also have pressures on their budgets. Often, students are only diagnosed and found to be requiring additional specialist help when they enrol at the college… The core allocation has meant a reduction in income, and it's not possible to offer the same level of support as we used to. Students with specific difficulties now only received individual support once a fortnight, rather than once a week" (A2).

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

It was noticeable that the lexicon used by the managers, particularly in the update at the second visit, reflected that used in the *Wolf Report* (DfE, 2011a). They found that course leaders had become more *risk aver*se and were much more rigorous in their selection processes because of the focus on QSRs, and this meant *perverse incentives* to offer less challenging courses and units:

> "The guidance staff have to be much stricter about accepting students onto provision without the agreed criteria. We have to consider very carefully whether to enter students for a Certificate or a Diploma because of the financial penalty if they don't get the Diploma. We've had to raise the bar for entry… Functional Skills requirements for progression to level 2 are much more rigorously applied, and most students are entered for Entry Level 3, because that doesn't have an external examination… We don't have the funding to run units with small numbers, so in reality everyone does the same. The notion of wrap-around support for individual students is a joke, as the funding has been cut so that we can't even offer an enrichment programme anymore" (B3).

The faculty manager explained that with E2E colleges had been able to offer more meaningful personalisation:

"The E2E programme was flexible and trusted lecturers to base the provision on what students needed to prepare them for employment or further study, without external pressures. The reason it did not work in preparing for employment is because it was inadequately funded. Foundation Learning assumes everyone is ready for qualifications… It's an unforgiving programme that makes assumptions that students are deficient in some way, when it may be that the school system has failed them" (B2).

Programme design

The managers found that the requirement to study all three strands was not appropriate for many of the students on the specialist Level 1 courses, and had led to an overload of paperwork and increased bureaucracy. They expressed relief that the national policy requirements had quickly relaxed, so that all students on level 1 courses did not have to take a long PSD qualification as well as a vocational qualification, which was what they had thought would be required in 2008, when the programme design was announced. The only PSD provision now offered on the Level 1 courses was an employability Award offered during induction week. This effectively meant *ticking off* activities that students had previously done, so they could easily achieve the qualification. The Foundation Learning manager observed that:

"Many of the PSD units do not reflect what the students on their courses required, which was a much more developmental, long term approach, not isolated units which just meant having to demonstrate skills in artificial situations… We decided it would be best just to use the employability Awards, which gives more time for the main qualification" (B3).

The managers all had significant reservations about Functional Skills. It was costly to train lecturers, hard to recruit good staff and it was unpopular with students who could not understand its relevance to the vocational programme they had come to study. Managers found Functional English unsound in having a different pedagogical base from ESOL. They thought the leap between levels was too great and meant more students were entered for lower levels. The faculty manager summarised their perceptions:

"Level 1 and level 2 Functional Skills present a particular problem as they are not contextualised. We were just making progress with embedding Key Skills, and then we have this examination, which takes us back six years, as it encourages separation, not integration. The Functional Skills approach is quite different to Key Skills, and we have had to spend significant sums on staff training and development" (B2).

The QCF and competence-based approaches to assessment

The VP was particularly critical of the competence-based approach to assessment. She said:

"The competence-based curriculum leads to a narrowing of the curriculum offer. It doesn't encourage the development of critical thinking or reflection. All the units are of the same value and the programmes seem to have nothing at the core… The tick-box culture is the opposite of genuine learning" (B1).

However, the Foundation Learning manager took a more pragmatic view, finding that, despite the problems with the QCF, having clear criteria meant that managers could ensure that lecturers were covering the requirements. The competence-based approach also helped lecturers new to teaching:

"The criteria are very clear, and this means that lecturers know exactly what has to be covered and evidenced in order to make sure students pass. It's really useful when we have new lecturers, because we can track student progress through the units on-line, and make sure the lecturers are keeping up with the requirements" (B3).

Vertical progression

Managers found that, despite the Foundation Learning policy aims, vertical progression was becoming highly problematic for several reasons. One manager identified a central structural issue:

"We enter students for Entry Level 3 Functional Skills courses to make sure they pass, but that's not always seen as adequate for progression to a level 2 course. They therefore have to consider a second year at level 1, which means having to go onto adult funding if they want to progress to Level 2. These students often continue to need compensatory work as they progress to higher levels, because,

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although their occupational skills may be sufficient, they have not caught up with Functional Skills and study skills. We don't have sufficient funding to support those aspects on adult programmes" (B2).

Another identified perceptual issues:

"Foundation Learning hasn't helped us to overcome the way our students are sometimes viewed. The publicity about low level courses has meant that increasingly, lecturers prefer to accept applications for Level 2 courses from school leavers with the necessary GCSE grades, rather than students who've completed a Level 1 here. This means another year at Level 1 for some students, or they go elsewhere" (B3).

FOUNDATION LEARNING: PERSPECTIVES OF LECTURERS

1. Lecturers on the General Vocational Studies Level 1 Programme (GFL)

Three lecturers on the Level 1 GFL programme were interviewed. All were transitional, having an academic degree, a PGCE, and teaching the vocational taster units. None of them was vocationally qualified in the subjects they were teaching. They lectured on travel and tourism units (B5) caring for children units (B6) and administration units (B7).

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The lecturers had taught the same taster units prior to the change to Foundation Learning, and so the provision had not changed very much. They found that the biggest structural change to the programme was the amount of paperwork that had to be completed. This had significantly increased with the the QCF.

A particular concern for two of the lecturers was the impact that the decision-making in local schools was having on their recruitment. They had seen a recent increase in the proportion of applications from students with very low attainment in English and mathematics on leaving school, which meant they had more difficulties with the taster units. This situation had not been helped by the decreasing budget for ALS, because the students came with much lower

achievements in English and mathematics, and had less support than previously in the classroom. As one lecturer commented: "The cuts in the ALS budget make it even more difficult, as, with larger classes, we really need more support in the classroom to help those who have difficulties with basic skills" (B7).

Staff roles and working conditions

The lecturers' lexicon reflected their very negative perceptions about the impact of the Foundation Learning policy on their roles as teachers. All perceived that the introduction of Foundation Learning had been problematic, because of the lateness of the release of the qualifications on the QCF, so they were not sure what they could offer until after the start of the term. They had operated on a "wing and a prayer" (B6), and the first few months had been very stressful.

The lecturers strongly agreed that the quotidian impacts of the change had been significant, and they had to spend far too long on paperwork, with too little contact time, which they saw as disadvantaging the students:

> "Filling in paperwork is what students hoped they would not have to do when they came to college. They just wanted to try out different vocational options to see which ones they would like to pursue further. There's not enough contact time to go into anything in any depth. We have to complete the units very quickly. It's just a big rush, like an examinations factory" (B5).

In relation to their own professional roles, the lecturers were very clear that the constant focus on success rates had meant less time for team contact, and increasing pressure on them. One lecturer commented:

> "We've very little time to meet, as we used to previously…The one hour a week meeting time focuses on targets and performance. It's helpful to keep students on track, but we have less time for other discussions… The focus on possible inspection and teaching and learning means that we also have more classroom observations, which puts even more pressure on us" (B6).

The lecturers found it almost impossible to plan any improvements in the programme, because they only had one hour a week to meet, and then they had to focus on student performance, which had become all-consuming. They said they

would like to do joint projects, and work more closely with the Functional Skills lecturers, but "it's really not possible, as we're just about keeping our heads above water" (B7).

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The lecturers agreed that the arrangements for IAG had been significantly changed, with much greater emphasis on Functional Skills, which had come to dominate choice of course level. Individual subject choice was also limited in reality, because the funding restrictions meant that the only choice the students had was limited to selecting two of the three taster subjects.

Programme design

The lecturers all thought that the programme achieved its main purpose, which was to introduce the students to vocational qualifications and let them try out different options. However, the restricted hours of class contact, and the focus on accreditation, limited the extent to which they could offer a more expansive programme, and they had no time for realistic practical experience. They all regretted the loss of enrichment funding, which had meant students could try other subjects such as sport and performing arts, but had also enabled them to organise trips out. They also found that employability units were "no substitute for practical work experience" (B6).

The lecturers described the response to the PSD requirements as "tokenistic" (B6). The students were simply taught units relating to CVs and applications, which, they pointed out, most students had done many time before. They found this aspect the least useful for the students, although, as one lecturer pointed out, "the development of formal communication skills should run through everything we do, as many students have had very interrupted schooling" (B7).

The lecturers thought the Functional Skills should have been more occupationally relevant and that Level 1 was much more difficult than Key Skills. Students did not like it, as it was too much like school, which many had hated, and it was not really

the most appropriate for ESOL students. English and mathematics were the sessions that had the lowest attendance and the lowest success rates. The lecturers would have liked more involvement with the Functional Skills lecturers, because they thought English and mathematics were best taught in context, but this was almost impossible to arrange.

The QCF and competence-based approaches to assessment

The lecturers were not vocationally qualified for the taster units, and welcomed what they saw as the clarity of the criteria. They appreciated the opportunity provided by the introduction of the QCF to accredit individual units early, seeing it as the most beneficial aspect of the programme for the students. As one lecturer said:

> "It's helpful for the students to be able to achieve accredited units early, and it's very motivating. For some students it's the first time they've achieved anything that mattered to them" (B7).

Another said:

> "The use of very clear criteria that have to be met is very helpful for me, because I'm not a subject specialist. Everything is transparent in an NVQ approach. The students know what is expected of them in order to meet the criteria, and I can base my schemes of work on the Awarding Body requirements. I also know we can satisfy the verification requirements and I can meet my performance targets by making sure students complete the units on time" (B5).

However, they all found that meeting the requirements of the criteria dominated their planning, because of the pressure of time to complete the units, which they thought made the process "very formulaic" (B6).

Vertical progression

The lecturers were clear that vertical progression had become more challenging since 2010, because the staff at every level had to make sure students were likely to succeed, and perceptions about the students and the course were sometimes negative. One lecturer summed it up:

> "It's become more common for the students to do another full level 1 course, unless they have made really exceptional progress, and have done well also in Functional Skills. We used to encourage students to go straight to a level 2, but not all of the level 2 lecturers welcome level 1 students, because they can take students with GCSE grades D and E straight from school… The Foundation Learning students are often seen as trouble makers. An increasing number of students are treading water, because of these perceptions about them" (B7).

2. Lecturers on Functional Skills and ESOL courses

Three inclusive lecturers were interviewed, all having an initial academic qualification, and now teaching on functional skills and ESOL programmes. All had PGCEs and had taught for more than five years. One had an ESOL qualification (B8) and the other two both had Level 4 specialist qualifications in English and mathematics (B9) and (B10).

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The lecturers' lexicon reflected the significant change that the introduction of Functional Skills had meant, and the challenges they faced. The three lectures had been involved in the pilots and had all attended training and completed the sample tests.   They perceived the biggest change as the nature of the external examinations at Levels 1 and 2. Functional Skills tests were conceptually much harder than the Adult Literacy and Numeracy tests and Key Skills they replaced.

The lecturers found that the new requirements had placed more pressure on lecturers and students, because of the increasing imperative for them to pass the tests. In 2012 the Functional Skills results in the college were well below national success rates. The lecturers attributed the low rates of participation in Functional Skills lessons to the fact that students found the arrangements too like school:

> "It's unrealistic to expect to compensate for the low levels of skill of the students when leaving school with only one hour a week of tuition. Many students hadn't realised they would have to do Functional Skills when they applied to the college. They had been alienated by English and maths at school, and thought they were

just doing a vocational course, so were put off from the start and were reluctant to attend" (B10).

Staff roles and working conditions

The lecturers found that the pressure on them had increased, and they were much more closely monitored. One lecturer voiced the concerns that both of the Functional Skills lecturers shared:

> "It feels as though we've let everyone down when the results aren't good enough, but the conditions we're working in have never been more difficult. The classes are of mixed levels and include students from several occupational areas… This is very challenging. The number of students we have in each class has increased to around 20, which makes individual programmes in a hour lesson almost impossible" (B10).

The ESOL specialist had found that the national confusion over ESOL funding in 2011/2012 had been detrimental to the provision, because some ESOL lecturers had been made redundant. That had made it difficult when funding had been restored a few months later. Although that had not affected 16-18 year olds as directly as the 19+ provision, it had reduced the college's specialist lecturer base:

> "We have lost that expertise in English which would be very useful now, as many students continue to need language support in order to cope with the vocational language of the course. The ALS budget has gone down, and has significantly reduced the support we can provide to the students. Students with dyslexia now only have individual support once a fortnight, which isn't enough" (B8).

The lecturers would have welcomed more time for discussion with the vocational staff, but although they attended team meetings, the focus was on the performance of students and they did not have time to discuss the integration and embedding of Functional Skills. There was no time for wider discussions. This meant they had fewer opportunities than previously to make the lessons as vocationally relevant as possible, particularly where they had students from several different occupational areas in the classes, and studying at different levels.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

All three lecturers were clear that the IAG arrangements had significantly changed to accommodate Functional Skills. Guidance staff had become much stricter about the results of the English and mathematics initial assessments. Most of the students on the Level 1 courses did not have a solid grounding in the basics at school and so many had to start with Entry Level 3. One Functional Skills lecturer pointed out that that:

> "It was problematic to have to agree the level of course at the start of the year, as previous attainment and current assessments were not necessarily accurate predictors of potential and future achievement" (B10).

Programme design

The lecturers speculated about the way in which the accreditation of three strands suggested separation rather than integration, which was particularly unhelpful for English and mathematics. On the long vocational courses, the PSD strand had become a way to generate income, because the employability Awards were completed during induction, and were not really developmental. Both lecturers wanted greater contextual integration, and as one summed it up:

> "integrating the Functional Skills into the vocational qualifications in some way would be more appropriate for the students. This would mean that the topics and use of language were based on skills students actually required for their occupation, rather than being generalized and decontextualized. We could then focus more on providing individual support, which many students need. Because we have a syllabus to get through, we don't have enough time to work with individual students" (B9).

The lecturers regretted that the progress made in using vocational contexts in Key Skills assignments had not been recognised in the development of Functional Skills. It was as if all of that hard work had never happened, and the years of developing expertise had been ignored, because, as one lecturer said:

"Functional Skills is based on a completely different approach, particularly the sole use of an on-line problem-solving approach for the external exams. I feel as though I'm not trusted any more, because this moves us into a different type of examination regime, as well as undoing all the embedding work we did with Key Skills" (B10).

Another lecturer explained that:

"the problem-solving approach to the testing is positive in principle, but in practice it's much more difficult for the students, and requires a different kind of teaching. I found it very challenging at first, although I've got more used to it now. To move from that relatively protected assignment-based model to an on-line final test at level 1 is much too hard for the less confident students, and they just don't show up for the examinations, which is bad for our results. That's why we enter them for Entry Level 3" (B9).

The concern for the impact on students was strongly voiced, particularly for those who needed some kind of adjustment, such as greater accessibility on-line. The lecturers explained that the poor accessibility of the awarding-body sites had been a challenge for those students who needed different font sizes, and the strong focus on language in the mathematics paper had sometimes been a problem for deaf students, who were effectively disenfranchised. They were also aware of the implications for ESOL students of the crucial importance of language and nuances of meaning, particularly in the scenarios used for the problems, where, as the ESOL lecturer pointed out, "the language is confusing, and is sometimes more complicated than the actual response required"(B8).

With a high number of ESOL students in the college, the lecturer was very aware of the potential difficulty for them when faced with different pedagogical approaches and assumptions. This created tensions when deciding which examination would be most appropriate, within the climate where examination success was so vital:

"The ESOL students are presented with three different approaches enshrined in the three examined areas for English and the two for Maths. ESOL qualifications, Functional Skills qualifications and GCSE all have a distinct pedagogical base… It's possibly easier for ESOL students to take GCSE than Functional Skills Level 1,

particularly in maths… We can decide which examination would be best for our students, but we have to decide about that at the start of the year, which is not always easy if the students are new to us" (B8).

One of the key pedagogical difficulties identified in their narrative was the failure to build on the success of Key Skills and make sure the contexts used for the examinations were occupationally based. It had been well-established in the sector that students learn best in practical contexts and make more sense of problems that relate to their occupational practice and activities. As one lecturer said:

"Contextual relevance was a central component of our professional development as English and mathematics specialists, but it was ignored when they introduced the Functional Skills external tests" (B10).

Vertical progression

The lecturers were clear about the key role of Functional Skills in progression opportunities, recognising that the increased focus on this aspect constituted a hurdle for many students who wanted to take higher level qualifications. Reductions in compensatory support for those with identified difficulties had created a particularly high barrier for those students, who were mainly entered for Entry Level 3 because it was significantly easier to pass. As one Functional Skills lecturer said:

"We are not sure that success at Entry Level 3 is a good indicator of success at Functional Skills Level 1, because of the big jump between the levels. Some Level 2 lecturers prefer to take students straight from school with the necessary GCSE grades, as they see these as less risky than the Foundation students. The publicity about the poor quality of the low level courses has not helped" (B9).

They perceived that the reduction in the funding for adult courses would possibly limit the opportunities for a second chance, because the contact hours would be even further reduced once the students reached 19, so guidance staff would need to be very strict in accepting students onto those courses. All agreed that Functional Skills could become more of a "gatekeeper".

The lecturers could suggest nothing in the changed arrangements that had benefited students, other than the opportunity to gain units of accreditation early. They could not identify any ways in which they had been able to overcome the shortcomings in the programme, although they continued to use their professional experience to make the programme as interesting and valuable as possible, given the large numbers, the different levels in the groups, the range of occupational subjects that students were studying, and the reduction in ALS.

3. Lecturers on Specialist Level 1 Academic Vocational Courses

Two vocationally experienced lecturers were interviewed. One taught ICT (B11), the other administration (B12). Both had PGCEs and both had taught for more than ten years in the FES.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The lecturers on academic Level 1 vocational courses had found that the introduction of Foundation Learning lacked co-ordination, and the late announcements about which qualifications could be used had been very unhelpful. The availability of a long vocational course at Level 1 continued as before, but the change to the QCF had meant a significant increase in paperwork to meet the assessment requirements.

The lecturers saw the main advantage of the Foundation Learning programme for the students as the opportunity for early accreditation, which was very motivating. However, although students sometimes remained on the course for longer than in previous years, retention stubbornly remained as a key challenge; they pointed out the irony of the situation whereby students remained longer, but this now meant their eventual withdrawal contributed to lower rates of retention, because those who previously withdrawn in the first few weeks would not have been included in the performance results. They felt particularly strongly about the funding penalty imposed on the college and their QSRs, if a student found employment and did not complete the course.

The local context

The lecturers found that the local context was becoming more challenging, as schools were now beginning to offer more academic vocational courses, in preparation for RPA, as were the colleges within travel-to-learn distances, and there were several ILPs locally offering the same course over a shorter time. The ICT lecturer identified the difficulties for students of finding a job after successfully taking a level 1 course, because of the intense competition for jobs in that sector:

> "The students have to compete with adults with experience, as well as graduates who can't find relevant work, and settle for a low-level office job. This means gaining a Level 1 qualification at 17 years of age rarely leads to a sustainable job locally. Having to spend a second year doing a level 1 is particularly tough for those students who need to work, as it means another year without income, and they then have to move onto adult funding where they get less support" (B 11).

The lecturer in administration had found that the student cohort was changing in the run up to RPA:

> "Many of the students applying for the level 1 programmes come to the college having been unsuccessful in gaining a place on a level 2 programme, as no-one is now prepared to take a risk. It's also much harder now to get a pitch on school careers evenings, so it's difficult to get our message across" (B12).

Staffing roles and working conditions

The lecturers found that the demand-led funding arrangements had resulted in a stronger focus on the management of their performance, because qualification success was all that really mattered. At the same time they had to teach more with a reduction in class contact hours. The amount of paperwork and their work-loads had increased significantly with the QCF, and the late decision-making about which units could be funded had made the first year very stressful. They had very little opportunity for team working, which meant they were working with too little contact with Function Skills lecturers. They had worked much more closely together in previous years.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The lecturers' lexicon when describing the educational consequences of the enactment of Foundation Learning was starkly negative. The realities of the restrictive funding limited the number of units that could be offered. The subject entry criteria had become increasingly stringent, because of the funding focus on QSRs. Risk-taking was not really an option, and lecturers agreed that students were placed on courses where lecturers and guidance staff thought they had most chance of succeeding. They found that having to make choices early was problematic for some students, who were not really sure which vocational option they wanted to take.

Programme design

The lecturers found that, in reality, the three strands of the curriculum had quickly become two strands, as PSD was seen a way to generate income during induction week. They suggested that funding work experience, where social skills could be practised, would be of more use than PSD, and found it difficult to understand why it had not been included.

The introduction of Functional Skills was viewed negatively, and seen as unhelpful for students. The ICT lecturer voiced particular concerns about the impact of the silo approach to English and maths and challenged the extent to which they were functional:

> "If it were truly functional, English and maths would be much more integrated into the vocational qualification, rather than a separate silo. We had been working towards that with Key Skills assignments, where we could work jointly with the Key Skills staff, but now it's all changed again. We're asked by managers to integrate, but the assessment mode, with an external examination, suggests a separate approach" (B11).

The lecturers pointed out that the funding imperative for high QSRs meant most students were entered for Entry Level 3, as students were more likely to pass. The

situation was exacerbated by reductions in the amount of ALS that could be provided. One lecturer explained that:

> "Many students opted out of English and mathematics at school. I think they saw vocational courses as a way of avoiding English, because we have a high number of students who need ALS. Only those with identified dyslexia get 1-1 support, and that's been reduced to once every two weeks. Otherwise it's expected that any difficulties would be addressed in the Functional Skills sessions with large groups. We have numbers of ESOL learners who would benefit from smaller classes or more support in the classroom" (B12).

The lecturers described a situation where funding had been reduced, and "colleges are expected to compensate in a few months for the years of failure in school" (B11).

The QCF and competence-based approaches to assessment

The lecturers expressed very strongly their educational reservations about the nature of the vocational qualification, as offered by the Awarding Bodies. Their lexicon included phrases such as *teaching to the test*, and *gaming*, seeing the arrangement as:

> "a unit conveyor belt with the students as passive recipients, rather than active learners… Education has been lost to criteria compliance rather than opportunities to develop critical thinking. Gaining qualifications isn't the same as learning… It's become a programme where counting and the number of units was more important than the quality of learning" (B11).

In particular, the lecturers made use of their pedagogic memory, and invoked the very different approach of BTEC:

> "I would like to go back to a programme like BTEC, where we could design projects and assignments with students, and where we and the students had more autonomy. They don't have any opportunities to develop critical thinking" (B11).

Similarly, the other lecturer explained:

"In order to get a full qualification the students have to complete units every week, and there is no let up to the pressure. We are very driven by the criteria, which becomes a tick-box exercise. We don't have a chance to encourage other skills like study skills and independent research: it's all focused on credits and the completion of paper work" (B12).

The lecturer in ICT strongly challenged the structure of the NVQ model on the QCF and its validity as a medium for incremental learning:

"The idea that more units at the same level is better, is simply not true: it's better to do fewer thoroughly and build up skills and knowledge. There's no meaningful concept of underpinning skills that are developed over the year, although we can make sure that we introduce the units that make sense, but it's not a requirement. We have no merit and distinction grades, so there's no incentive for students to work hard" (B11).

The lecturer in administration added that without mandatory units, lecturers could pick units that were the easiest to achieve, rather than the mixing and matching of common skills across units to encourage consolidation and development, which was what would have happened previously with BTEC courses. She summed up by saying: "The NVQ approach used on the QCF means that there are no underpinning knowledge or skills to match".

Other than the opportunity to gain accreditation early, the lecturers could not provide examples of ways in which the change to Foundation Learning had benefited the students. They described a situation in which the severe constraints on planning time meant that, although they were able to use their previous experience to do their best for the students, they were unable to offer students wider learning opportunities, such as the use of assignments, that they recognised would be of benefit to the students. They very much regretted this, and both agreed that their professionalism had been undermined by the criteria compliance model on the QCF and the limited contact hours to meet the requirements.

Vertical progression

The lecturers were clear that the Foundation Learning programme had not made progression for students easier. They had, realistically to gain a Level 2 qualification if they were to find employment, but this had become more difficult with Foundation Learning:

"Attainment in functional skills is increasingly becoming the key requirement for progression, and the qualifications on the QCF don't prepare students adequately. No-one values Level 1 qualifications and staff often prefer to take students from school with better GCSE grades… Students are having to complete a second Level 1 course, so that they can try to achieve a Level 1 in at least one of the Functional Skills… That means they will have to progress to the adult funding which is much less generous and provides very little support… It's very difficult for the students".

THE CHANGE TO THE STUDY PROGRAMME: PERSPECTIVES OF MANAGERS

The faculty manager (B2) and a newly appointed interim senior manager (B13) were interviewed. The interim senior manager had been appointed following turbulence and major changes at senior level in the late spring and summer of 2013. Both the principal and the vice-principal had left the organisation during that period, and the senior roles had been restructured.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The managers explained that the change to the study programme had very negative impact on their core work, which was programmes at level 3. The immediate impact on provision below level 2 had been much less marked. The long GFL and Level 1 specialist courses continued, but their half yearly GFL courses, which had failed to recruit for 2012 and 2013, would not now be resurrected, because the part-time funding for half yearly provision would not be sufficient. They thought it clear that, as one manager said:

"the thrust of the Study Programme funding is to encourage full-time, long courses… That's not right for all students, particularly those who would otherwise

be NEET. Although an increase in programme hours in line with other courses appears to be helpful for young people who've underachieved and need more time, the funding model still mainly advantages those ready and able to follow a full-time course" (B13).

The local context

Locally, the managers found that the impact of RPA for their provision had been significant. More schools and private providers were offering academic subjects at Level 1, and schools were expanding their sixth forms, and appeared to be retaining their most able students. They had experienced more late applications for many of their courses at all levels, and students had applied with lower levels of attainment than in previous years, with a big increase from students who had been turned down elsewhere. This meant an increase in the number of students on the long GFL course, and an increasing number taking a second academic specialist Level 1 course, because applicants did not meet the criteria for Level 2, particularly in Functional Skills.

The managers found that staffing changes at Level 1 could not be fully separated from the impact across the college of the decrease in the number of contact hours at other levels. The reductions in fundable course hours at Level 3 were significant, and as much of their provision was at this level, the change to the Study Programme had meant much turbulence for the college. The result was:

"a significantly increased demand for well-qualified and experienced English and mathematics lecturers, as well as decreased demand for academic and vocational specialists in some areas, as not all lecturers who taught on Level 3 courses want to work at a lower level… A few of the displaced lecturers at Level 3 have agreed to teach on Functional Skills courses at Level 2, but the change in 16-19 provision has led to many redundancies, and significant unrest in some areas of the college. Apprehension and anxiety amongst staff at all levels was the result… We're operating in an increasingly volatile and competitive local market, where schools can afford to pay more for English and maths lecturers" (B2).

Performance measures

The managers welcomed the change to the funding of a programme of learning rather than by QSR, because it would limit, though not eliminate, the amount of *gaming* that had been so disastrous for the reputation of Foundation Learning. However, they did not think that funding on the basis of retention was in reality very different, because students usually achieved if they were retained.   The problem of retention remained, and was the key reason for a decline in QSRs.

They saw as a disadvantage the continuing decision by policy makers that colleges incurred a funding penalty if a student left early to go into employment, before achieving the main qualification aim.   They recognised that attendance continued to be a problem on some courses and that the funding arrangements, would continue to necessitate very close monitoring of courses.

The managers found that the funding changes had resulted in further reductions in college income, which would not be off-set by the two years of income formula protection. They found that the expanded use of deprivation factors in arriving at allocations for ALS should have helped them in theory, as many of their students lived in post-codes in deprived areas and many also had relatively low achievements in English and mathematics.   However, despite this their actual allocation under the new Disadvantage Factor had been reduced, particularly for ALS, because their catchment also included postcodes with very mixed populations. They found it inexplicable that:

> "at a time when all students are encouraged to improve their achievements in English and maths, the compensatory funding was not sufficient, particularly for those with specific difficulties with text or number, who need intensive support. The funding has been reduced significantly over the past few years, although our recruitment at all levels has shown an increasing poor grasp of English and maths that's not always reflected in prior attainment" (B2).

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

The changed programme requirements

Both managers pointed out that late changes to guidance about the relaxation of the use of qualifications on the QCF, echoed the "chaos" of the first year of Foundation Learning. They were ambivalent about the requirement that students take a substantial qualification at a higher level than in previous study:

> "A substantial qualification is useful for many students who came to the college knowing what they want to do and able to benefit from a specialist Level 1 course, but they could have done that anyway under E2E and Foundation Learning. But we find that even though students have achieved qualifications they don't necessarily have the skills and knowledge required for the next level. That's why lecturers on Level 2 courses still prefer to take students with acceptable GCSE scores over those who've studied vocational qualifications at Level 1" (B2).

They had decided to use their own assessments for English and mathematics, as they needed to be sure that students were studying at an appropriate level.

The managers further identified the difficulty of having to establish a single achievement aim. The requirement for early decision-making about qualifications to be taken had been a problem with Foundation Learning and still continued, because it meant they lost funding if a student found employment or decided to focus on qualifications. The managers thought there needed to be "greater flexibility over the main aim, with some recognition that students changed their minds" (B13).

The managers had found that the funding generated for the 'local' non-accredited activity over and above the substantial course and Functional Skills was not sufficient to fund lecturers' contact time:

> "The Study Programme is supposed to provide opportunity for localised opportunities but doesn't generate the funding to do this properly: it seems like another sound-bite, without substance… As a way of meeting the requirements we're piloting an arrangement whereby all 16-19 year olds have a timetabled hour of supervised time in the learning centre, where they can achieve bronze, silver and

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gold awards on an on-line enterprise programme. It's not been possible, with so little funding, to offer the type of enrichment activities we'd offered in college before 2011… I'm a bit apprehensive about the attendance of students in such large groups, but we'll have to review it later in the term" (B 3).

The managers had decided to deploy administrative staff to carry out some of the tutorial functions, reducing the requirement for lecturers' contact hours. They recognised that the arrangements did not provide the opportunities for active learning that they could have offered with sufficient funding for class contact with lecturers, but had to find ways to make savings.

The faculty manager commented that although they no longer had to use qualifications of the QCF, the NVQ approach continued to be used for VQs:

"The fact that we don't have to use the qualifications on the QCF is good news, as it means much less paperwork, but the qualifications haven't substantially changed. At Level 1 they don't provide students with an opportunity to develop the study skills that would help them to progress" (B 13).

The managers did not foresee significant changes for their provision as a result of the English and mathematics requirements, because they already expected all students on Entry Level 3 and Level 1 provision to take Functional Skills. However, the competition for specialist staff was fierce locally. The interim senior manager noted that the Functional skills approach continued with a model that was at variance with functionality: "it's still not occupationally contextualised, despite, the criticism from Alison Wolf, which has just been ignored".

The managers welcomed the recognition that work experience was included, but they felt that the guidance and briefings were unclear. The expectation that all 16-19 year olds, including those in schools, would require external work experience would increase local competition for placements. It was likely to be particularly difficult at lower levels, because estimates in one local LA were that more than 4,000 external placements a year would be needed. They understood that where students had found part-time employment this could not be included, which also

seemed unhelpful. The basis of the programme with a work experience aim was especially unclear. The faculty manager pointed out that it seemed

> "like a return to E2E, but it's not clear how any assessment of this would be evaluated, and how it should be monitored. Details from the EFA were vague, and the changes to the FE governance have not helped. Changes in personnel have presented a particular problem, as the officials from the DfE, EFA and the four main LAs we work with, interpret the requirements differently" (B2).

Vertical progression

The managers thought that the barrier to progression that Functional Skills had become for some students looked likely to continue, and with it the possibility that more students would have to take a second course at level 1 before achieving the level required to take a course at level 2. The requirement for Functional Skills had been strengthened, but the ALS income was reduced. The continuing reductions in funding for adult programmes was seen by the managers as particularly unhelpful, compounding the disadvantage that some students who had low attainment on leaving school continued to face when they attempt to progress. As the faculty manager pointed out, *it means the end of a second chance for young people, which is what FE has always been good at* " (B13).

The interim senior manager was particularly outspoken in his understanding of Foundation Learning and not optimistic about the change to the Study Programme:

> "Foundation Learning didn't prepare students for anything: it was a corrupt model, pretending level 1 was useful, but also seeing it as a glass ceiling. We'll have to see what happens with the Study Programme. It's good to have the link between accreditation and funding relaxed, but I think it's still possible to short-change the students with false expectations and hopes. The substantial vocational courses are not in reality not much different, and will continue to disadvantage the students who didn't do well enough at school, because they might still be seen as meaningless" (B13).

Summary of the main consequences of policy changes

The narratives of the participants were bleak. Their lexicon reflected a climate in which they understood Foundation Learning to be contributing to an economic, rather than an educational culture. Their perspectives illustrated the concept of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, op.cit.), as they described the consequences of a neo-liberal strand: the national, centralised, Foundation Learning programme design, with a funding methodology based solely on QSRs, was not appropriate for all of their students, negating the social democratic ambition, to improve life chances by ascending the QCF qualification ladder. The policy change to Foundation Learning had resulted in a significant decline in the provision at Entry Level 3 and difficulties with their 'trades' courses at Level 1. Although not central to their strategic aims, which focused on provision at Level 3, managers regretted the demise of the flexible half yearly GFL courses that had formed an important part of their E2E provision, and a major source of recruitment.

The managers attributed the decline in enrolments during the life of Foundation Learning to the highly competitive local educational landscape, with minimal strategic planning, combined with the dispersed nature of their provision across many local authority boundaries. They also noted the negative perceptions by lecturers and parents to the qualifications on QCF, which were seen as not challenging, and of little exchange value.

Experienced lecturers found their professionalism undermined as they struggled to manage increased workloads. Their negativity about the qualifications on the QCF stemmed from their perceptions that the outcomes-based model was not developmental, with a pedagogy that illustrated the *horizontal discourse* and *restrictive codes* that Bernstein (op.cit.) argued compounded educational disadvantage.

Their pedagogical memory embraced formative approaches to assessment but because of time pressures they were unable to *mediate* beyond what Higham (op.cit.) categorised as an *accommodation* response in order to improve the provision. They voiced in particular the view that the combination of low level

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qualifications on the QCF and the requirement for achievements in Functional Skills had created additional barriers to progression that were further exacerbated by the reductions in compensatory income. They found the lack of contextualisation in Functional Skills, and the different pedagogies implicit in exams for ESOL and GCSE very unhelpful.

The managers did not think the change to the Study Programme would make a substantial difference: the use of retention as the performativity measure was similar to the use of QSRs in reality, as they struggled to improve rates of retention. Increased local competition continued to impact negatively on their recruitment, as with the introduction of RPA, schools retained the more able students. The requirement for external work-placements was particularly problematic locally. Vertical progression looked likely to continue to be a challenge, as the perceptual and structural barriers remained, particularly with the increased focus on Functional Skills. The programme continued to marginalise students who would benefit from flexible arrangements for participation and those with least educational capital. The dominant narrative from the participants was that, increasingly, students who underachieved at school were being denied a second chance as the neo-liberal aspects of policy negated the social democratic ambition, both by reductions in compensatory funding and the continuing behaviourist orientation of the curriculum, which had only marginally improved with the demise of the QCF.

CASE THREE: GAMMA INDEPENDENT LEARNING PROVIDER

Context

Gamma Independent Learning Provider (ILP) was a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, which was established in the 1980s and located in a large, ethnically and economically very diverse conurbation. The mission of the centre was to work in the local area with school leavers, with few qualifications, but with a strong interest in working out of doors in horticultural settings. The centre consisted of a wildlife garden and study centre, and the Foundation Learning Programme was the only programme funded by the YPLA, although the centre also had link arrangements with local schools. In 2010 the Centre offered one main subject area, horticulture.

Table 6: Summary of Previous Experience and Training of Participants.

Gamma ILP	Years in FES			Qualification		Teaching Qualifications			Other Experience	
Current Role	≤5	6-10	11-20+	*Ac.	*Voc.	PGCE or cert ed.	PTLLS CTTLS DTTLS	Level 4 L/N or ESOL	E2E or Entry	**Ind. or **Com
Lecturers	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
Managers	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1

*Ac = academic *Voc. = vocational as main subject route.

** Ind. = Industrial Experience,   Com. = Commercial Experience

FOUNDATION LEARNING: PERSPECTIVES OF A MANAGER

The director (C1) was interviewed. She had qualified as a horticulturalist. She had been director of the centre from its beginnings, adopting an inclusive stance from the outset, working with young people who had underachieved at school.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The Provision

The lexicon used by the director was overwhelmingly positive on the first visit: she described the change to Foundation as a "life saver". She explained that before 2008 she had funded the training programmes through an annual contract from the

European Social Fund (ESF). However, in 2008 the local LSC quality manager had offered the centre a contract to help the to meet the targets to widen participation for 16-19 year olds. The director thought that the change to Foundation Learning had been:

> "brilliant for the centre, and had meant greater financial stability and an endorsement of our focus on qualifications, which is central to our mission. We've always seen qualifications as the key to progression for students who've not achieved well at school" (C1).

Despite what she saw as the early teething troubles, and lack of clear guidance when Foundation Learning was introduced, the director explained that enrolments had increased rapidly from 10 in 2008/2009, to 33 in 2011/2012. With the recent introduction of retail as an additional subject area, the proportion of female students had increased. In 2012, the centre had very high QSRs, including above average Functional Skills results, and more than 80 per cent of students moved into positive destinations. There were no significant differences in achievements by race, gender or disability.

As a result of the Foundation Learning funding, the director had been able to afford to increase the number of part-time lecturers, which now included a part-time retail specialist and an additional part-time Functional Skills specialist. However she found that the focus on qualifications had significant administrative disadvantages:

> "it's meant a proliferation of paperwork to meet the assessment requirements of three curriculum stands, much increased bureaucracy associated with the new ILR, and time-consuming contact with the Awarding Bodies in order to make sure we are offering the right qualifications on the QCF" (C1).

The local context

The local policy context was very important for the centre. The director explained that:

> "central to the charity's articles and instruments is the requirement that we provide local training for young people who've not been very successful at school… We also have a wider brief as a community resource, so we work with local primary

schools to encourage young people to develop an interest in plants and the natural world. We've also developed 14-16 link courses, and secondary school pupils from 14 years attend for one day a week to make use of our facilities" (C1).

Neither of the two large, local GFE colleges offered Horticulture, although a nearby ILP provided horticulture training over 22 weeks. However, the director explained that the ILP was not located in a realistic setting, and most of the training took place in a classroom, so she thought her centre had been in a relatively advantageous situation.

However, by the second phase of visits, the director found the local situation less auspicious. She explained that many of the local schools were expanding their sixth forms in preparation for RPA, and, with pressure on budgets, the number of school link programmes had reduced. The centre was no longer invited to school careers events. The transfer of responsibility for careers from the Connexions Service to schools was beginning to have negative implications for the student cohort. As she explained:

> "The careers teachers in schools don't seem to value vocational training as a possible career route. They don't think of apprenticeships either, which is where many of our students progress... We've found an increasing number of students this year are applying with very low attainment in maths and English, so we are accepting more students at Entry Level 2 in Functional Skills, whereas we have previously focused mainly on Entry Level 3, with Level 1 for the vocational qualifications" (C1).

Funding Methodology

The funding methodology had enabled the director to increase the income substantially by offering students two long qualifications, plus Functional Skills and short additional qualifications. She welcomed the opportunity for the students to gain accredited units very quickly and to take smaller Awards, as many had never achieved a nationally recognised qualification before. She also found helpful the funding available for other occupationally relevant qualifications such as health and safety.

However, despite this advantage, the first year of the QCF had been very confusing as it was not clear which qualifications could be funded. She also found the national funding arrangements over-complicated:

> "The listed contact hours attached to the qualifications on the QCF frequently underestimated the actual time students needed to complete work effectively… The flexibility to offer students units, rather than full qualifications is good in principle, but it's also costly, as individual units are relatively more expensive than full qualifications… Our accreditation costs have spiralled…the arrangements benefit Awarding Bodies substantially" (C1).

Educational Consequences of Policy

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The director explained that she had not significantly changed the entry requirements, and continued to accept students who had not achieved well at school, and could benefit from the provision. The key requirement was still an enjoyment of horticulture and especially working outside, as this was the hook that motivated students:

> "The students select themselves really. This is something you either enjoy or you don't. The initial visit is usually sufficient for them to make up their minds and for us to assess them. We try to accommodate young people who like plants, relish being outdoors, and are willing to learn through that practical medium" (C1).

Nevertheless, the demand-led funding methodology meant the staff had to be very careful about the qualifications initially offered to students, because the funding depended on successful completion. The director thought that the requirement for early decision-making about qualifications compounded the difficulty, as it was not easy to tell whether a student would achieve a Certificate or a Diploma, and the centre faced financial penalties if the student did not achieve the stated qualifications.

The director explained that since its inception, a key feature of the centre had been that every student followed an individual programme. However, choices of units were constrained in reality because the Awarding Bodies required a minimum

number of entries for each unit. This meant a restriction of choices, as the numbers of students in the centre was small.

Programme design

The director was positive, in principle, about the inclusion of the three qualification strands, which she had found benefited students. However, she did not endorse the silo approach to the curriculum, and had, since the 1980s, used what she described as an "integrated holistic approach":

> "I have always used an approach where the three strands are integrated and taught through team projects. Students are assigned tasks that are appropriate for their level and development needs… By using this approach we can make sure that the students have the opportunity to develop the social skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to be able to find and maintain a job, because their development is on-going, and not taught in separate silos" (C1).

The director found the omission of funding for work experience, believing it to be vital. She continued to use fund-raising income to resource a work experience co-ordinator, so that every student had work experience for one day a week in the summer term, which often lead to employment.

The director did not find Functional Skills pedagogy helpful. Whilst accepting that English and mathematics were important, she thought that the external tests should relate to the practical context. She found the approach too theoretical for the students, who had been turned off these subjects at school. She thought that the Functional Skills tests were hard at level 1, with a big leap from Entry Level 3. In order to be sure of success, most of the students took Entry Level 3, as that did not have an external examination.

The director also had reservations about the PSD qualifications on the QCF:

> "There's too much paperwork attached to PSD qualifications. This is what the students hate, because they need to be in the classroom to complete it. The lecturers have to do a lot of additional work, which is challenging because they're part-time…I think the unit approach being used for PSD is simplistic. Many students here can be very articulate with their peers in informal situations, but this

can't be captured in separate units… The development of the formal social skills needed for employment occurs throughout the programme, through team work and participating in community activities, not by ticking off units" (C1).

The QCF and competence-based assessment approaches

Although the director was critical of the unitised approach to PSD on the QCF, she was sanguine about the competence-based approaches to VQs, having herself been trained initially with a competence approach in a practical context. She thought that the approach could work well, because everyone could be clear about expectations. However, despite this, she pointed out that much depended on the quality of the criteria and the context for learning:

> "It's possible for students studying with other organisations to achieve accreditation in horticulture in six months or less, mainly in the classroom, without having developed the skills or knowledge in any depth… It's possible to comply with the criteria with only superficial knowledge, and no opportunity for consolidation or development. That undermines the value of the qualification for all students. It doesn't happen here, because students have constantly to practise their skills, and they have external work opportunities to consolidate what they had learnt" (C1).

Vertical progression

The director was clear that progression routes for students on completing the course were changing. She observed on the second phase of visits that:

> "Many students used to go straight into employment, but the local labour market's recently become more difficult at entry level, unless the students has had involvement with the employer. We've been in establishing a number of apprenticeship places with local horticultural organisations, including local parks and gardens and garden centres, which has been very positive… It's got more challenging for students who want to continue studying, because they sometimes have to take a second level 1 course in local colleges. This is disappointing for them… I see this as a consequence of the way in which other providers choose easier units to ensure success, with very little practical work, so colleges no longer see any value in the qualifications" (C1).

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She added that the regional land-based college, which used to accept the students directly onto their Level 2 Horticulture courses had also become more selective and now required level 1 in Functional Skills as well as the VQ. She thought that the focus on Functional Skills was becoming a barrier for some of their students, since many had specific difficulties with text or number, although they had very good practical skills.

FOUNDATION LEARNING: THE PERSPECTIVES OF A LECTURER

The inclusive education co-ordinator (C2) had overall responsibility for the curriculum and was also a lecturer in Functional Skills and PSD. She had been with the centre for 18 years, had a degree, a PGCE and had previously taught English and Basic Skills in colleges, including working with students with high needs.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The co-ordinator said she had eagerly "embraced" the introduction of Foundation Learning, because she could focus on helping students to achieve qualifications, which formed the basis of their programme and mission. The consequences for the provision of the change had been enormous, as the centre had been able to expand. This expansion meant that, as a small centre, they had greater economies of scale and so could enhance their programme.

Since 2010, the co-ordinator had introduced a retail qualification, which had attracted more female students, and provided all of the students the opportunity to engage with the local community through retail activities associated with horticulture, and to use their retail outlet on site. She was considering introducing a floristry qualification, since this would build on the produce from the gardens and provide additional opportunities for students. Not only had the number of students increased rapidly, but they had consequently been able to employ two more part-time staff.

The coordinator explained that the expansion had not been "plain sailing"; the introduction of the QCF had been problematic. The guidance had been

contradictory at times as she had not been sure which qualifications could be funded. Their costs of accreditation had spiralled and they had had to introduce the ILR, which had been time-consuming and costly. However, she welcomed the fact that health and safety qualifications could be funded, since these were essential for horticulture students, and sometimes determined whether or not a student would be offered work-experience.

The local context

The co-ordinator found, on the second visit, that despite the fact that their mission was to provide opportunities for the local community, the local policy landscape had changed since 2010, in ways that had not been helpful.

> "We've always had really productive relationships with the local schools, and have felt part of the local education community, but referrals have dropped this year. The local schools' budgets have been reduced, and some schools have cut the 14-16 provision, so parents don't know of our existence. Some local schools with sixth forms are preparing for RPA, and developing their own level 1 provision. We have not been invited to careers events this year, and we're sure that the schools aren't all encouraging students to look at vocational options. The loss of Connexions hasn't helped, as the PAs used to refer students to us" (C2).

The co-ordinator confirmed that the centre had never been included in any local 14-19 strategic planning groups. She thought that a particular local difficulty for the centre was the relatively close proximity of another ILP, which offered the Level 1 qualification in horticulture in 22 weeks. It offered a quicker route, because it was mostly classroom based, and could seem a better option. She maintained that:

> "We make sure that students develop their skills in a practical context, so that they can consolidate them, but it's possible to get the same qualification without this depth of experience, which devalues the qualification" (C2).

She recognised the value for some students of the flexible entry date, but she thought that most students needed a year to develop the skills and understanding they needed for occupational formation.

Funding methodology

The co-ordinator welcomed the funding methodology, which generated substantially more income than the previous ESF contract. However, she had found the allocation for ALS was insufficient for the numbers of students who needed specialist support with text or number. Most of the students had experienced significant difficulties at school. More than a third of applicants who required support had not previously had their difficulties identified, or received any support at school. She felt that with more funding she could provide more intensive individual help so that the students could make more progress during the year.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The co-ordinator explained that the process of initial advice and guidance had not changed very much. She continued to invite potential applicants to visit the centre for a day and meet some of the current students. However, once they had accepted students they had to be confident that they had a good chance of completing the course successfully, so most were entered for Certificates rather than the Diplomas. She thought it was unhelpful that this decision about the type of programme had to be taken very quickly, as a student's potential was not always immediately evident. They had to be particularly careful about Functional Skills and tended to play safe. By the second visit, the co-ordinator was increasingly finding that students who applied to do a level 1 course had previously been rejected elsewhere.

The co-ordinator explained that the Foundation Learning requirement to offer individual programmes was fundamental to their approach, but found constraints within the Foundation Learning and Awarding Body arrangements:

> "As the centre is small, we can get to know each student well and can tailor the programme to their needs as far as possible. We've continued to do this, but the requirement to identify accreditation very early, means we don't have the flexibility for students to change elements of the programme. This restriction is frustrating, as it limits the opportunity to try different areas linked to individual

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interests and abilities… It's also not helpful that Awarding Bodies require a minimum number before they will allow us to offer individual units" (C2).

Programme design

The co-ordinator explained that they were used to a three-strand approach to curriculum design, but she did not think it appropriate to teach the strands separately, and had never done this:

> "We use a project-based approach, where students work in teams and develop their skills, through specially devised projects. Some of the projects we've used this year have related directly to gardening, such as asking teams to plan, develop and evaluate a new bed of specific plants. Another project involved working in the community, providing Christmas lunch for the elderly, using much of our own produce… This approach means that the evidence for the assessment criteria is meaningful, and is based on realistic activities… We try to keep classroom-based completion of paperwork to a minimum, because students find it too like school. Often it was the classroom lessons that alienated students… It seems to work. We have very high rates of retention by using this approach" (C2).

The co-ordinator explained that the project approach was the vehicle through which a range of skills and behaviours were developed and fostered.   The vocational experience formed the bed-rock of the programme. The work in the grounds helped the students to gain the practical skills they needed, and helped with manual dexterity as well as wider employability skills. She further explained that:

> "The students need time to develop these skills to the level expected by employers. They have to get here on time and stay on task.   It's no good giving up easily. That's what many of our students have done in the past. They need to apply themselves to something practical where they can see the results. They also need to develop formal social skills, which they learn by working in a team or in the shop with customers. All of these activities also help to develop and reinforce maths and English skills" (C2).

The co-ordinator perceived the lack of work experience as a significant policy failure.   She was clear that work experience was essential for the cohort of

students. Work experience, with a good employer, helped to contextualise and reinforce the learning, and often led to employment or an apprenticeship. That was why the director fund-raised so that all students had external work placements in the summer term.

The experienced co-ordinator thought that the requirements for Functional Skills presented a significant challenge, because most of the students had difficulties with English and mathematics at school.

> "The external on-line tests use problem scenarios that students find remote from their experience, and also use language that obscures rather than clarifies the focus of the questions being asked…The term Functional Skills is inaccurate, because they are not functional. The testing doesn't relate to functionality, which implies a realistic, not an artificial context… What matters is how the students operate in their daily lives and in employment" (C2).

She questioned the currency of Functional Skills qualifications, saying the term did not mean anything to employers. She speculated that it might be more appropriate at Level 1 and below to have English and mathematics integrated into the occupational qualification. She pointed out, as an experienced practitioner, that:

> "We've known for more than 30 years that people who have difficulty with basic skills find it much easier to learn and remember in familiar situations, particularly if they are able to apply the concepts in an immediate practical situation. Why are we getting even further away from that? Wouldn't it be better to integrate them into the qualification?" (C2).

The co-ordinator was ambivalent about the PSD requirements, because although having an accredited strand had meant they could maximise their income, she had reservations about the quality of the units on the QCF:

> "We've always emphasised communication and social skills in our programmes, and we think this is just as important as the vocational qualification. Most students need to develop their formal language to prepare them for employment, or a college, so it's good to see that the importance of social skills recognised… but the qualifications on the QCF are not what's needed… The paperwork is tedious, and

very off-putting for students, who find it pointless… Dividing communication into small segments is not very helpful, as it's not how students learn. They develop their social and work skills over time, and throughout the programme, not by completing separate units. That's why we've always used an integrated approach to the curriculum" (C2).

The QCF and competence-based assessment approaches

The co-ordinator's perception of the NVQ approach was measured. She thought that the main value of the competence-based approach was that it was very clear for everyone what was expected, but she had found that the unitisation on the QCF had undermined the value of the Foundation Learning qualifications

> "I can understand why people think the qualifications don't necessarily mean students are competent: the criteria in the units offered by Awarding Bodies aren't challenging and don't prepare students well for the Level 2. Some units are far too easy… The problem is that some providers just comply with the basic requirements and complete the qualification very quickly, without allowing students the opportunity to develop skills over time. Students may have the piece of paper, but haven't developed the skills of knowledge… Students have to be able to demonstrate skills that can be replicated and transferable, not just demonstrated in a specific circumstance" (C2).

The co-ordinator maintained that the curriculum model used by the centre overcame many of the shortcomings on the QCF and the Functional Skills approach. She thought that the main benefit for the students of the change to Foundation Learning was the increased funding it generated, enabling them to continue with approaches that they had previously found successful.

Vertical progression

The co-ordinator had found that the barriers for progress to higher level courses had gradually increased. The combination of more stringent requirements in English and mathematics and negative perceptions about the value of Level 1 vocational qualifications, had made the situation worse for the students who wanted to continue studying. The regional land-based college where many of the students applied to take a Level 2 qualification, had become:

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> "suspicious of the level 1 horticulture qualification, because they say they have accepted students from other centres who can't even do the basics in horticulture, even though they have the Certificate or the Diploma" (C2).

She found that colleges had become much more selective now, because they needed to improve their success rates. Guidance staff in colleges were increasingly requiring students to take a second Level 1 qualification in a practical subject, which meant having to repeat the year.

THE CHANGE TO THE STUDY PROGRAMME: PERSPECTIVES OF MANAGERS

The director (C1) and the education co-ordinator/lecturer (C2) were interviewed together.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The managers' lexicon reflected the extreme apprehension they felt about the changes to the basis of funding, which adversely affected the programme they could offer. They said that they had "dreaded the change", as it meant a "reversal of their situation," by reducing their income significantly and setting them right back to where they were before 2009.

The Foundation Learning funding arrangements had made it possible to offer two long qualifications over 40 weeks, but the change to the Study Programme made that virtually impossible, as the students could only be funded for one substantial qualification. Several weeks after the start of the Study Programme, the managers were still not clear about all aspects of the funding. The reduction in income meant that it would be impossible to fund qualifications over and above the substantial vocational qualification and Functional Skills. They would not be able to fund the external qualifications related to occupational competence and health and safety, which were invaluable for employment. They were uncertain what would happen to students' benefits, as they would be required to study for more than 16 hours a week. They were still waiting for guidance about this.

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They anticipated that their holistic programme would be very similar to the one they had offered under Foundation Learning. They observed wrily that the change would mean "a welcome reduction in the time spent on paperwork to meet the excessive QCF assessment requirements, but this would not compensate for the substantial reduction in income" (C1).

The Local Context

The participants found that the local educational landscape had got more competitive. With the start of RPA, the trend that they had identified on the second visit had continued, as students were applying with lower levels of previous achievement than in previous years. They thought that schools were "cherry-picking and hanging on to students with better grades" (C2), and that careers teachers did not tell pupils about their centre or about apprenticeships. The number of applications had halved compared with 2012/13, and the enrolments had dropped to 20. For the first time, many students would have to take courses at Entry Level 2 rather than Entry Level 3 or Level 1.

Performance Measures

The managers did not think that the change from QSRs to retention as the main performance measure would make much difference, as their rates of retention were very high. However, they found it worrying that they would lose significant amounts of funding if a student with a qualification aim found employment before completing the qualification. This seemed to "contradict the main aim of the programme" (C1).

The managers hoped that, despite the budget significant reductions, they would be able to retain the newer part-time members of staff, but were unsure. They would have to continue to fund-raise even further in order to offer the programme for 40 weeks. They had found managing the changes to the ILR challenging and were awaiting guidance about its completion for the increasing cohort of students who were not ready to take a substantial vocational qualification. As the co-ordinator explained:

"A big problem is that we get different advice from the LA and the EFA about how we record and monitor on the ILR the programmes for students who are not ready for a full Entry Level 3 programme. The funding model assumes a full substantial programme. It's really complicated and time- consuming trying to complete an ILR for a student who does not fit the standard requirements" (C2).

The managers found that, despite income formula protection, their allocation under programme area costs and the disadvantage factors had resulted in reductions in income, which would have very serious consequences for them. They felt the disadvantage funding allocation did not reflect the mixed post codes and the educational deprivation of their changed student cohort, because a lagged funding formula was applied. They had been forced to increase group sizes and reduce further the opportunities for individual support. This went against the grain of their inclusive practice. The reduction in the funding allocation for ALS was of particular concern, with the increasingly low levels of previous achievement of the cohort.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

The changed programme requirements

The managers found that the Study Programme requirement to offer a programme at a higher level did not make much difference, because most students came with very few previous achievements. They carried out their own assessments and diagnosis for Functional Skills. They found that, although they continued to provide individual timetables for students, their choice of programme had been significantly reduced by the lack of funding for additional subjects. As with Foundation Learning, the managers found the requirement for early identification of the main aim as problematic for their cohort, as many students changed their minds during the year.

The managers found no difficulty with offering a substantial vocational qualification for the cohort of students who were able to participate at that level, but they had found significant difficulties in using the ILR to complete a programme for the

increasing number of students not yet ready for a substantial qualification. Much still remained unclear:

> "We've found that the changes from the YPLA to the EFA and new LA commissioners have meant frequent changes of quality managers. They don't know much about our work and they all have different interpretations of the regulations. We've received differing guidance about completing the new ILR and even now we are not sure what is allowable" (C2).

The very small allocation for 'local' non-accredited activity had been absorbed into the tutorial arrangements. The managers continued to view Functional Skills as pedagogically problematic, as the lack of occupational relevance continued. The big jump between levels remained and they had not found suitable alternative qualifications for the students.

The managers welcomed the inclusion of work experience, but could only afford to offer it by continuing to fund-raising to pay for the work-experience co-ordinator. Guidance about work experience requirements was vague. Their students had external work experience for one day a week for 10 weeks, so they hoped that would be sufficient for the main programme, but were not yet sure. Schools were also now required to find external placements, so finding good placements was likely to be much more competitive. They wanted to offer Traineeships, but were not sure how much of the programme had to be with an external employer. They were not sure whether their realistic setting, including an allotment, would be counted towards the hours of work experience required.

Vertical progression

The managers found that the change to Study Programme did not necessarily improve the possibility of progression. Negative perceptions about the value of the programmes at Level 1 or below were unlikely to change, because the programmes had not substantially changed. They thought the situation would not improve unless the Awarding Bodies insisted that the occupational aspects had to be completed mainly in a realistic setting. Similarly, the pedagogical issues relating to lack of occupational relevance in English and mathematics had not changed.

Functional Skills attainment would continue to be a barrier for students wanting to take a course at a higher level, because colleges still had to have confidence students would succeed. The increased focus on English and mathematics was particularly a hurdle for students who had specific difficulties with text or number, and with their changing cohort, with higher needs and a reduction in compensatory funding this barrier might increase.

Summary of the main consequences of policy changes

The participants had found that the social democratic ambition of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, op.cit.), to improve social mobility, had seemed to be a reality when the Foundation Learning policy was introduced, because their enrolments initially increased. However, during the life of Foundation Learning, they found that negative consequences of the funding methodology, the neoliberal strand, and the consequences of a locally competitive environment, and other national changes, had effectively undermined this ambition.

The participants initially found that the focus on accreditation in the Foundation Learning policy matched their values and their mission, describing the funding methodology as a "life saver", because they were able to maximise their income by offering students two long courses. However, over time, the preparation for RPA, and the loss of the Connexions service, resulted in declining applications, as schools cherry-picked the most able students and the centre staff were no longer invited to careers evenings. They found themselves in an increasingly competitive situation.

Using the typology developed by Higham (op.cit.), the participants' response to the curriculum was one of assimilation, as they overcame the significant shortcomings they perceived with the QCF and the segmented programme design, by continuing to offer students an holistic integrated programme, based on projects, that prepared the students for employment or further learning. They voiced strongly the view that the unitisation of PSD did not reflect the ways that students developed social skills. They recognised that the focus on QSRs as the performance indicator resulted in unchallenging courses that undermined the value of the

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provision, and described a situation in which, without their mediation, the NVQ approach reflected the *horizontal discourse* and *restrictive codes* identified by Bernstein (op.cit.), compounding educational disadvantage. They offered a programme which encouraged the development of a *vertical discourse* and *elaborated codes*, so that students were better prepared for employment or higher level provision. Despite this, the participants found that the negative perception of Entry level 3 and Level 1 qualifications, and the focus on Functional Skills had led to warehousing, as students found it increasingly more difficult to progress to a Level 2 course.

The participants "dreaded" the change to the Study programme, because the changed funding methodology meant a complete reversal of their funding situation. This was combined with a drop in applications and a significant change in the attainment levels of applicants, few of whom were ready for a Level 1 vocational course. The requirements for Functional Skills had increased, the compensatory income had reduced, and local schools were retaining more able students and failing to provide comprehensive careers advice. The change to retention as the main performance measure did not concern them, as their QSRs were very high. They still had to fund-raise in order to provide external work-experience, and much was still unclear as the programme started. However, they thought that the same factors that had limited progression with Foundation Learning were likely to remain, as the social democratic strand of the *double-shuffle*, namely the ambition to improve social mobility through vertical progression, was undermined by continuing negative perceptions about the value of the qualifications, still largely narrowly behaviourist, and by the hurdling effect of the focus on English and mathematics.

CASE FOUR: DELTA INDEPENDENT LEARNING PROVIDER

Context

In 2010, Delta ILP was situated in a highly diverse area of a large conurbation, with two sites, including a practical skills workshop. A registered charity and company limited by guarantee, it was founded in the 1980s, specialising in programmes for young people who have been excluded from school, or had not been successful in formal schooling settings. Prior to the introduction of Foundation Learning the centre had offered the E2E programme, with flexible entry dates and many very short, re-engagement and re-orientation courses. Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy tests were the only qualifications offered prior to 2010, and many of the staff had youth and community backgrounds. Referrals came from the local youth justice teams, the pupil referral units (PRUs) and the Jobcentres. During 2008/9 the centre had worked with 174 students.

Table 7: Summary of Previous Experience and Training of Participants.

Delta ILP	Years in FES			Qualification		Teaching Qualifications			Other Experience	
Current Role	≤5	6-10	11-20+	*Ac.	*Voc	PGCE or cert ed.	PTLLS CTTLS DTTLS	Level 4 L/N or ESOL	E2E or Entry	**Ind. or **Com
Lecturers	0	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Managers	0	0	3	1	1	1	2	0	3	1

*Ac = academic *Voc. = vocational as main subject route.

** Ind. = Industrial Experience,   Com. = Commercial Experience

FOUNDATION LEARNING: THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE MANAGERS

The director and the training manager were both from inclusive backgrounds. The director (D1) had a degree in community work and had worked for more than 20 years in the charity, managing the Lifeskills programmes and then the E2E programme. The training manager (D2) had a youth work qualification and a Level

2 teaching qualification, and had taught on the employment preparation aspects of the E2E programme. She had worked for the charity for more than eleven years.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The lexicon used by the managers reflected their very negative perceptions of the change from E2E. The director explained that the introduction of Foundation Learning had been "a near disaster for us. For many months we thought we would have to close down". The consequences for the provision of the national policy change had been stark: they had to make "root and branch changes" which conflicted with their mission, and had resulted in what they described as "mission drift"(D1), as they had to change from offering provision based on re-engagement and mentoring, to three strands of accreditation.

The centre was not affiliated to the Association of Education and Learning Providers (AELP), and the managers felt they had received minimal information from national funding officials about the policy change. They had been compelled to close one of their two learning sites to save overheads. This had limited the study options as they only had four classroom spaces plus a small practical workshop. They had previously offered five vocational subject taster options, but now only offered two, construction and care. The number of enrolments dropped from 174 in 2008/9 to 70 in 2011/12, since this significantly reduced their options and their economies of scale.

Staffing

The managers explained that in 2009/2010 most of their staff had community and youth work experience and were not qualified to teach vocational qualifications, because these had not been required for the E2E programme.

> "We had to make six of our eight teaching and support staff redundant. We retained an English and mathematics lecturer, but she left us for a better paid job after we paid for her Functional Skills training… Many of our staff had youth work backgrounds, and understood the challenges our clients face, particularly the gang

culture, the negative experiences of school and current personal barriers to participation… We've found it very difficult to find qualified lecturers to match that level of understanding and empathy, although we've been fortunate in recruiting a former trainee, who had a basic teaching qualification and still lives in the community. He is studying and wants to work part-time. He has been a good role model for the students"(D1).

They had also recruited a former care manager, who had just started training to be a teacher, and also wanted to work part-time. In order to offer Foundation Learning they had found it necessary to employ someone who could understand and use the ILR, which they found overly bureaucratic and complicated. With relatively low enrolments, this requirement added significantly to their overheads.

The local context

The director further stressed the negative consequences for the centre of the reductions locally in the numbers of staff in the local youth justice team, and the loss of Connexions PAs, which had led to a drop in referrals and contributed significantly to their low enrolments. The centre had not been involved in any 14-19 strategic planning groups, and the managers were not aware of their existence.

The funding methodology

The managers explained that the change to a funding model based solely on qualification success had resulted in the profound culture change, as the director explained:

"We'd been following the E2E programme expectations, which allowed for great flexibility and was appropriate for our clients. All come from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, and most have dropped out of school, had precarious living circumstances and some have been involved with gang culture. Many of our clients are referred through the youth justice system and can't enrol for a full-time course anywhere else because of their circumstances… some attend here while awaiting court hearings or sentencing. Others, often referred following time in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), couldn't commit to regular attendance because they're carers, or were badly bullied at school, and have periods of mental ill-health. We've seen an increase in the number of clients whose attendance is patchy

because of mental ill-health… Having to introduce a programme based just on qualifications is a massive change of culture" (D1).

The managers explained that they had learnt, from the costly experiences of the first year, that it was advantageous for them to enter most clients for the easiest Units or Awards, rather than for Certificates or Diplomas, so that if they left the programme early the centre they could be funded for the qualifications gained. However, the accreditation costs were proportionately much higher than for long qualifications. The training manager explained how precarious the first year of funding had been. The consequences of the changes to the funding arrangements were:

> "almost a disaster, as we'd not been used to offering vocational qualifications and in the first year I entered the students for many qualifications in order to maximise the income, but the clients did not have enough time to complete them all, so our QSRs dropped to a disastrous level, even though our clients did achieve some qualifications…I learnt from that and we recovered by 2012, but only just reached the minimum levels of performance required." (D2).

The managers explained that the flexibility of the E2E programme had been paramount. The training manager said:

> "Our clients could attend for a few days of mentoring and re-orientation, or for up to 22 weeks if that suited their circumstances. We'd developed many contacts with referral agencies for support in areas such as sexual health, substance misuse and counselling, and it had been possible to build this type of mentoring support into the programme because of its flexibility… The change to Foundation Learning has altered the programme fundamentally, as the funding mechanism meant we had to focus on qualifications rather than activities to support, build confidence, stimulate and engage… This sole focus on formal accreditation was a step too soon for most of our clients" (D2).

The director summed it up by saying:

> "Our cohort has changed, because in order to survive we've had to focus mainly on clients who are prepared to study for qualification units. For many of our clients this is like going back to school, which really puts them off, and for us, it feels as if

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we had become a production line of units rather than a centre that helps young people in very challenging circumstances to get back on track" (D1).

The training manager voiced strongly the view that the funding officials and the Awarding Bodies did not understand their provision

"They don't understand how long it takes to complete a qualification when clients start from such a low base, and have often dropped out of formal learning at school. The previous local quality managers from the LSC had always recognised that we put the clients first, and had been very flexible, allowing for periods of absence, but we no longer have a specific quality manager… The contact hours listed on the qualifications on QCF are not sufficient for our clients. The officers don't have the background knowledge…The Awarding Bodies should reconsider the funding arrangements, because it's much more expensive to offer Units rather than full qualifications… This means that the clients with the most barriers to long programmes cost us the most. That can't be right" (D2).

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

The managers found it ironic that with the change to Foundation Learning,

"Choice and personalisation now means the shoehorning of clients into provision that's not right for them… The Foundation Learning programme means that rather than offering choices, we are under constant financial pressure to accept only those clients whose personal circumstances allow them to commit to a formal programme of learning, rather than a flexible mentoring programme with individual objectives" (D2).

The director voiced strongly the view that the Foundation Learning requirements were a barrier to genuine personalisation of programmes, because, from their inclusive perspective, accreditation did not constitute meeting the needs of individuals.

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Programme design

The managers were negative about the prescriptive requirement for three separate accredited strands, because of the pressure of work involved and the emphasis on the completion of paperwork for accreditation, which was the opposite of what their clients needed at this stage of their engagement with learning. It was too much like the aspect of schooling that many had found the most boring, and they hated it. The clients were reluctant to attend theory sessions.

The managers thought that a major, and for them, a crucial omission from the Foundation Learning programme design was the lack of funding for work experience:

> "Foundation Learning has removed the opportunity to engage gradually with the formal community of work. We'd built up productive links with local employers as part of the E2E programme, because we find that short, supportive, mentored work-placements are very effective vehicles for clients to find out about employment and develop their social skills… Many of our clients have very little prior knowledge of the world of work, coming from backgrounds of generational unemployment, so we see this as representing an important stage in their engagement with formal employment. This could offer an alternative to the economy of drugs, or a life on benefits" (D1).

Although managers found the change to a fully accredited programme inimical for their provision and mission, they recognised the value of vocational qualifications for a very small proportion of their students, for whom the achievement had been motivating, and had given a few of them the courage to think about moving into a formal programme in one of the local GFEs.

The managers found the change to Functional Skills particularly challenging. Not only was the training costly, but their experienced lecturer had found a better paid job after they had paid for her specialist training. They had recently recruited a new lecturer who was experienced and had moved into the locality. They found Functional Skills was the aspect their clients liked least, having specific difficulties that had often not been diagnosed at school. Too many clients had been put off by having to attend these sessions, hoping not to have study English and mathematics

any more, and this aspect had impacted most negatively on rates of retention. They found the funding for ALS had been insufficient to compensate for the very low achievements of clients when they left school. They struggled to find ways to provide this, because the notional funding hours attached to English and mathematics had been insufficient for any specialist 1-1 tuition.

From inclusive backgrounds, and working with clients with little social and educational capital, the managers explained that their professional experience of youth and community work led them to focus strongly on helping to develop attitudes and skills that would help clients to succeed in the formal world of education or employment. However, they found that although it seemed positive to include the PSD strand, the content and segmentation of the qualification diminished its value. The training manager explained that:

> "Many of our clients are street wise and socially adept within their own communities. The units don't acknowledge the variety of contexts of their lives. The assumptions in some of the units are middle class and far removed from the experience of our clients… The best way to learn the social skills needed for college or employment is through contact with more formal settings over time… Social skills can't just be parcelled up into units" (D2).

Because of pressure of time, and the clients' dislike of paperwork, they mainly complied with funding requirements completing the employability units, which most clients had done many times before, particularly when they had been referred from the Job Centres where this type of activity had been compulsory, and was not challenging.

Vertical progression

Progression data was a sore point for the managers. They explained that destinations data had been the basis of funding for E2E, and so they had previously maintained a record of destinations, which had formed a key component of their performance on Ofsted inspections. However, they had not realised that Ofsted inspectors would still look at this as a key performance indicator, as it was not a funding requirement in the Foundation Learning programme guidance, so they had

not maintained a formal register. The failure to keep records of destinations had adversely affected their outcomes on inspection, as they only had anecdotal evidence of progression.

The managers did not think the programme prepared their cohorts adequately for progression. They found themselves in an increasingly frustrating position, because the programme they were required to offer didn't prepare clients well either for employment or further learning in a college. Low-level qualifications alone were not enough.

FOUNDATION LEARNING: PERSPECTIVES OF LECTURERS

The two lecturers were both new to the organisation. The Functional Skills lecturer (D3) was qualified and had previously worked in college. The other lecturer taught construction (D4), and both taught on PSD employability Units. Both were on part-time contracts and both worked from a mainly inclusive perspective, one as a youth worker and the other had taught basic skills in colleges for many years.

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

Both lecturers recognised the significance of making sure that clients were entered for qualifications they were likely to achieve. Most were entered for Entry Level 3 vocational Units and Awards, or Functional Skills qualifications at Entry Level 2 or 3, although, as the Functional Skills lecturer pointed out, this often reflected their previous attainment, rather than their ability. Because of legitimate intermittent attendance on the part of some clients, and lots of gaps in their formal learning, Entry Level 2 or 3 courses were more likely to lead to successful completion. The requirement to agree a programme early made this very challenging, since "clients do not respond well to formal testing, and may underperform on our initial assessments" (D3).

Programme design

Both lecturers thought the requirement for three accredited curriculum strands was excessive, not least because of the amount of time that had to be spent on

paperwork needed for accreditation evidence. Clients found this to be "too like school" (D4). The lecturers tried to minimise the amount of time spent on this activity, but, nevertheless, found it onerous. They both thought that a work experience element would be of much more use.

The construction lecturer thought the vocational Award was useful as an introductory taster.

> "I found that the opportunity to use the small construction workshop had been very helpful, when I was a trainee ten years earlier. That experience, combined with having supported work-placements helped me to realise that I could achieve, and that I might be able to work…I select units that I think the clients will enjoy, so that some might be motivated, like me, to go to a college and get more qualifications… I know the area, and I think it helps that I live nearby. I think I've been successful in teaching clients who enjoy practical work, but they don't all enjoy it, and then it's harder to motivate them. Many would have preferred sport or ICT or perhaps music, but the centre could only afford to offer two subjects" (D4).

He found teaching the theory lessons the most challenging, and as clients' attendance was often low, it was challenging to complete units quickly. An additional difficulty was that the teaching groups were quite large, and it was difficult to keep track of all of everyone, particularly as he only worked there two days a week.

Both lecturers taught the employability Units on the PSD strand, which they found were very easy for clients to achieve, but they also recognised that the topics were not challenging, as most had completed CVs and letters of application many times previously. They did not find many of the other PSD units helpful, because they did not connect sufficiently with the lives of the clients. The Functional Skills lecturer pointed out that the development of formal social skills needed a longer term approach and could not be "reduced to units". She also pointed out that "completing a unit did not mean any fundamental learning had taken place".

The Functional Skills lecturer found the Functional Skills strand problematic:

"The external tests are too abstract for many clients, and are not occupationally relevant. The wording of the problems is often unclear and it's sometimes hard to identify what the examiners are looking for. Many of our clients have ability, but made little formal progress at school. I've found that practical approaches are the most successful, but Functional Skills is too theoretical, which is what turned the clients off school. After many years of failure, more of the same will just not engage many of our clients. That's why attendance is such a big problem" (D3).

She explained that the amount of contact time was not really sufficient where students had very low previous attainment, and were living in extremely challenging situations, or had had school phobias. Where clients had some kind of dyslexia, they really needed intensive individual help so that they could devise coping strategies. She had found this intensive individual support had been effective in colleges where she had worked previously, but that level of funding did not seem to be available any more, and the group sizes were too large to provide individual support. This meant that progress was slower than it could have been.

The QCF and competence-based approaches to assessment

The construction lecturer had found the competence-based approach to vocational qualifications helpful as a lecturer, because it provided clarity for the students and for himself, about expectations. The quick achievement of units of accreditation was motivating for the clients who had not achieved anything before. He thought that, as tasters, the Awards worked well for those who enjoyed construction activities, but he also had reservations about their relevance:

"The criteria for construction don't really reflect what I'd found in the industry…When I was a trainee, I spent more time on work experience, and that had helped me decide about a possible career…I've contacted the firm where I worked and they've let me have some examples of items that need repairing, so that the clients can make use of our resources to get a sense of what it would mean to work in the industry. I think the activity has to be realistic, because doing units in isolation doesn't reflect the satisfaction of completing something real…the lack of work experience doesn't encourage a wider understanding of what it means to be employed, and why the theoretical aspects are important" (D4).

Vertical progression

Both lecturers felt that the programme could provide a first step for the very small number of the cohort who were in a situation where they could attend a college course or find employment, but it was not appropriate for most of them. For the majority, progression opportunities were increasingly limited because their personal circumstances made it impossible to commit to a course involving sustained attendance, and they required more time make up for periods away from formal learning. They saw the increasing focus on Functional Skills as a big challenge for many of the clients, who needed more individual support, and "who'd have to find a way to overcome their dislike of English and maths lessons if they're to progress to a Level 2 course" (D3).

THE CHANGE TO THE STUDY PROGRAMME: PERSPECTIVES OF MANAGERS

Delta ILP had merged during the summer of 2013 with a similar charity-based ILP, and had relocated. A new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the merged charities had been appointed. He came from an inclusive community work background, and had been the director of the organisation for more than twenty years. The new CEO (D5) and the director (D1) of the former Delta ILP were interviewed.

Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision

The managers' negative lexicon reflected the considerable upheaval that the change of policy to the Study Programme had meant for both centres. As with the change to the Foundation Learning policy, the organisation's future was precarious. The director explained that:

> "In order to continue trading, our trustees decided to merge with another charity which had a similar profile of provision… This means we can maximise economies of scale…neither organisation could have survived alone under the Study Programme funding. As a merged organisation we can offer vocational

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qualifications in construction, ICT and caring for children, which gives the clients more choice than they had before'' (D1).

However, despite these positive aspects, the move to another location had meant a rupture of many immediate local contacts and sources of referral for specialist support, such as housing. All of these contacts took time to build.

Both managers found that the Study Programme moved them even further away from their mission, as the funding model was based on the expectation of a substantial vocational course, which suited students on higher level courses, but was not appropriate for the majority of their cohort.

The managers perceived the prescriptive programme requirements as a major challenge. The requirement for increased overall contact hours, and half-yearly contracts, meant that they needed to have larger groups in order to cover teaching costs, which in turn meant having rooms or workshops large enough to accommodate the students. This was more like school, which many students were trying to avoid, but with fewer resources for individual support.

Performance measures

The CEO explained that the EFA had not calculated the formula protection funding for ILPs in the same way as GFEs. It was a "quasi-lagged" funding arrangement, and their income had substantially reduced. The rise in the the full-time programme hours to 450 for 2013-14, meant that they would have to deliver more hours with little increase in funding. In reality they would only be able to offer shorter programmes, with lower levels of funding, because very few students could attend for four days a week over 22 weeks. The situation was potentially very serious:

> "We've always had two intakes a year, but at the moment the EFA has imposed a cap on numbers and we still don't know what will happen in January when we recruit our second intake. We're just taking it one step at a time, because we

envisage having to close the provision altogether if the cap on recruitment isn't lifted, because we just won't survive" (D5).[1]

Of particular concern also was the income for ALS which, had reduced as a result of the new disadvantage factor formula, at a time when the focus on English and maths was increasing. Additionally, the advice they received from LA officials was that they would have to contribute 50 per cent to the funding for those with high needs, which would make it very difficult to accept anyone in that category. It was also unclear how unemployment benefits would be affected by the 16 hour rule, and they were still waiting for a decision about that.

The director explained that they were waiting for further guidance about how to complete the changed ILR for clients not able to undertake a long programme, because the new arrangements were very complicated, and, after their experience with Foundation Learning, where they had underestimated the length of time it would take to complete qualifications, they wanted to get it right.

The CEO explained that the change to the Study Programme had meant significant staffing turbulence and redundancies again, particularly with the merger, which had been agreed in order to reduce staff and accommodation costs:

> "Both of our centres have lost senior managers, as well as the teachers who were not qualified to teach substantial qualifications… The recruitment of staff has been proving particularly difficult because any new employment contracts have to be temporary in case we can't recruit for January. This makes it difficult to attract applicants with the experience we need, because colleges can offer higher salaries and better conditions. We've been lucky to find people so that we can offer three vocational subjects as well as Functional Skills" (D5).

The managers welcomed the principle of the change to funding by programme of activity, but they perceived the change to retention as the key performance measure as particularly problematic for them, because it "fails to take account of the nature of the cohort of clients we choose to engage with, where intermittent attendance is common" (D5). The managers thought that the challenge presented

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[1] The Centre closed in January 2014

by the use of retention as a key performance measure was exacerbated by the loss of funding for very short programmes:

> "This means a return to the situation at the start of the Foundation Learning policy… Only after lobbying from the sector did officials allow flexibilities for very short programmes… The loss of funding for two week courses, and the use of retention for funding, will mean difficult decision-making over recruitment, because of the financial penalty if clients don't stay…The funding's most beneficial for full-time courses and part-time or flexible attendance is discouraged" (D5).

Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

The changed programme requirements

Managers did not see the requirements to follow a higher level programme than previously as a change that concerned them, since virtually all of their applicants came with few, if any, qualifications. They had implemented a new English and mathematics assessment, and would use the results of that for entry to an English or mathematics qualification, but they had found the clients had been put off by having to do an assessment. As with Foundation Learning, the managers found the requirement for early identification of the main aim problematic for their cohort, who often had little concept of what was available. As the director pointed out, "re-engagement guidance is the main reason the clients are referred to the centre, because the agencies think they're not ready for a substantial programme".

The programme element that was the most challenging for the managers, was the requirement to offer a substantial vocational qualification. This not only moved them further way from the mission, but also, even with the merger, was only really appropriate for the very small number of students who were able to be retained for long enough. This meant having to identify an individual programme of units on the ILR for the students who were not able to complete a long programme. They found the changed ILR overly complicated, and were still waiting for more guidance. The CEO pointed out that:

> "the policy seems to be based on an assumption that it's only clients with high needs who should be excused this requirement, or those who can commit to a long

programme of work experience… The circumstantial disadvantages, which is what many of our clients face, appear to have been overlooked… The programme, just like Foundation Learning, is not appropriate for our clients" (D5).

The CEO expressed disappointment that the Functional Skills model continued, and that it had become much more important. He thought that the strongly worded emphasis on English and mathematics showed a lack of understanding of the student cohort, as many had dyslexia or phobias, and the increased requirements would not help. The income from the disadvantage factor was not sufficient to provide clients with the individual help they required. The allocation for non-accredited provision was very small and absorbed into group tutorials.

The managers were confused about what was meant in the funding guidance by external work experience. They weren't sure how long it should be for, and how it would be monitored: the advice they had received had been confused, as LA and EFA officials had different views about what was required. With the implementation of RPA all schools and colleges would be looking for placements, and the search for them was time consuming. The director pointed out that

"Even with the merger, we are a relatively small organisation and we don't have the income to fund a work experience co-ordinator, which is very frustrating. We've lost many of the local employer contacts we had when we ran the E2E programme, because we had to lose the staff who worked with employers, in order to focus on qualifications… The work-experience route resembles the E2E programme, but with increased importance of English and maths… We can't offer that programme because of the requirement for attendance over a long period" (D1).

Vertical progression

The managers did not think that the change in policy would increase the opportunities for their students to progress. It did not seem a meaningful programme for many of the most disadvantaged students for whom a commitment to attendance was a major problem. They expressed concerns about the increased focus on English and mathematics, which would continue to be a challenge, particularly with the limited budget for support. They were unsure where clients

could progress to, since the they were sure that colleges would have the same difficulty in finding programmes that were flexible enough to accommodate those whose attendance would be intermittent. They felt pessimistic about the extent to which the Study Programme would improve life chances for their clients.

Summary of the main consequences of policy changes

The lexicon and narrative of the participants in Delta ILP reflected the extreme precariousness of their situation and potential "disaster'. The policy change to Foundation Learning led to *mission drift* as they were required to change from the long-established mission to provide engagement programmes for young people in very challenging circumstances, to a fully accredited programme. The neoliberal policy strand of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, op.cit.) severely hampered their inclusive focus on improving life-chances. The change from E2E resulted in wholesale staff redundancies and contraction of premises. In order to comply with national policy requirements, the participants had to offer programmes that they knew were not of great value for their clients. The lecturers found the opportunity to study for a accreditation motivating for some clients. However, the Units were not perceived as adequate by themselves and needed augmenting in order to reflect industrial requirements. The lecturers responded to the requirements by *accommodating* Higham (op.cit.) as far as possible, although mediation was challenging within a context where client attendance was often problematic. Functional Skills was found particularly challenging. The lack of occupational relevance was not helpful: lecturers suggested it would have been more useful to integrate Functional Skills into the vocational qualifications. The lecturers found the segmentation of PSD particularly inappropriate, as it did not reflect how social skills developed. It also enshrined negative assumptions about the clients' personal effectiveness, which did not reflect the reality. The demise of the Connexions service, their lack of involvement with local 14-19 strategic groups, combined with the radical change to their offer, resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in referrals, and their performance declined.

The managers did not think the change to the Study Programme would improve the situation. They had merged in the hope of surviving, but because of a funding cap, were not sure of their survival beyond four months. Neither Programme took account of the educational needs of their clients. The focus on retention as the performance measure, when two weekly programmes could not be funded, was particularly unhelpful, as was the reduction in compensatory funding. As with Foundation Learning the managers perceived that the funding model privileged students who could follow a long programme, and was not appropriate for their client group.

The managers described a situation in which the neoliberal strand of the *double shuffle* negated any social democratic ambition to foster progression for their clients. The continuing expectation of sustained attendance, the low expectations of students enshrined in the qualifications, the lack of flexibility in the centralised programmes, combined with reductions in compensatory funding for those with specific difficulties with text or number, and an increasing focus on Functional Skills, meant that the participants did not think either programme improved the life-chances of their traditional cohorts. They feared they might not survive as charitable organisations.

COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF THE PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FOUR CASES

This comparative summary illustrates the ways in which the ambiguities and duality of purpose at the core of both Foundation Learning and the Study Programme policies conceptualised by Hall (op.cit.) as the *double-shuffle*, resulted in significantly different consequences for the four sub-cases.

The summary is divided into two main sections: firstly the experiences of the four sub-cases as they complied with the requirements of the Foundation Learning policy and, secondly the perspectives of the managers in the first weeks of implementation of the Study Programme.

Foundation Learning: Structural Consequences of Policy Enactment

The provision and the local context

The structural consequences of the change to Foundation Learning were starkly different for the four sub-cases. The participants' narratives and lexicon reflected their specific circumstances, including their missions, values and local contexts. At a headline level, the change from E2E to the Foundation Learning programme resulted in expansion of provision at Entry Level 3 and Level 1 in Alpha College and Gamma ILP, and decreasing enrolments in Beta College and Delta ILP. However these headlines concealed significant contextual differences.

The managers in Alpha College were positive about the introduction of Foundation Learning which chimed with their inclusive, social democratic mission, and acted as a "catalyst" for their strategic plan to expand the number of subject pathways from Pre-Entry Level to Level 4. By 2012 the number of subjects offered at Level 1 had doubled, and the previous E2E Entry Level 3 programme (GFL) was closely linked to the progression pathways. However, the Principal had also introduced a GCSE retake course, because she found that the structure of the QCF assumed that all school leavers who underachieved would only be capable of a low level vocational course.

Central to the realisation of the strategic aim to expand progression routes, was the managers' very productive involvement with the local 14-19 strategic planning group, which enabled rationalisation of provision locally. Fortuitously, the Coalition Government's policy decision in 2010 to privilege GCSEs in the performance measures for schools resulted in a reduction of low-level vocational courses offered in local schools, which further lubricated the managers' strategic planning for expansion of provision at Entry Level 3 and Level 1. In this respect, the participants' narratives reflected the ambitious social democratic purpose of the Foundation Learning programme to encourage progression, as they expanded the opportunities available for school leavers who had underachieved.

Participants in Gamma ILP similarly embraced the introduction of Foundation Learning and its ambition, but for them, it was the funding methodology that was the key to their expansion; for the other three sub-cases, the funding methodology was found restrictive, part of the neoliberal policy strand of the *double-shuffle.* The provision of accredited vocational courses for young people who lived locally, and who would benefit from learning in a practical, realistic environment was at the core of Gamma ILP's mission. They described the focus on accreditation, as a "life-saver" (G1), because they were able to maximise their income by offering students two long qualifications, one a VQ, the other PSD, as well as Functional Skills, and a range of short, occupationally relevant qualifications such as Health and Safety. By 2012 enrolments had increased substantially.

However, unlike Alpha College, managers in Gamma ILP had never been included in formal local 14-19 strategic planning. Their contacts with local schools were longstanding and central to their mission, with link courses and visits from primary school children to explore their grounds. The managers found, during the lifetime of Foundation Learning, that the local educational context had become unhelpful, following the demise of the Connexions Service and the preparations for RPA. They described a local landscape that became more competitive as, gradually, local schools were retaining more able students and providing pupils with little information about vocational courses. As a consequence, the participants found that, by the Spring of 2013, the numbers of referrals were reducing with fewer

applicants ready for a vocational course at Level 1. Increasingly, an aspect the neoliberal strand of the *double-shuffle,* the focus on local competition, started to have negative consequences for their provision.

The managers in Beta College attributed their decline in provision following the change to Foundation Learning, to a combination of negative perceptions by parents and students about the quality of the programme, and to local competition. Although their strategic priorities focused on Level 3 provision, the E2E provision had been a valued channel for recruitment before 2010. They perceived the decline in the applications for the four bi-annual GFL courses, and the stagnation in provision at Level 1, as a consequence of the dispersed nature of their provision, the negative publicity about low level provision, and to the increasing competition from GFEs within the travel to learn area. Like Gamma ILP, participants in Beta College described the ways in which, increasingly, local schools were developing or expanding their sixth forms in planning for RPA, and retaining the more able students.

Unlike Alpha College, Beta College operated within a highly competitive educational environment, where the local 14-19 strategic partnerships were weak. Other local GFEs offered more specialist facilities for the 'trades' courses, and local ILPs offered ICT in 22 weeks. The labour market was challenging. Students on the 'academic' vocational courses such as administration and ICT had to compete with adults for entry-level jobs, and needed to progress to Level 2 if they were to find employment. However, such progression became increasingly problematic during the life of Foundation Learning because of the nature of the programme and negative perceptions of its value, and, by extension the students.

The experience of participants in Delta ILP was the mirror image of that of the participants in Gamma ILP, who had welcomed the funding of qualifications. The participants in Delta ILP attributed their substantial decline to the funding methodology, and the change to a fully accredited, and centralised programme. They found that complying with the changed requirements had resulted in significant "mission drift" (D1), because they had offered very few accredited

courses under the E2E programme. Their staff were mainly trained as community workers offering short guidance and mentored work experience programmes to re-engage students. The consequences of policy change were the loss of one of their two centres and redundancies for most staff. However, like Gamma ILP, the demise of Connexions, one of their main sources of referral, resulted in a halving of student numbers during the life of Foundation learning, and they, too, had never been included in the local 14-19 strategy groups. Their enrolments declined from 170 in 2008/9 to 74 in 2012/13. For Delta ILP two aspects of the neo-liberal strand of the *double-shuffle*, competition and the use of accreditation as the main performance measure and generator of income, resulted in their perspective that the enactment of Foundation learning had led to "near disaster" (D1).

The funding methodology

The funding methodology was found particularly problematic for three of the four organisations. Only the managers in Gamma ILP found it positive. Participants in the three other sub-cases found the notional course hours listed for each course, and the income generated were not sufficiently flexible for the range of students. Participants described the perverse incentives of the model, which encouraged lecturers to seek out the easiest units from Awarding Bodies, and to offer as much accreditation as possible in order to maximise income. This contributed to negative perceptions about the value of the qualifications, reducing their exchange value. Lack of experience of accreditation meant that participants in Delta ILP initially entered their clients for many qualifications, without fully appreciating how long it took them to achieve them. Consequently they experienced a significant drop in success rates.

Managers found that the change to the ILR was expensive and time consuming, particularly for the two ILPs, as they did not have the economies of scale of larger organisations. In Alpha College, the managers introduced new job roles to encourage students at risk of dropping out to return to college, in order to meet the performance criteria for funding, which improved their success rates. However, the participants in Beta recognised the irony whereby many students were motivated by early unit accreditation to stay for longer, but were not finally retained, thus

impacting negatively on the QSRs. Had they left in the first few weeks, they would not have been recorded on the ILR as a leaver.

Participants in all four organisations identified that the changed centralised formula for funding ALS had resulted in reductions in compensatory income. They found this particularly concerning given the increasing focus on the importance of Functional Skills, the necessity for larger classes, and increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist staff. In Beta College the amount of individual support for students with dyslexia, had halved, and fewer support staff were available in classes. Managers in Alpha College observed that officials did not understand the challenge facing colleges when compensating for the low attainment of many students when leaving school. Of particular concern was the growing number of students with fragile mental health. The principal had mediated by providing additional resource for the GFL courses, but this had not proved possible for the Level 1 specialist courses, where support levels were reduced.

Staffing and staff working conditions

Participants in the four organisations identified, in different degrees, the substantial human costs of policy enactment. Only in Gamma ILP were the consequences of policy change entirely positive for staffing: the managers were able to appoint two more part-time staff and to introduce an additional vocational subject.   The structural consequences for Delta ILP were the most extreme, as in order to survive as an organisation, managers had to make most of their experienced staff redundant. In Alpha College lecturers on higher level courses, who did not want to teach their subjects at Foundation Level, were made redundant, in order to appoint specialists at Level 1. Lecturers had found this unsettling and very upsetting.

Lecturers in the four organisations found that their working conditions deteriorated as a result of policy enactment. The introduction of the QCF meant increased bureaucracy, with significant amounts of additional paperwork to meet accreditation requirements, and in the colleges, the lecturers found the class contact hours reduced with an increased workload. The lecturers in both colleges found that the increased management focus on QSRs had led to greater scrutiny of

data and of their performance, which increasingly was measured in relation to unit completion and retention. They found this, and the lack of time for meaningful team meetings, very stressful. In Beta College, participants voiced very strongly that these pressures, combined with the pedagogical factors discussed below, undermined their professionalism.

Foundation Learning: The Educational Consequences of Policy Enactment

The perspectives of the participants were grounded in their previous training and experience, as well as their specific working context. Irrespective of their organisations, they expressed strikingly similar perspectives about the shortcomings of the prescriptive curriculum and associated pedagogies, illustrating the way in which, using the concepts of Bernstein (op.cit.) the curriculum compounded educational disadvantage because of the dominant pedagogical approach adopted for the QCF. This approach enshrined a *horizontal discourse* and *restricted codes* that denied students the opportunities to develop the *vertical discourses* and *elaborated codes* that characterised higher level courses, particularly academic courses. The differences in the responses of the participants to the curriculum change, sprang from their understanding of the perceived needs of the different cohorts, their previous experience, and the extent to which they could meet these within the Foundation Learning programme requirements.

Initial guidance, personalisation and choice

Participants in the four organisations experienced significant limitations to the progressive requirement in the Foundation Learning guidance to enable individual choice about the level of the programme offered to students. The IAG arrangements in the two colleges became more stringent, and for the four sub-cases, the requirement for early decision-making about the course to be studied was increasingly governed by the need to ensure that the students were likely to achieve, so in reality, this often meant Entry Level 3 for Functional Skills and a Certificate rather than a Diploma course, or a GFL course rather than a specialist vocational course.

During the life of the programme, it became more common in the colleges for students to be offered a second course below Level 2, particularly in Beta College. Participants recognised that in some cases this advantaged students, who, because of their previous lack of educational capital, needed more time, but it was not always the case. For participants in Delta ILP, choice was governed by the unavoidably intermittent nature of their clients' attendance. This meant a combination of Units and Awards rather than long courses, even though these attracted proportionately lower levels of funding and higher relative costs.

Participants found that personalisation within a programme, and of a choice of units, was made more difficult to achieve because the funding generated by the qualifications was restrictive, so class numbers had to be maintained at a minimum level, limiting possible choice. Awarding Bodies would not allow units to be offered below a minimum number, so this too constrained choice. In reality choice was limited to level of Functional Skills, and on the GFL courses to two out of three possible subjects. The notable exception to this was Gamma ILP, where participants explained that, although experiencing the constraints outlined above, their students did have an individual programme, because of the integrated holistic approach they adopted for the curriculum.

Overall, the social democratic aims of the programme, advocating choice and personalisation, were limited by the neoliberal strand, as the centralised requirements and concentration on QSR's, led to guidance staff becoming more risk averse, and financial realities restricted additional options.

The programme design and associated pedagogies

The initial expectation in the Foundation Learning Programme design, of three segmented accredited strands, was seen as overly prescriptive by most participants. For the participants in Delta ILP the requirements were far removed from the mentoring and guidance that they had found were appropriate for their cohort, and too much like school, alienating many of their clients. Only in Gamma ILP were the three strands fully implemented through their holistic project-based approach.

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The requirement for PSD became diluted over time. In Alpha College most students had one timetabled hour a week, but in Beta College PSD was seen as tokenistic, with employability units or Awards only offered during induction week. A common perception was that the PSD requirements were not appropriate for the students, although the importance for students of developing these skills was recognised. The perspectives of many managers and lecturers echoed the finding of Bourdieu (1997) that students were marginalised because of their lack of linguistic capital. They voiced strongly the view that students developed social skills over time, not in segments. The holistic, constructivist approach adopted by the participants in Gamma ILP ensured that students had opportunities to develop these skills were throughout the programme. Those lecturers who taught the PSD strand found the requirements for the units were sometimes patronising, making negative assumptions about the students, many of whom, as the participants in Delta ILP observed, were "street wise and socially adept within their own communities" (D2).

Many experienced participants had a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which a pedagogical approach could enhance or inhibit meaningful learning. Their lexicon often reflected their perceptions of a narrowly economic emphasis in the Foundation Learning design. They understood the curriculum, in particular the VQs and PSD courses on the QCF, to be instrumental, excluding expansive opportunities for learning, and based on "numbers and counting" (A4). These perspectives were summed up by the memorable observation from managers in Alpha College that "Foundation Learning values what's creditable, rather than crediting what's valuable" (A1), and by the director of Delta ILP (D1), that the change to accreditation on the QCF meant that the centre had become "like a production line of units".

The ways in which lecturers and managers implemented the Foundation Learning programme reflected the terminology adopted by Higham (2003), in which members of staff *mediated* in response to curriculum change through *implementation, adaptation or assimilation*. The most experienced vocational lecturers, and those managers and lecturers who adopted inclusive pedagogical approaches, voiced the most powerful misgivings about the pedagogical

implications of the segmented approach to the programme design, and the outcomes-based approaches to the qualifications. They were very concerned that the unitised basis of the accreditation in the vocational and PSD strands were not developmental, because units could be taken in any order. The experienced lecturers and managers found ways to *assimilate* the requirements into their professional practice to improve the experience of students.

Participants in Gamma ILP *assimilated* by continuing to implement their inclusive, holistic approach through the use of integrated projects, believing that students acquired knowledge, skills and understanding over time, not by the completion of separate, segmented units without any common core. In the three other organisations approaches varied, depending on the extent to which the lecturers were expected to teach more than one strand, and also on their educational backgrounds and experience. The very experienced vocational lecturers in Alpha College *accommodated or assimilated* by paying lip-service to the inadequate criteria, ensuring the students had opportunities to learn in a practical contexts.

The experienced lecturers in Beta College, teaching on the academic vocational courses, expressed most overt negativity about the QCF, making use of their pedagogic memory, and regretting the lack of flexibility of assessment processes, such as the assignments they had previously used on BTEC courses. They found the particular form of NVQ approach, with very small units of accreditation, encouraged "criteria compliance rather than opportunities to develop critical thinking" and led to "a unit conveyor belt with the students as passive recipients, rather than active learners" (B11). Because of time constraints, with little opportunity for team work, they reluctantly adopted an *adaptation* approach to the requirements, although they recognised that other approaches, such as assignments and projects were more effective for professional formation in their subject areas.

The transitional lecturers, not qualified in the subjects they were teaching, and/or those new to teaching, and themselves trained through the competence-based approach, tended to adopt an *implementation* approach to the requirements, finding that the clarity of expectations for the QCF Units helpful for themselves and

the students. It also meant that, by focusing on unit completion, they met their own performance targets.

The negative perceptions by many participants, in all four sub-cases, of the curricular and pedagogical aspects of the Foundation Learning programme design, in particular the courses on the QCF, reflected the type of *horizontal discourse* and *restrictive codes* that Bernstein (op.cit.) argued perpetuated educational disadvantage, because they were not developmental, would often accredit what students could already do, and did not equip them with the skills, knowledge and understandings required for the *elaborated codes* and *vertical discourse* found on higher level courses.

A common concern about the programme design was the the lack of funding for work experience, which seemed perverse, given that one of the outcomes of the programmes was employment. Participants in Delta ILP explained that mentored opportunities for short episodes of work experience had been a core component of the programme for many of their clients. In Alpha College very experienced lecturers on occupational courses found other ways to prepare students for employment. Students were often successful in finding employment because of productive contacts with employers: the lecturers worked hard to ensure some kind of work-related, practical experiences for the students.   They found that employers would often prefer to take young people on the basis of attitude to work and willingness to learn, rather than qualifications, because they preferred to train up the students themselves. In order to prepare the students for employment, the director of Gamma ILP had augmented the income by fund-raising and employed a work experience co-ordinator who made sure that all students had external work-placements for one day a week in the summer term. These placements had often led to employment or apprenticeships. However, in Beta College, lecturers found that the students on the academic vocational courses needed to gain at least a level 2 qualification if they were to find employment, because they had to compete, even for entry-level jobs, with more experienced adults.

Participants in the four organisations found Functional Skills to be problematic for its pedagogy and for the policy context. The lack of occupational relevance was found by most participants to be pedagogically unhelpful and conceptually at odds with its title. It was also seen by lecturers in Beta College as effectively ignoring the progress made in the FES to embed Key Skills into vocational courses. Many participants perceived the wording of the scenarios in the external examinations to be overly complex, particularly for ESOL students. They found the external tests daunting for students, and the distance between qualification levels too great. Many students were entered for the Entry Level 3 course because they did not have to sit an external examination. The participants noted the irony of a situation where their income for ALS had reduced at the same time as Functional skills, much harder than Key Skills, had become a required curriculum strand. Several participants suggested that English and mathematics be integrated into the vocational qualification, using the actual requirements as the basis for the integration.

Progression opportunities

An unequivocally common perception was that the introduction of Foundation Learning had led to increased barriers to vertical progression for students in the most disadvantaged circumstances. These barriers were both perceptual and structural and were intertwined with the nature of the educational programme.

 Participants in Alpha College found that students, who had been ready and able to undertake a Level 1 specialist course, often progressed to Level 2, but, overall, perceptual barriers had increased with the introduction of the QCF. Lecturers on level 2 courses questioned the value of qualifications at Level 1, often preferring to accept students straight from school with requisite GCSE grades. They perceived the qualifications as *dumbed down* as a result of the low expectations of the QCF, and because Awarding Bodies offered easier units.   Participants in Beta College found that students on the academic vocational courses, who needed to progress to at least Level 2 if they were to find employment, were often required to take a second academic vocational course at Level 1. Participants in Gamma ILP found that, increasingly, the guidance staff in the regional specialist college were more

reluctant to accept students with Level 1 qualifications, because they had found that students from other centres had achieved the qualification, but did not have the skills and knowledge that prepared them for a Level 2 course.

The increased stringency of selection criteria for entry to a Level 1 or Level 2 course presented increasing structural hurdles for students. Participants saw attainment in Functional Skills was seen as particularly problematic, and, together with the perceptions that VQs were of little exchange value, was leading to warehousing. Functional Skills gradually came to be seen as a gatekeeper. The reductions in compensatory support were seen as particularly unhelpful, given the number of students who had specific difficulties with text and number. Participants perceived that second chance opportunities had declined as progression became increasingly more difficult, and funding for adult provision was significantly reduced.

The participants in the four sub-cases described a situation in which the ambition of the social democratic strand, to improve social mobility through the ladder of the QCF, was limited by the dominance of the neoliberal strand, with a programme that was not appropriate for the diversity of the cohort, and with stringent performance and audit arrangements. They found that the pedagogical limitations of the QCF, and the increasing focus on English and mathematics, further compounded educational disadvantage and created hurdles to progression. Only by paying lip service to the qualification criteria and using a variety of forms of mediation in their different contexts, could lecturers and managers provide programmes that helped students in their professional formation.

The Change To The Study Programme

Structural consequences of policy enactment

As with the change to Foundation Learning, the implementation of the Study Programme resulted in widely divergent structural consequences for the four organisations. These consequences were the most keenly experienced by the ILPs, as both found that their situation had deteriorated significantly.

The managers in Gamma ILP experienced a substantial reversal in their situation, taking them back to 2008. In the first month of implementation they were "dreading it" (C1). Their financial position had deteriorated, because they could only be funded for one substantial qualification, and also received reduced income under the revised programme area and disadvantage formulae. The managers found that the local educational environment continued to have an adverse effect on their recruitment. The cherry-picking by schools to retain the most able students and the lack of adequate careers advice about vocational courses, had resulted in a situation where the number of applications had reduced significantly, and many more students were applying with very low attainment, having been refused a place elsewhere, and were studying at Entry Levels 2 and 3 rather than on courses at Level 1. The managers would continue to offer the same holistic programme as before, but with much reduced funding and much larger teaching groups. They were not sure that they would be able retain all of their part-time staff, although students needed much more individual support.

The situation for Delta ILP had also deteriorated sharply over the summer of 2013, and it was in a precarious position, as the quasi-lagged funding arrangements meant significant reductions in income. The merger with another charity that shared their mission meant relocation and the loss of valuable local referral agencies that had been central to their work with young people with significant socio-economic challenges. As with the change to Foundation Learning, the policy implementation meant redundancies at all levels. Although the merger meant that they could offer an additional subject area, and had reduced overheads, the cap imposed by the EFA on their recruitment numbers, meant that the managers were not certain that they would survive after January 2014. Staff recruitment was particularly challenging, as they could only offer temporary contracts. Compliance with the policy requirements meant further *mission drift* as, in order to survive, they had to offer courses that they recognised did not benefit students.

In the colleges, staffing turbulence had occurred for lecturers teaching at higher levels, where funded contact hours had been reduced. In Alpha College, the change had made least difference to the students studying below level 2 because they

would benefit from more class contact hours, and would no longer be required to take both PSD and VQ qualifications. The excessive work loads of those lecturers who had taught all three strands would be reduced. The local context continued to be auspicious. The arrangements with the 14-19 partnership had continued to enable very productive local planning, including the sharing of English and maths staff, so the college's recruitment had not been adversely affected.

However, the managers in Alpha College found that their income for ALS had substantially reduced. The changed arrangements disadvantaged students perceived as having low needs, but who still required individual support, such as those specific difficulties with text or number, or with fragile mental health. The managers also found that the funding policy privileged long courses, and did not allow sufficiently for the students in rural areas with long distances to travel, who needed to work part-time, and would not be able to attend more than two days a week.

The principal and vice principal had left Beta College by September 2013. The managers found the income had reduced, despite income formula protection. The staffing turbulence and redundancies resulting from the change to the Study Programme had been substantial at higher levels, particularly Level 3, the college's main provision, and it had not been possible to redeploy all of the specialist lecturers, so had resulted in redundancies. Finding additional specialist Functional Skills staff, particularly for Level 2 was challenging. Lecturers who taught at that level could find much better salaries in school sixth forms. Below level 2, the Level 1 provision continued as before, although the future of the 'trades' courses was in doubt. The GFL courses, which had been offered twice yearly, would attract lower levels of funding and were not going to be resurrected, which meant the loss of a more flexible route for those students. The pattern that had started in 2012, with increasing local competition during the lead in to RPA, meant that more students were applying later, having been refused elsewhere, and their level of Functional Skills attainment was much lower overall. More students were studying the long GFL course rather than the specialist vocational courses, as the profile of applicants had changed, and fewer were ready for a specialist Level 1 course.

The managers in all four organisations agreed that the change to retention as the main performance measure made little difference in reality, as it had been retention that had made most difference to QSRs at Level 1 and below. However, it seemed particularly inappropriate for Delta ILP, because commitment to sustained attendance was the main barrier to participation for their clients. The managers were aware that the increasing use of other performance measures, such as destinations and minimum levels of performance, would continue to dominate practice and Ofsted inspections would continue to make use of QSRs. QSRs and destinations data would be published on the government's FE Choices web-site.

Educational consequences of the policy enactment

The participants perceived the main curriculum changes to be the requirement for a substantial qualification, at a higher level than previously, and the requirement for external work experience for all 16-19 year olds, wherever they were studying. The change to a substantial qualification made little difference to those students ready and able to take a long qualification, but significantly disadvantaged those whose attendance was unavoidably interrupted, or wanted to study on a part-time basis. Managers in Delta ILP regretted that programmes of two weeks could no longer be funded, because this was often appropriate for students living in the most challenging circumstances. The end of the requirement for a qualification in PSD was particularly welcomed by managers in Beta College, who had previously marginalised it. The participants in Gamma ILP would continue to offer students the opportunity to develop formal social skills through integrated projects, and were relieved that the burden of paperwork had been lifted because they no longer needed to use a qualification.

Managers welcomed the end of the QCF as the sole basis for VQs, because it lightened the bureaucratic requirements for staff and students, but they were clear that the NVQs fundable continued the competence-based approach to assessment, with the known shortcomings in the approach.

 Although welcoming the inclusion of work experience, the managers thought that the national requirement for all 16-19 year olds to have external work experience,

would make it very difficult to find meaningful placements for students on lower level programmes. Managers in Alpha College had outsourced the requirement to a local agency, and the arrangements in Gamma ILP, whereby all students had external placements, made possible by fund-raising, would continue. Managers in Delta ILP pointed out that the work-experience option might suit their clients, rather than a qualification aim, but very few were in a position to commit for the length of time required.

The managers in both colleges and in Gamma ILP regretted the lack of funding available for other qualifications, particularly occupationally specific qualifications, since these were particularly valued by employers. Alpha College managers continued to offer their successful GCSE retake programme, despite the withdrawal of funding, because they believed that students needed an alternative to the vocational track.

The minimal allocation of funding for non-qualification activity was used positively by managers in Alpha College, because they already had an enterprise programme available, that did not require standard class contact hours. Participants in the three other sub-cases did not see the funding as sufficient for any substantial enterprise or entrepreneurial activity, because it did not fund a standard hour of class contact. Managers in Beta College had arranged an hour of supervised study in a learning centre, where students studied for an online qualification in enterprise, with administrative support, and both ILPs absorbed the time into group tutorials.

The changes to the governance of the sector had led to late, and very confusing messages, about the programme. Managers found a lack of clarity about the length and monitoring required for external work experience requirements; about the consequences for increased contact hours for the 16 hour rule and benefits; about completion of the ILR for students not ready for a substantial qualification; and about which qualifications could be used following the relaxation of the requirements to use the QCF. As with Foundation Learning, managers found that much remained uncertain as managers were expected to implement the

programme with very late information and conflicting advice from newly appointed officials.

Vertical progression

The managers in the four organisations were of the unanimous view that the change to the Study Programme would not reduce the barriers to vertical progression for the students with the least educational capital; in fact, the availability of flexible routes could decrease further. Although the QCF was no longer a requirement, the substantial VQs continued to be based on a behaviourist NVQ approach, with its *horizontal discourse* and *restrictive codes* (Bernstein op.cit.) perpetuating the disadvantage of the students. The Functional Skills pedagogy remained the same. They pointed out that the relative importance of English and mathematics for progression had increased, while funding for compensatory support had further declined with the introduction of the Disadvantage Factor. The managers all thought warehousing and treading water would continue. This situation was compounded because of further reductions in the funding for courses at 19+, with significantly reduced contact hours. This effectively limited opportunities for a meaningful second chance.

As with Foundation Learning, the duality of the *double-shuffle* remained, and the Study programme did not fit all students. The dominant strand of the policy, the national, centralised focus on performativity and competitiveness, continued to limit students' opportunity to progress to Level 2, and the social democratic strand, through the use of the qualification ladder to enable social mobility, looked even more distant, particularly for those most disadvantaged.

CHAPTER FIVE: IS A CUL DE SAC INEVITABLE?

Introduction

The overarching aim of the research was to explore the perceptions, understanding and experiences of four organisations in the Further Education Sector (FES) as they implemented the Foundation Learning and Study Programmes.   The findings confirmed that, despite the stated policy ambition of Foundation Learning to enable progression from Level 1 to provision at Level 2 and above, the enactment of the programme decreased the progression opportunities for the most disadvantaged cohorts of school leavers.   The participants did not consider that the Study Programme would lead to any substantial improvements in opportunity. Using the lens of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, 2005), what could be seen as the neoliberal strand of policy, with its concentration on audit, performance management and competitiveness, combined with Functional Skills and a segmented, predominantly behaviourist pedagogical approach to the curriculum, proved to be a particularly toxic combination for provision at Entry Level 3 and Level 1. The social democratic ambition to use the QCF as the mechanism for progression to higher levels was undermined by the limitations of the curriculum and reductions in compensatory funding. I argue, that without a paradigm shift, the situation for this cohort of learners is unlikely to improve, and the *cul de sac* will remain.

This chapter is divided into two main sections, followed by final reflections. The first section provides an overview of earlier Chapters. It traces the way in which the themes and conceptual perspectives that arose from the Introduction and the first two Chapters, contributed to the development of the research questions, and subsequently, to the adoption of a case study approach to the presentation of the perspectives of managers and lecturers in four organisations, as they enacted policy change. The section concludes by demonstrating how the thesis contributes to knowledge.

The second section considers and reflects upon the implications of the findings from the sub-cases, making reference to recent research findings and policy developments. Here I reflect on the themes that underpinned the empirical study,

highlighting their consequences for the four sub-cases, before considering their wider implications for provision that could enhance, rather than constrain the life chances of students who underachieved at school.

I conclude by arguing that the glass ceiling is not inevitable: I consider and expand upon ways in which changes to policy generation and pedagogy could transform the possibility of a second chance for under-achieving school-leavers. I locate these changes within the current further education context, where government ministers are well aware of the diminishing life-chances for young people in challenging socio-economic circumstances.

Overview of earlier chapters

Chapter One traced an historical narrative which was shot through with ironies, ambiguities and antinomies, and argued that school-leavers who underachieved had been marginalised for 50 years, as generational prejudicial assumptions leeched into education and training policy formation. In the 1970s, with the decline of manufacturing industries, growing youth unemployment, and the loss of entry-level jobs, the need for further training was identified. However, too often, the prevailing assumption was that education and training for this cohort was about remediation of perceived deficits, rather than the development of potential.

The 1980s and early 1990s were characterised in the Further Education Sector (FES) by lively pedagogical debates as constructivist (progressive) perspectives wrestled with competence-based (behaviourist) dimensions for the soul of provision: the victor was the behaviourist competence-based approach used in National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).

Although from 2000, policy documents referenced to social justice and identified social mobility as a key target, the policy levers privileged qualifications at Levels 2 or 3, and Level 1 was largely invisible in national data sets. The provenance of the provision was always unclear and ambiguous: no qualifications below Level 2 were deemed appropriate for employment, although employment was used as a key performance measure for Education to Employment (E2E) programmes in

independent learning providers (ILPs). This ambiguity was reflected in the duality of purpose at the centre of New Labour's Third Way.

The theoretical perspectives that were adopted to analyse the findings in Chapter Four, emerged during this first chapter. The concept of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, op.cit.) helped in the exploration of the duality of policy purpose that characterised Foundation Learning, and has persisted with the change to the Study Programme. The perspectives of Bernstein (1990, 1999 and 2000) were utilised to identify ways in which the curriculum at Level 1 compounded educational disadvantage. When tracing the history of responses to curriculum change, the typology of responses developed by Higham (2003) of *implementation, adaptation or assimilation,* provided a helpful model in conceptualising the behaviours of the participants in the four sub-cases.

Chapter Two explored in greater depth the policy generation and the components of the two programmes.   It set out the background, aims and programme requirements of the Foundation Learning programme, and identified the main changes with the introduction of the Study Programme. The chapter included a consideration of the *Wolf Report* (DfE, 2011a) and its importance for the development of the Study Programme policy. The detail in this chapter augmented the four key themes that emerged at the beginning of the thesis, and underpinned the research rationale and questions: firstly, the ambiguity of much policy generation and formation in relation to the education and training of school leavers who had under-achieved; secondly the failure of national policy makers to learn from the past; thirdly, the questionable value of the curriculum below Level 2 as a basis for improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged students; and fourthly, the variety of responses of managers and lecturers to policy change, within the context of changes in governance of the sector, and the increasingly restrictive mechanisms for performance management at a time of significant reductions in funding for FES.

Chapter Three confirmed the key research questions, making explicit use of the themes that had emerged from the previous chapters. These key questions were:

1. How did enactment of the Foundation Learning policy impact on the structures and provision in the different organisational contexts?

2. How did managers and lecturers perceive and respond to the changed educational requirements?

3. To what extent did the Foundation Learning policy enable students to progress to a course at Level 2?

4. How did managers perceive and make sense of the change to the Study Programme, compared with the Foundation Learning policy?

I outlined the rationale for adopting an interpretative, qualitative approach to the empirical research and a case study design. The basis for the selection of the four sub-case organisations was justified, as was the rationale for choosing a semi-structured approach to interviewing. Steps taken to limit researcher bias were outlined: lead interview questions were framed in relation to the requirements of Foundation Learning and the Study Programme requirements, so that they were as objective as possible. A phased approach was adopted for the research visits, so that the changing perspectives of the participants could be captured during the Foundation Learning programme, and in the first weeks of the change to the Study Programme.

In Chapter Four, the perspectives of the four sub-cases in relation to the key research questions were presented separately, allowing the voices of the participants in each organisation to be heard. The data from each organisation provided eloquent testimony to the ways in which the centralised policies failed to take sufficient account of the diversity of the circumstances and missions of the organisations in the sector.

The comparative summary of the perspectives from the four sub-cases that completed this chapter, showed that the change to the Foundation Learning Programme and then to the Study Programme had the most turbulent structural consequences for the two ILPs, as Gamma ILP lurched from significant expansion because of the demand-led funding policy, to a reversal of fortune as a result of the

change to the Study Programme funding policy. For Delta ILP, the change from the flexibility of E2E to the prescriptive Foundation Learning and Study Programmes, had "disastrous" structural consequences financially, but also meant that they were not able to offer a programme that was of benefit to students whose personal circumstances constituted a barrier to sustained attendance.

For the two colleges the differences in the structural consequences reflected partly their differences in strategic aims and mission, but of greater significance was the striking consequence of the differences in their local context. Participants in Alpha College engaged productively and collaboratively with the local strategic partnership, whereas participants in Beta College operated within a highly competitive environment, with dispersed provision spanning several local boundaries, where local collaboration was weak.

The comparative analysis also revealed common perceptions of significant shortcomings in the Foundation Learning programme design and its constituent elements. Participants challenged the assumptions that school leavers who under-achieved at school were only capable of a low level vocational programme and found its segmented design overly-prescriptive and unhelpful. Very experienced participants questioned the narrowly behaviourist basis of the QCF, and depending on their previous experience and training, found ways to mediate to provide students with more expansive opportunities for professional formation. Participants in the four sub-cases had reservations about the pedagogy and provenance of Functional Skills, finding that it gradually became a gatekeeper, contributing to the warehousing of students as they were unable to progress to a Level 2 course.

Most significantly, participants found that the fundamental shortcomings in Foundation Learning remained with the change to the Study Programme, despite the change to the funding of a programme of learning, rather than on accreditation success. Neither programme was sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse educational needs of the cohort of students studying at Entry level 3 and Level 1, and the curriculum and its associated pedagogies contributed to the barriers to

progression that many young people faced. The ladder of opportunity, central to the aims of both programmes, proved to be a chimera for the groups who had the least educational and social capital. Adopting the lens of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, op.cit.) I showed how the findings illustrated the specific ways in which the dominant, neoliberal policy strand effectively negated the ambition of the social democratic policy strand, by undermining the value of the curriculum for the students, limiting progression opportunities. As managers in Alpha College agreed: "Foundation Learning values what's creditable, rather than crediting what's valuable."

Generalisation

The research focused on four sub-cases, so generalisations in relation to the sector are to be treated with caution, but as Yin (2009) and Robson (2002) argue they can be used by other researchers for analytic generalisation, rather than for statistical generalisation. The findings from the sub-cases can be tested by researchers in other similar settings. The national centralised policies that formed the basis for the studies, and the changes to governance, were common to the whole sector, so it would be surprising if the concerns of the participants were not repeated elsewhere. Even though it was a small-scale study, inferences can be drawn about Foundation Learning and the Study Programme at Entry Level 3 and Level 1 that I argue deserve to be considered further.

Contribution to knowledge

This empirical study makes a significant contribution to knowledge in this area. It was a contemporaneous study of the implementation of national policies in the FES. The sense that participants made of their circumstances, in four different organisations, was revealed through the narratives they used, and the changing lexicon they adopted.

The study was ambitious in its scope by exploring not only the structural consequences of policy enactment, but also the pedagogical implications. It provides a powerful illustration of the ways in which policies, pedagogies and perceptions are interconnected, and that, without paradigmatic change, provision

for this cohort of students is likely to continue to lead to a glass ceiling for those most disadvantaged.

Instrumental in unravelling this interconnectedness was the adoption of the lens of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, 2005); the referencing of the concepts of *horizontal and vertical discourses, and restricted and elaborated codes* Bernstein (1999, 2000 and 2009) and the application of the typology developed by Higham (2003) of ways in which members of staff responded to curriculum change.

The analytic lens of the *double-shuffle* exposed the ways in which the neoliberal strand of the Foundation Learning policy undermined the social democratic strand. The neoliberal stand, the implementation of a restrictive national performance measure, based on qualification success, became embroiled with a curriculum in which pedagogies were based on a narrow competence-based behaviourist model. This model promoted a *horizontal discourse* and *restrictive codes,* which Bernstein (op.cit.) argued, compounded educational disadvantage, limiting access to the kinds of pedagogies that characterised higher level qualifications: namely *vertical discourse and elaborated codes.* Thus the social democratic strand of policy, in which the QCF was seen as a ladder of opportunity and mechanism for social mobility, was undermined both by the the use of the funding methodology as the main measure of performance and audit, and also the restrictive curriculum. The declared social democratic ambition was further undermined by reductions in compensatory funding at the same time as achievements in Functional Skills became requisites for entry to higher level courses.

The use of Higham's typology (ibid.) revealed the ways in which experienced members of staff found ways to *mediate* to ameliorate the full impact of the dominant strand for the students they taught, often focusing on what they perceived as the importance of professional formation, and thereby enabling students to find employment. However, the study also signalled the consequences of a generational pedagogical deficit, whereby lecturers themselves had received little exposure to pedagogies that promote a *vertical discourse and elaborated codes.*

Reflection and considerations of the research findings

The themes that derived from the four sub-cases are reflected upon in relation to two dimensions emerging from the data. They focus firstly, on **policy**, looking at its generation and formation, and its consequences for the four organisations in their local contexts.   They focus secondly on the **educational programme,** and the sense that participants made of *what* and *how* they were expected to teach. I consider the implications of these themes with reference to recent research reports and the current state of the FES, that have implications for policy-making and for the provision.

Policy generation and formation: a continuing failure to learn

Reflections on policy generation and formation suggest that Foundation Learning has suffered the consequences of a narrow view of educational purpose, and of negative assumptions and perceptions about school-leavers who under-achieve.

This thesis was prefaced with three extracts from earlier works that reflected attitudes and concerns about education, dating from 1895. Decades later, similar concerns lay behind one of the five overarching aims of the wide-ranging Nuffield Review of Education and Training, which argued for:

> The re-assertion of a broader vision of education, in which there is a profound respect for the whole person (not just the narrowly conceived 'intellectual excellence' or 'skills for economic prosperity'), irrespective of ability or cultural and social background, in which there is a broader vision of learning and in which the learning contributes to a more just and cohesive society (Pring et al., 2009: 208).

In many respects it seems as if my end is my beginning: many of these fundamental concerns about the failure to provide an educational programme that recognises and values all aspects of students' abilities, and also fosters a cohesive society, still remain.

The difference between the perceptions of the participants, and the demands of the Nuffield Review, could not be more stark. The lexicon of many managers and lecturers, when describing the Foundation Learning policy, noticeably darkened

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over time. Their perspectives became increasingly couched in economic terms, as they perceived the policy to be promoting an instrumental view of education, which focused solely on numbers and counting, and on the achievement of qualifications: essentially a commodity rather than a public good. Powerful phrases from the participants continue to resonate: "a production line of units" (D1), "a corrupt model… leading to a glass ceiling" (B15), "valuing what's creditable, rather than crediting what's valuable" (Alpha College managers) "a unit conveyor belt with the students as passive recipients, rather than active learners" (B11). These are weighty and troubling perceptions that deserve to be more widely heard, particularly by policy-makers.

The findings suggest that policy making and implementation are unlikely to be successful without sufficient weighting given to research evidence about the reasons for previous policy failure, and, in particular, to the views of practitioners.

In Chapters One and Two I referred to the findings of researchers who had identified the ways in which *policy neglect, policy amnesia* or *the failure to learn from past mistakes* had been a constant feature of major curriculum policy changes (Higham and Yeomans, in Raffe and Spours, 2007; Pring et al., 2009; Isaacs, 2013). Keep (2009) argued that policy makers may have placed too much reliance on a civil service that had been long dominated by neoliberal ideas, and did not challenge the prevailing culture. The Study Programme policy-makers were highly selective in responding to the findings and recommendations in the *Wolf Report* (op.cit.) ignoring, for example, pronounced negativity about Functional Skills and her strong endorsement of local involvement. Some managers and lecturers in the sub-cases found that their contributions in consultation meetings had largely gone unheard. Participants wryly suggested that the main beneficiaries of the Foundation Learning programme were the Awarding Bodies, because of the income generated by the small units of qualification on the QCF, and the requirement for three separate strands of funded provision, all of which led to significant accreditation costs for the four sub-cases.

The experiences of the participants provided clear evidence of the consequences of the failure to listen to practitioners and to take sufficient account of research findings, including those from other government departments. They support the view that policy formation should be encompassed within a broader, significantly more expansive understanding of the purpose of education and training and seek to avoid negative, prejudicial assumptions about the abilities of young people who under-achieve at school.

Centralised policy making and contextual diversity: one size did not fit all

When reflecting on the implications of the narratives from the four sub-cases, it is abundantly clear that centralised prescription, and an inflexible funding methodology, were not appropriate for the diverse cohort of students undertaking Foundation Learning or the Study Programme, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds or not ready for a programme of formal engagement: one size did not fit all.

The starkly negative consequences of national policy changes for Delta ILP provide a powerful reminder of the consequences of inflexible programme requirements. The extreme financial vulnerability of the two ILPs, offering specialist, niche provision, is particularly concerning.   The local context compounded their difficulties, particularly the consequences of the demise of the Connexions Service, from 2008, with the loss of many specialist Personal Advisers (PAs) who had been a major source of referral.

Recent reports reflect the experiences and perceptions of the managers. A report from Ofsted (2013) confirmed that change from the Connexions Service to a schools' based careers service was not providing adequate guidance for this group, and was failing to signpost young people to vocational provision.   A Skills Commission Report (2013) further confirmed that the arrangements for programmes around Level 1 were not sufficiently flexible to allow for different modes of attendance and types of programmes. This flexibility had previously been a strong feature of FES, with roll-on, roll-off provision and different programme lengths. The EFA funded a number of short engagement programmes for 16-17

year olds, including Youth Contract pilots. Ironically, one of their main findings in reviewing the programmes (DfE, 2014) was that mentoring, exactly the type of E2E programme previously offered by Delta ILP, was particularly effective when working with disengaged young people.

The findings from the four sub-cases support strongly the need to strengthen local 14-19 partnerships. The experiences of the participants, in particular the positive consequences of policy enactment for Alpha College, suggest that improved local strategic planning would make sense, given the local authorities' statutory responsibility for ensuring that provision is adequate up to the age of 19. This would be helpful for those students ready and able to follow a long Entry Level 3 or Level 1 course, as well as those not yet able to undertake a formally accredited course.

Current literatures reflect the discourse about the links between national governance and localism, as different approaches to the implementation of localism are conceptualised (Higham and Yeomans, 2010; Hodgson and Spours 2011, 2013 and 2014; Avis 2009).   The case for a collaborative local approach, with co-ordination and co-operation that includes local employers, is increasingly being recognised. Hodgson and Spours, in Hodgson (ed.) (2015: 215) argue for a 'lifelong learning ecosystem', where all types of institutions work together in a social partnership, minimising segmentation.

The educational programme: structural hurdles

All the managers in the sub-cases, even when largely positive about the change to Foundation Learning, found that, increasingly, more students had to take a second course at Level 1 before progressing to Level 2, and that although some students did progress, for the cohort of students with the least educational capital on leaving school, the reality was a "glass ceiling" (B 15). The findings provided a helpful steer in identifying why some cohorts of students found themselves in this cul de sac. The combination of demand-led funding based on QSRs, and the prescriptive programme requirements led to, and perpetuated, perceptual and structural barriers to progression. Two aspects of the curriculum, the competence-based

approach to assessment used for QCF and Functional Skills, were perceived by participants in particular as constituting hurdles for students.

The QCF: a problematic ladder

The approach adopted on the QCF for very small units of accreditation proved particularly unhelpful for students who wanted to progress to a Level 2 course, despite progression being the overarching aim of the programme. The competence-based QCF enshrined a behaviourist approach, which, without significant intervention, perpetuated and in some cases to justified, perceptions that Foundation Learning programmes were unchallenging, and poor preparation for higher levels of learning.

The shortcomings that managers and lecturers identified in the QCF, chimed with the theoretical perspectives in Chapter One, which argued that social demarcation was reproduced through the education system, and compounded the marginalisation of under-achieving students (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bernstein, op.cit.). The findings confirmed perceptions that the qualifications were of low value because of the behaviourist pedagogy adopted for the QCF, plus the fact that the programme was not developmental: students could take units in any order. The demand-led funding methodology and the imperative to achieve the qualifications as agreed when enrolling, led to perverse incentives to offer the easiest units so that students could be seen to be successful. Student choice had to be balanced against the imperative to achieve and the availability of funding. Participants were well aware of the irony of a situation where the inclusion of small, easily achievable units to motivate students, proved to be a major source of the warehousing. Such ironies have been a constant Leitmotif in the history of the provision.

A root cause of the pedagogical difficulty for VQs and PSD was the adoption of an NVQ model outside the workplace, or other realistic contexts. Participants found the segmented approach enshrined in the unitisation, combined with the implicit negative assumptions about the abilities of students in the PSD units, compounded negative perceptions. Those experienced lecturers who mediated by *assimilating*

to improve the VQs and PSD programmes, focused successfully on providing students with a context that involved meaningful realistic opportunities for learning, not just classroom-based activity. They adopted constructivist approaches, based on their previous experience and perceptions of what students needed for their occupational formation or accumulation of social capital. The most complete example of *assimilation* was the holistic approach developed by the director of Gamma ILP, where students could develop and consolidate their skills, knowledge and understandings over time, through the use integrated projects taught in a realistic, working environment.

Since its inception, the NVQ approach had been seen by many researchers, as promoting a behaviourist, not a developmental approach to learning (Ecclestone, 2002; Hyland, 1994; Steedman and Hawkins 1994; Wolf, 1995; Yeomans, 1998; Young, in Burke (ed.), 1995). More recently, Allais (2015: 237) argued that qualification frameworks, such as QCF, lead to:

> over specification, in a vain attempt to create learning outcomes which refer to a clearly identifiable competence that everyone understands in the same way. This oversimplification reinforces the tendency for knowledge to be confused with information, as it leads to a narrow specification of bits of knowledge. Knowledge is seen as a commodity comprised of isolatable and measurable discrete objects that can be picked up or dropped at will, as opposed to holistic, connected and structured bodies of knowledge which are located in structured social relationships.

The shortcomings in the QCF that participants in the sub-cases identified, resonated with these arguments, as the qualifications, without mediation by lecturers, did not enable students to develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed for employment or vertical progression.

Particularly concerning is the implication from these findings of a generational connection, whereby vocational lecturers, whose vocational and teacher training are both competence-based, do not necessarily acquire the pedagogical knowledge or experience to provide alternative approaches to the curriculum. This concern

reflects research findings that the competence-based model used for teacher training, inhibits more expansive approaches to learning (Lucas et al., 2012). The competence-based model is seductive, because it leads to quick, easily achievable rewards for colleges, ILPs, Awarding Bodies and national data sets. Without intervention at government level, the prevalence of a narrow, competence-based approach to assessment is likely to continue in the current climate, in which accreditation success continues to dominate evaluation of performance, rather than the effectiveness of the programme in enabling students to develop the broader educational capital that enables them progress to higher levels.

Very recently, the OECD (2014) and the Commission for Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning CAVTL (2014) have stressed the need for a much wider curriculum for all vocational qualifications, involving opportunities for the development of knowledge and critical thinking. The recent report on social mobility, BIS (2015), confirmed that vocational qualifications such as BTECs, which focus on providing learners with general transferable skills, have the highest rates of learner progression, whereas the social mobility picture for low-level NVQs is negative. This report confirms that there has been no change since the earlier literatures, identifying similar findings about the value of NVQs at Level 1 (Beaumont, 1995; Jenkins et al., 2006; Wolf et al., 2010).

Functional Skills: a questionable provenance

Participants identified Functional Skills as a major hurdle to vertical progression. Guidance staff tended to play safe by allocating students to courses that they had confidence they could achieve. For many this meant Entry Level 3, often because it did not have an external examination. This strategy may have improved success rates, but it made it harder for students to progress to a Level 2 course, even when their vocational competence was not in doubt.

A central pedagogical difficulty identified by managers and lecturers was that the Functional Skills model was not, in fact, functional. It was described as *conceptually incoherent* by Professor Wolf (op.cit: 171), but, nevertheless continued unchanged in the Study Programme. Not only was the external examination conceptually more

challenging than Key Skills, the Skills for Life tests or ESOL courses, it also lacked occupational relevance. Functional Skills lecturers ruefully pointed out that contextual relevance had been central to their Level 4 and 5 specialist training. The numeracy inquiry led by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE, 2014) recommended that the Government adopt a new approach which focused on how mathematics and numbers are used in everyday life.

It is clear that ministers and policy officials require a more sophisticated understanding of the reasons for the continuing failure of strategies to improve standards of English and mathematics, despite billions of pounds of investment since the start of the century. The reports from the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) are based on what students can actually do, not on qualifications gained. The focus on using qualifications as the proxy for learning needs revisiting, since despite an increased in the numbers of qualifications achieved, competence seems to continue to be a problem. Numbers and counting may not be the solution.

Two ideas flow from the perceptions and suggestions of participants: firstly, full integration of English and mathematics into the requirements of the vocational qualifications at Level 1 and, secondly, partial integration, so that the external examinations are offered in relation to vocational subjects, and have full contextual, subject relevance. Full integration would end the segmentation that divorces English and mathematics from their practical application. Partial integration might help to make the examinations seem legitimate to students.

This second option is likely to appeal to government officials, because they could continue to collate statistics about achievements in English and mathematics. However, the first option would do more to stem the marginalisation of students at Entry level 3 and Level 1 by potentially improving perceptions of the value of vocational qualifications, and removing artificial barriers to progression for those occupationally competent. This option assumes that the integration of English and mathematics is endorsed by employers and by practitioners with relevant occupational experience. Both the *Wolf Report* (op.cit.) and the CAVTL (op.cit.)

found that leaving the embedding to be carried out separately, was not sufficient; it also further endorsed the need to engage employers in the development of the vocational qualifications.

Interestingly, a government-funded review of Functional Skills *Making English and Maths Work for All* (ETF, 2015: 3), with a specific focus on the views of employers, found that arrangements *though not broken, could be improved.* Despite the cautiously optimistic title the report was more than faintly damning, as only 47 per cent of the 87 per cent of employers who responded acknowledged any contact with Functional Skills, and the recommendations included revising both the content and the assessment modes. At the time of writing, the Department for Education was undertaking further development of Functional Skills. The BIS Committee Report into Literacy and Numeracy (BIS, 2014) referred to the continuing alarmingly high proportion of adults with low literacy and numeracy skills, and recognised the ambiguity of the role of GCSEs in English and mathematics. It recommended moving away from the linear approach to achieving qualifications, and recognised that, as the participants in the four sub-cases maintained, many people who have not previously been successful at school, learn English and mathematics best in relevant contexts, not in the classroom.

However, whilst the nature of qualifications is being debated, the experiences of participants in all of the settings strongly suggest that there continues to be an elephant in the English and mathematics policy room: the barriers to progression for those many school leavers who have specific difficulties with text or number. This highly significant aspect of English and mathematics was noticeably lacking in Skills for Life publications. Rice and Brooks (2004) argued that students who have specific difficulties need no more than just the routine teaching, but the findings of the more recent Rose Report (DCSF, 2008) suggested that intensive individual support for young people with dyslexia is the most effective intervention. The experience of the four sub-cases was that, as a result of policy change, compensatory support had reduced significantly at the time when demands of the students were increasing, and support was consequently spread too thinly. The funding methodology has drifted away from the recommendations in the

Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996), that students with greater difficulties than their peers should have individual assessments followed by tailored support.

Will the change to the Study Programme improve the situation?

The managers' experiences suggested that the change from Foundation Learning to the Study Programme will not substantially change the situation. The headline change to the funding of a programme of learning, was welcomed in principle, but meant a significant income reduction, despite protection measures. The change from QSRs to retention as the key performance indicator made little difference in reality, as students who were retained usually achieved their qualifications.

Unlike Foundation Learning, which had been designed to include pre-entry levels on the QCF, with the assumption that 'bite-size' units were best for everyone, the Study Programme was designed for all 16-19 provision, with a strong emphasis on higher level learning. The requirements remained largely centralised and prescriptive, and were not sufficiently flexible to meet the diverse requirements of students studying below level 2. The policy further confirmed a vocational track for all students, as funding for GCSE retakes other than English and mathematics had been withdrawn. All managers thought that the reification of English and mathematics qualifications would continue to constitute a barrier for many students unless more compensatory support was made available. Although the inclusion of work experience was welcomed in principle, the huge increase in the numbers of students requiring some kind of good quality and meaningful external work placements was seen as particularly challenging, and possibly not achievable. The fanlight of opportunity for 'local' non-accredited provision did not attract sufficient funding for a standard class-contact hour.

The managers' expectations, in the early weeks of implementation, were that the programme would not facilitate progression to Level 2. These views were subsequently borne out by Ofsted's survey of the Study Programme (Ofsted, 2014), which stressed in particular the low levels of progression to Level 2, as well as failures to find suitable external work-placements.

Despite their significant misgivings about the changes to Foundation Learning and the Study Programme, managers and lecturers in the four organisations strove to find ways to comply with the requirements. The compliance culture, that has increasingly dominated the FE sector (Fletcher et al., in Hodgson, (ed.) 2015), prevails because the penalty for failing to enact centralised policies, even when they are not in the best interests of students, can result in contract withdrawal, financial penalties and inadequate judgements at inspection. The considered perspectives of the participants in all four organisations betokened significant unease about the settlement at Level 1, and the unforgiving nature of the centralised approach to provision. The significant reductions in the Adult Skills Budget and the introduction of loans at higher levels, indicated significant erosion of future second chance opportunities for those who do not thrive at school.

Final reflections and indicators for change

Only a paradigm shift will open up the *cul de sac* at Level 1. The future of the FES is unclear; its raison d'etre is being questioned by government officials, researchers and educational organisations, as it faces significant, much publicised, reductions in funding, severe financial pressures and area reviews (BIS, 2015), that could lead to a reshaping of the post-compulsory landscape. Its very existence in its current form is being debated Hodgson (ed.), (2015). Although much of the current discourse in FES is about apprenticeships (Ofsted, 2015) and higher level specialist provision (CAVTL, 2014), the widening attainment gap between the wealthiest and poorest at GCSE level has also caught the attention of ministers and the media (Guardian, 2015; HC 142, 2015). Now is a propitious time to inform the debate so that ministers and officials have a clearer understanding of the need for a seismic change at Level 1.

The sector is subject to countervailing initiatives and pressures: on the one hand encouraged to specialise in higher level vocational work, linked to universities, on the other to play a part in the flexibility that Raising the Participation Age (RPA) could potentially offer, albeit with dark overtones of a tertiary modern. The experiences of the participants in the sub-cases suggest that schools may retain more able students, and those perceived as less will apply to other post-16

organisations. The extent to which the arrangements for 14-16 year olds to transfer to colleges, and the possible impact of that on perceptions of colleges is as yet unclear. Might this be seen as a mechanism whereby schools can 'off-load' groups of 'less able' pupils to improve performance data? Will it further confirm the division between academic provision and vocational provision?

The LA's role in planning for 14-19 provision has been potentially increased with the introduction of RPA, but this influence is somewhat attenuated by the diversification of secondary education, with numbers of academies and free schools altering the ecological balance. It is not clear whether further segmentation of the 14-19 sector will flow from the consequences of RPA, and sector rationalisation: what is clear is the relative silence in recent ministerial communications with the sector about Level 1 provision (Boles, 2015; BIS, 2015a; 2015b).

The findings from the four sub-cases provided significant insights into how and why the current policies compounded educational disadvantage. It is clear that tinkering is not sufficient: although the funding requirements and performance measures in the Study Programme reduced the excessive bureaucracy of Foundation learning, the programme is still centralised and prescriptive; structural and perceptual hurdles to progression remain and the programme design and pedagogical approach for vocational qualifications continues to be competence-based.

I argue for four major changes that could assist the paradigm shift:

- the purpose and provenance of provision at level 1 needs to better understood, with policy and pedagogical assumptions based on development of potential rather than the generational presumption of deficits;
- the nature of the provision and its funding should be flexible, and determined locally, so that it can encompass the diversity of the cohort;
- the curriculum should be broader and more expansive, moving away from the hegemonic behaviourist, outcomes-based model;

- the fundamentals of educational capital that facilitate progression should be integrated into the educational programme below Level 2.

From deficit to potential: a shift in perceptual set and purpose

A paradigm shift has to encompass a new strategic focus that recognises the economic and social realities of the lives of young people in their localities, and the ways in which the curriculum can reproduce disadvantage. This paradigm shift has to start with a change in the perceptual set on the part of ministers and officials, which recognises the abilities and potential of under-achieving school leavers, rather than a socio-educational remedial model, predicated on assumed deficits that apply to all under-achieving school-leavers. This perceptual transformation has to be accompanied by a revisiting of the purpose of provision, contesting the settlement that views students in crudely economic terms, and promoting a much wider, more comprehensive vision.   Social mobility cannot simplistically be correlated with the accretion of qualifications. The findings from the four sub-cases illustrated the need for a programme of learning that enables students to increase their educational capital by developing the skills, knowledge and understanding required for meaningful progression. In order to achieve this, ministers and policy makers need to take greater account of the views of experienced practitioners and research findings.   Currently marginalised, and neither fish nor fowl, the provenance of provision at Level 1 has to become much clearer, so that it is perceived as valuable, not for what is credited but for *what* and *how* and *where* students learn, so that it provides a genuine second chance for young people who have not thrived in a school environment.

Stronger local determination of provision and centralised policy making

The experiences of the sub-cases powerfully support the argument for much greater local determination of the provision. The centralised funding methodology, performance measures and programme requirements failed to allow for the diversity of the sector with a consequent loss of very short courses and flexible attendance arrangements.   All organisations found that the funding and

programme requirements disadvantaged the disadvantaged students most: an exact opposite of what Rawls (1999) argued constituted social justice.

Policy-makers failed to anticipate the significant financial vulnerability of Gamma and Delta ILPs resulting from policy change. In order to survive, Delta ILP had to comply with requirements that were of little benefit to their cohorts, experiencing irreversible mission drift. However, compliance was not sufficient to avert final closure, even though the DfE (2014) found that the type of mentoring/re-engagement programmes that Delta ILP had provided under the E2E programme was the most advantageous for this cohort.

The current governance arrangements for the sector are over-complicated: the local authorities' commissioning role for provision from 3-19 years is at odds with the national funding role of the Education Funding Agency (EFA) and the changing ecology of schools, with the mix of academies and free schools. Local determination does not rest easily with a national funding methodology, and will require, at the very least, greater flexibility over what and how provision is funded and how performance is monitored: it should be possible to fund re-engagement programmes with funding commensurate with the specialist nature of the work. It cannot be in the best interests of students that charitable organisations such as Delta ILP, working with local youth justice teams, have to close because of the prescriptive programme requirements and a funding formula that does not allow for very short programmes. LAs should be able to agree flexibilities and recognise the importance of mentoring for the most disengaged students. The participants found that the national funding formula for ALS significantly disadvantaged students with specific difficulties with text or number, or fragile mental health. The principles of inclusion enshrined in the Tomlinson Report (FEFC, 1996) need restoring.

Beyond outcomes-based approaches to assessment
The dominant narrative from the participants is clear: the outcomes-based NVQ model adopted for the VQs and PSD on the QCF assumed a low-level, segmented, behaviourist approach, that further disadvantaged students. Although the

requirement to use qualifications from the QCF was removed from the Study Programme, many qualifications at Level 1 are still based on a behaviourist NVQ model. The negative consequences of a segmented programme and a tick-box approach to criteria compliance, have been reduced, not removed, and the funding methodology continues to encourage curriculum snacking, rather than continuous nourishment. The VQs can still be taught in the classroom, and are, therefore, of questionable value, not only in terms of professional formation, but also for the significant cohort of school-leavers alienated by school. The proposed change from the QCF to the less prescriptive Regulated Qualifications Framework (DfE, 2015), overseen by Ofqual, is several years away from realisation, and there is therefore still time to implement changes.

Recent suggestions for improved programme designs for vocational provision (CAVTL, 2014; OECD, 2014; Hodgson (ed.), 2015) call for greater involvement with employers at the design stage, with components that require more subject knowledge and a wider range of pedagogical approaches to include creative thinking, problem-solving, planning and reflection. An essential feature of the debate has to be the contestation of the hegemonic assumptions that led to the predominance of outcomes-based approaches to assessment, and the enabling of a wider range of formative approaches. In Bernsteinian terms, this would mean moving way from a *horizontal discourse* to a *vertical discourse* to enable greater engagement with a range of pedagogies. Such a change would help to challenge the perceptions of low-level meaningless provision. Crucially, teacher training, itself competence-based, must reflect and model the demands for more expansive pedagogical approaches to stem the generational gap between those whose experience includes a range of pedagogies, and those who have had little engagement with the range of approaches on the constructivist/behaviourist continuum.

Overcoming fragmentation of provision

Just as outcomes-based approaches have dominated educational provision for several decades, so too has the settlement of a fragmented and segmented approach to the provision of fundamental skills, such as literacy and numeracy,

employability and social skills, that contribute to the educational capital that facilitates progression. Despite overwhelming, and continuing evidence of ineffectiveness, government officials keep pressing the same buttons, and assume that these fundamental skills can be taught and examined in silos, and that accreditation success is the same as learning.

The understandings and perspectives of the most experienced lecturers and managers in the four sub-cases provided insights into why this approach is fundamentally flawed, and how the shortcomings might be overcome. Wherever possible, experienced practitioners mediated so that these fundamental skills were integrated, not crudely into segmented units, but into the whole programme. In order to facilitate occupational formation, they recognised the necessity of realistic practical activities which enabled students to develop, practise and consolidate these skills over time. It may be time to recall Newsom (DES, 1963 paras. 76, 88 and 89), who stressed that basic skills in reading, writing and calculation should be reinforced through every medium of the curriculum.

My own experience, referred to in the Introduction, where CPVE students spent a year in a shopping centre, with a store-based mentor, stays with me as a prime example of enabling students to develop both the vocational skills and the fundamental skills that facilitate professional formation. Such a model is possible if the sector makes a shift from funding the 'provider' to a focus on funding the type of provision that will most benefit students, not in the short term to meet participation or qualification targets, or even to improve performance on international metrics, but for the longer term. This may mean thinking not just about the taught curriculum, but also about the extent to which the **context** for learning as well as *how* and *what* is taught enables professional formation.

The much cited argument against integration of Functional Skills into vocational courses, that vocational lecturers cannot do the basic skills themselves, is both patronising and wrong-headed, because it simply perpetuates generational avoidance of the problem. The fundamental skills needed for a specific qualification, should form integral and essential components of the qualification;

this should be well within the competence of a vocational lecturer, especially those with successful relevant industrial or commercial experience. If the students ready for occupational training are taught in realistic settings, they have the opportunity to develop vocational and fundamental skills over time, with specific additional support provided if required.

The sub-cases provide a timely reminder that, despite much hand-wringing about lack of progression in the policy documents of successive governments, the specific nature of the provision around Level 1 has not been adequately considered or planned. The neoliberal strand of the *double-shuffle,* with the conflation of performance and qualification, fatally damaged Foundation Learning, highlighting the unanticipated adverse consequences of inappropriate compliance.   The emphasis in inspection, on the extent to which 'providers' comply with, and manage the funding requirements, has marginalised the more significant pedagogical issues about *what, how* and *where* students learn. The findings from the sub-cases suggest that inspections should focus less on compliance and more on the extent to which the government programmes in the different funding streams are, in reality, fit for purpose. The use of a broad-brush approach to the inspection of Study Programmes, which includes all provision for 16-19 year olds below Level 4, is likely to continue the marginalisation of provision at Level 1, possibly airbrushing it out of sight. This marginalisation is made particularly likely as the current debates and concerns are heavily weighted towards specialist provision at Level 3 and apprenticeships, as the 2014/15 Annual Report (Ofsted 2015b) demonstrates in its commentary about the FES. It is not clear where the provision below Level 2 will be located if FE Colleges are designated as providers of high level specialist courses.

Inverting the strands of the *double-shuffle*

Continuing the application of the lens of the concept of the *double-shuffle* (Hall, op.cit.), the balance between the dominant neoliberal strand of education policy and the sub-ordinate social democratic strand needs to be differently weighted, so that the ambition to improve life-chances and upward social mobility is not stifled by a combination of centralised measures of restrictive performance management

and funding requirements, a narrow, behaviourist pedagogy, and limited compensatory funding. I argue that only with a fundamental shift in an understanding of educational purpose, that leads to a transformation of the provision, and an expansion of opportunity for a second chance, will school leavers who underachieve, particularly those alienated by classroom learning, escape the current cul de sac.

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APPENDIX A: SCHEDULES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Schedule of Lead Questions for Managers: Foundation Learning

Q1. Tell me about your professional background and your experience in relation to provision below Level 2

> *Possible prompts: main degree or equivalent; teaching qualifications and experience; number of years involvement in FES; commercial or industrial experience*

Q2. Tell me how the change to the Foundation Learning programme impacted on the college/centre and the provision

> *Possible prompts: range and number of subjects offered, changes in recruitment, positive and less positive consequences the for students, connection with strategic plan and mission*

Q3. Tell me about any ways in which your Foundation Learning provision has been affected by the local educational context

> *Possible prompts: schools, strategic partnerships, local competition, RPA, Connexions and careers*

Q4. Tell me about the consequences of the introduction of Foundation Learning for staffing and staff conditions

> *Possible prompts: changed roles, redundancies, new expertise, need for CPD, performance management*

Q5. Tell me about the consequences of the changed funding arrangements

> *Possible prompts: income, class contact hours, ALS,*

Q6. Tell me your views about the requirements for initial assessment, which include personalisation and choice

> *Possible prompts: any changes to your guidance? How possible is it for students to have an individual programme?*

Q7. Tell me your views of the requirement for three strands of provision

> *Possible prompts: VQs; PSD; Functional Skills, work experience*

Q8. Tell me your views about the requirement to use the qualifications listed on the QCF

> *Possible prompts: accreditation of single units; competence-based assessment; the value of the criteria*

Q9. To what extent do you think the Foundation Learning programme has improved progression to higher levels, particularly to Level 2?

> *Possible Probes: what has helped/ hindered progression*

Q10. Can you describe any ways in which you have taken action to improve the provision for students, where you have identified shortfalls?

Schedule of Lead Questions for Lecturers

Q1. Tell me about your professional background and your experience in relation to provision below Level 2

> *Possible prompts: main degree or equivalent; teaching qualifications and experience; number of years involvement in*

Q2. Tell me about any ways in which the introduction and change to Foundation Learning affected the provision you offered students

> *Possible prompts: change to a qualification-based programmes. Comparison with previous programme*

Q3. Tell me about any changes for your role as a lecturer

> *Possible prompts: changes to the funding, the qualifications, working conditions and contact times, staffing*

Q4. Tell me about any changes to initial guidance, personalisation and choice have

> *Possible prompts: have the criteria for your course changed? is it possible for students to have individual programmes? Do the students have more choice?*

Q5. Tell me how have you found the curriculum requirements and the three strands?

> *Possible prompts: omissions from the programme; Functional Skills, PSD*

Q6. How do you view the change to the QCF and the use of small units of Accreditation?

Possible prompts: competence-based approaches; impact for students; perceptions of other lecturers

Q7. Where you've identified shortcomings, can you tell me about any ways in which you have attempted to modify the requirements?

Possible probes: can you explain why you decided on these modifications? Can you explain what prevented you from making any changes?

Q7. To what extent do you think the Foundation Learning programme has helped students to progress to Level 2?

Possible prompts: are there any factors that have made a difference? Is it the same for all of the students?

Schedule of Lead Questions for Managers: the Study Programme

Q1. Tell me about the change to the Study Programme and the consequences for your provision and the students

Possible prompts: funding; changes to subjects offered, staffing changes, benefits for different cohorts of students

Q2. Tell me whether you've found that the local situation has changed and has had consequences for your provision

Possible prompts: careers service, RPA increased or decreased competition, local planning and the local authority

Q3. How do you view the new performance measures?

Possible prompt: how do you think they will impact on your performance and income, particularly the change to retention?

Q4. How have you found the changed requirements to the educational programme?

Possible prompts: funding for a programme of learning; substantial qualification; increasing focus on English and maths; work experience; non-qualification activity

Q5. To what extent have you found the changed requirements an improvement on Foundation Learning?

Possible prompts: relaxation of the need for the QCF; fewer accredited strands; opportunity for non-accredited provision

Q6. To what extent do you think the Study Programme is likely to improve the opportunities for students to progress to a Level 2 course?

Possible probes: the same for all groups? Do the hurdles you identified with Foundation Learning continue?

APPENDIX B: CODES OF PARTICIPANTS

	ALPHA COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION
A1	Principal
A2	Vice principal
A3	Head of Foundation Learning
A4	Quality manager
A5	Manager for 14-16 provision
A6	Assistant Principal Student Support
A7	Lecturer in construction (team leader)
A8	Lecturer in construction
A9	Lecturer in countryside
A10	Lecturer in animal care
A11	Lecturer in equine (and countryside)
A12	Lecturer on GFL course PSD and Functional Skills (team co-ordinator)
A13	Lecturer on GFL course PSD and Functional Skills
A14	Lecturer in child care (GFL)
A15	Lecturer in hairdressing (team leader)
A16	Lecturer in travel and tourism (GFL)
A17	Lecturer in administration (GFL)
A18	Lecturer in horticulture
A19	Manager of 16-19 provision

	BETA COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION
B1	Vice Principal (Curriculum and Quality)
B2	Head of Foundation Learning

B3	Head of Faculty
B4	Manager for 14-16 provision
B5	Lecturer on travel and tourism units (GFL)
B6	Lecturer on caring for children units (GFL)
B7	Lecturer on administration units (GFL)
B8	Lecturer in ESOL
B9	Lecturer in Functional Skills
B10	Lecturer in Functional Skills
B11	Lecturer in ICT
B12	Lecturer in administration
B13	Interim Senior Manager

	GAMMA INDEPENDENT LEARNING PROVIDER
C1	Director CEO
C2	Lecturer in Functional Skill and PSD and education coordinator

	DELTA INDEPENDENT LEARNING PROVIDER
D1	Director
D2	Education Manager
D3	Lecturer in Functional Skills
D4	Lecturer in construction
D5	CEO of merged company