FE to HE Transitions:
Understanding Vocational Learner Experiences in Higher Education

Final report to:

Linking London Lifelong Learning Network

Dr Wayne Clark
Deborah Holt

CaSE (Careers and Student Employment)

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### Glossary

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BND</td>
<td>National Diploma</td>
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<td>CaSE</td>
<td>Careers and Student Employment</td>
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<td>DLHE</td>
<td>Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey</td>
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<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education</td>
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<td>GUTS</td>
<td>Gearing Up To Study</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HESA</td>
<td>Higher Education Statistics Agency</td>
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<td>IAG</td>
<td>Information, Advice and Guidance</td>
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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research project: *FE to HE Transitions: Understanding Vocational Learner Experiences in Higher Education*.

This project has been funded by Linking London Lifelong Learning Network (via the Development Project stream¹). The project has been undertaken by the careers service (CaSE) at University of Westminster.

This report contains a full summary of the project including aims, methodology, key findings and project outcomes.

The main aim of the project was to collect and disseminate data on the educational experiences and career/employment trajectories experienced by vocational learners who have entered, or are planning to enter, HE from ‘non-traditional’ (i.e. non A-level) FE backgrounds.

In doing so, the project ultimately aimed to develop new understandings of non-traditional progression routes. By mapping educational and transitional experiences across levels 4, 5, 6 in HE and across the graduate labour market, the project aims to enhance existing knowledge of vocational learner progression.

The research component of the project is premised on the value of capturing learner testimony through qualitative methods and thus enhancing the learner ‘voice’. This is supported by secondary statistical analysis of vocational learner progression.

The *FE to HE Transitions* project has two key outputs:

1. Research Report

   The project has generated a set of research findings designed to inform practitioner and pedagogic understandings of the vocational learner experience. This research component of the project is intended to support IAG practice in relation to facilitating learner progression in FE and HE. The current report summarises the key findings of this data, and this has been supported during 2009-10 by the dissemination of research findings via conference presentations and research articles across the Linking London Network and the relevant research communities.

2. fe2he website

   A key output of the project has been the construction of a suite of emblematic case studies of learners and graduates. This has taken the form of an online resource: the fe2he website (http://www.westminster.ac.uk/fe2he). This website is designed to support and encourage FE students in relation to progression to HE by presenting ‘real life’ case studies of vocational learners. The web materials are also designed to provide student support/IAG staff with examples of vocational learner success.

The contents of this report should be of interest to:

1. IAG practitioners in FE and HE
2. Student support staff in FE and HE
3. Prospective and current vocational learners in FE and HE

The project was awarded funding in June 2008 and completed in May 2010.

¹ The project was funded under the following stream: ‘(II) the process work streams around credit, guidance, learner support, work-based and flexible learning’.
2. Aims

The project has two main aims:

1. To develop enhanced understandings of 'non-traditional' or vocational (i.e. non A-level) learner progression routes across FE, HE and the graduate labour market.

2. To produce a suite of accessible online resources containing case studies of vocational learner experiences in HE and the graduate labour market

This report concentrates on the first of these aims by providing a summary of the key findings from the research component of the project.

The project used a multi-method to capture a ‘snapshot’ of educational experiences, expectations and aspirations amongst vocational learners at three key stages: prior to HE entry; during HE study; and following graduation from HE. The project also drew upon secondary statistical analysis of vocational learner trajectories by examining issues such as retention, progression rates, and the employment destinations experienced by vocational learners following graduation from HE.

The project has aimed to record learner experiences, learner progression and employment destinations at different stages of the vocational learner journey. Data has been collected from learners engaged in study across Levels 2 to 5 (see table 2 and appendix 6 for specific details of levels of study).

It is anticipated that by linking these stages of learner progression the research has generated a more rounded picture of the vocational learner journey than is currently available. The research has therefore been designed to provide a preliminary mapping of the various learning and employment trajectories experienced by FE entrants.

By capturing the experiences of cohorts of vocational learners at specific points of the learner journey, the project will provide data on the following key areas:

- The issues (if any) associated with the transition from FE to HE (including level 3 to 4 progression)
- Self-identity amongst vocational learners in comparison to ‘traditional’ learners
- The impact of pre-entry preparation and IAG on the transition to HE
- Learning styles and educational development amongst vocational learners
- Progression rates and employment destinations amongst vocational learners

The project aims to generate a collection of emblematic examples of vocational learners who have undertaken the FE to HE educational journey. It is anticipated that this material will be of use to staff involved in advising and supporting learners engaged in transitions across educational levels. Equally, the generation of accessible ‘real world’ examples should be of interest to for potential HE applicants when making decisions about their future educational and skills development. The project also aims to contribute to wider attempts to develop flexible and responsive best practice in support of vocational learner progression.

For the purposes of this project, vocational learning is defined broadly as education, training or learning which seeks to specifically enhance skills in preparation for the workplace and thus equip learners for a specific vocation or employment. This research is concerned with learners who progress from institutions of vocational study (in this case FE colleges) to HE via a non-A-level route.
3. Project team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Staff</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Leader</td>
<td>Dr Wayne Clark (Senior Manager – Research and Development, CaSE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Research Officer</td>
<td>Deborah Holt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Interviewer</td>
<td>Claire Larkman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribers</td>
<td>Linda Holt; Lucy Hatton; Sadie Curlett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical data analysis</td>
<td>Anita Shanbhag (Research Administrator, CaSE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website design</td>
<td>John McMenamin (Employability/IT Consultant, CaSE)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Project team

The project was co-ordinated and managed by Dr Wayne Clark in CaSE at University of Westminster.

In order to carry out the data collection and analysis, the project employed two members of staff. Firstly, the Project Research Officer was responsible for the design and implementation of the research data collection, as well as working with the Project Leader on the overall development of the project. Secondly, a Research Interviewer was employed to design and undertake interviews.

A team of transcribers were also employed at various points to undertake interview and focus group transcription.

The project drew upon existing expertise in CaSE for the statistical analysis (Research Administrator) and website design (Employability/IT Consultant). All project outputs were produced by Dr Clark (in collaboration with the Project Research Officer where required).

Input to the project was also received from the following staff within University of Westminster:

- Katherine Hewlett (Education Liaison Manager, Academic Services)
- Jayne Bakewell (Senior Manager - Careers and Quality, CaSE)
- Anita Jackson (Head of Planning - Planning Office) and Francis Nugent (Information Analyst - Planning Office)
- Nicholas Laws (Online Communications & Marketing Manager - Marketing, Communications & Development)

Advice on the scheduling and development of the project was provided on an ongoing basis by Stuart Mitchell (Development Project Co-ordinator/Researcher) at Linking London Lifelong Learning Network.
4. Methodology

4.1 Research methodology

The research strand of the FE to HE Transitions project used a multi-method approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis.

Firstly, qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) were used to capture a ‘snapshot’ of educational experiences, expectations and aspirations amongst vocational learners in the academic year 2008-9. Qualitative data was also collected from IAG staff in a FE context.

Secondly, statistical information relating to vocational leaner progression and achievement in HE and the graduate employment market was collected. This data was subject to secondary data analysis.

4.2 Research design

The data collection and analysis consisted of three main components:

1. Interviews with vocational learners
2. Interviews with IAG staff
3. Secondary statistical analysis of vocational leaner progression

This triangulated approach was used firstly to provide some level of comparison to take place across research data. Secondly, the methodology was designed to provide a ‘rounded’ picture of vocational leaner progression drawing upon personal testimonials of learners and practitioners, as well as more ‘objective’ measures of progression via statistical data. Taken as a whole, this triangulated research design is intended to provide the research with a relatively high level of validity in terms of developing new understandings of learner progression and transitions.

The collection of the research data was structured as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1: Interviews with vocational learners</th>
<th>Level (entry route into HE)</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current FE students</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current HE students</td>
<td>4, 5</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Part 2: Interviews with IAG staff          | Semi-structured interviews  | 2                   |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 3: Statistical analysis of vocational learner progression</th>
<th>Learner progression</th>
<th>Secondary analysis</th>
<th>n/a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate employment destinations</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Secondary analysis</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Research design

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2 As listed in: *Routes into Higher Education* (Linking London Lifelong Learning Network). Available at: http://www.linkinglondon.ac.uk/partners/index
Appendix 4 contains an overview of the educational profile of the learners who took part in the research. Pre-HE qualifications covered by the interviews include: Access to HE Diploma; BTEC; National Diploma; HNC.

Interviews have also taken place with IAG practitioners involved in advising students who undertake the FE to HE route. Two interviews were undertaken with IAG staff at a FE college in London: a Careers and Progression Co-ordinator and a Student Support Manager.

Chart 1 contains an overview of the research process (presented in the context of the wider aims of the project).

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3 No interviews were undertaken with Level 6 HE students. Potential respondents were approached but no level 6 students agreed to take part in the research.
Educational and transitional processes: learning journeys of vocational learners

**Early transition Processes**: how and to what extent do transitions from FE to HE happen?

**Transitional Journey**: what do the educational processes and learning experiences look like?

**Outcomes**: where does the learning journey lead to?

**Transitional Issues**: How can the transitional processes be improved?
4.3 Sampling and coding frame

In order to select potential respondents for the HE student interviews, the Planning Office at University of Westminster generated a coding frame of 'highest qualifications' of entrants (see Appendix 4). From this, the following 'non-traditional' (i.e. non A-level) entry routes were selected as 'vocational learners':

- ONC or OND (incl BTEC & SCOTVEC equivalents)
- Access course (QAA recognised)
- HNC or HND (incl BTEC & SCOTVEC equiv)
- Access course (not QAA recognised)
- Diploma HE
- GNVQ/GSVQ level 5 & NVQ/SVQ level 5
- NVQ/SVQ level 4
- GNVQ/GSVQ level 4

It was decided from the outset to exclude foundation degrees on the basis that this entry route would require a separate piece of research.

In order to generate a research population, the entry route coding frame was mapped against student records for current students and graduates. Potential respondents were contacted initially by email and then by follow-up phone call.

In order to select FE students for interviews, access to a FE college in London was negotiated via the college’s careers service. A focus group was advertised to students via posters and tutors. The Project Leader visited the college for a preliminary visit and then approached students at random on the college campus. Students were asked if they confirmed to certain criteria (i.e. wanting to attend University, year of study, course, and willingness to take part in a focus group).

4.4 Interview analysis

The interview guides can be found in Appendices 2 to 4. Pilot interviews took place for current HE students and graduates, after which the interview guides were revised based on feedback from pilot interviewees.

The interview data was analysed using the following scheme:

1. The interview data was imported into NVivo 8 (qualitative analysis software)
2. The interview responses were coded to relevant question node
3. The nodes were reviewed to establish an understanding of dataset as whole
4. Thematic (secondary) coding of the data
5. Review and analysis of the secondary coding from tree and constructed text for summary report
6. The interview data was analysed for by hand extra validity using the NVivo coding

4.5 Statistical analysis

Two areas related to vocational learner performance were analysed in a quantitative manner:

1. Graduate employment destinations

Analysis was undertaken of vocational learner performance in the graduate labour market using the results from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education 2007/8 for University of Westminster. Access to this data was available via CaSE. The data was analysed in an aggregate manner across the University's graduate cohort from the periods 1 August 2007 to 31 December 2007 and 14 April to 28 April 2008. This data was supported by analysis of entrants from the University’s Associate Colleges (used for reference purposes).
2. Vocational learner progression

In order to undertake analysis of vocational learner progression in HE, three reports were commissioned by the project team from the Planning Office at University of Westminster between December 2008 and September 2009. These were undertaken by Francis Nugent (Information Analyst, Planning Office) and covered the following areas in relation to vocational learner/FE entrants:

i. Overview: FE/Associate college entry profile; progression; achievement; time taken to qualify (24 December 2008)
ii. Progression, withdrawal and achievement – levels 4 to 6 (19 August 2009)
iii. Progression, withdrawal and achievement – new entrants (level 4) (3 September 2009)

Please note that this part of the research project is not included in this version of the report. A longer version of the report containing the statistical analysis is available from the Project Leader.
5. Findings part 1: Interviews

5.1 FE Students

This section presents the findings from the focus group data collected from FE students. All of these students were considering applying for entry to HE.

Motivations for applying to HE

When asked about their motivations for wanting to enter HE, the students highlighted career aspirations as the most significant factor. The opportunity to improve their career prospects and earn a ‘good’ salary were particularly significant for the younger students. As one student put it: ‘It gives you more job opportunities and have a chance to earn a good salary. Another noted that he was ‘doing economics so I hope to run and have my own company’.

For older students, progressing to HE from FE represents an opportunity to change career direction:

If you’re a mature student, and your kids are now at school and after clubs and things like that it gives you more opportunities to change career…I decided to change my career completely and go into something else.

I was working in an office and I was looking around, I did it for four years, my God if everyday was as bad as when I had to go to that office and the day was long and I was tired. I looked at the computer and looked at the walls and I don’t know what’s wrong, the people said probably that’s not you, you’re not that kind of person.

There was also a strong sense of educational and career success being about more than improved income. Several of the students referred to progression to HE as enabling them to become a role model to family members and peers. In this sense, educational success at HE level is a very personal aim. This is intertwined with a desire to contribute to society in a broader citizenship sense:

It’s important to me because I have children and I want them to follow in my footsteps. So if I’m at the age that I am at and I am prepared to go and better my self then I want them to see for themselves that things don’t just come easy, you have to work at something. It has taken me God knows how long to get to where I am and I’m still determined, at the end of this I am going to get what I want, to make the future a bit better for them and vice versa. But I really do want a career in nursing, and I want to do whatever it takes, work hard and get that now.

Basically having a better future for yourself. Trying to be a better person and trying to have a better future for yourself different from what you had growing up. Because some of us didn’t have a good background when we were growing up. You’re working towards giving your children a better future. A better background…so if you get a career and you’re feeling positive and you’re going forward…so it’s going to be good, so then your children look up to you and say ok my mum was able to do it despite the way she grew up. Or my dad can do it, you know.

I do feel like a career gives you stability. That’s the way I see it. And I agree with what Christine said. This would be like a positive role model in the society, and like especially at our age to be honest. I am a mother, and I also have teenage children. You look at them and you think they are messing with their futures, they are not interested. So are you going to look at me and are you listening? I don’t want them to think oh what is she doing? To think, I can do it. So to give something back to the society and just be a positive role model, I think.

My father didn’t have the chance to finish studying because he came from Africa to Europe and it was difficult for them. And they are doing everything they can to push me and my sister to finish our studies so I want to succeed to pay my father back for all the things they have done for me and for my sister.
For these FE students, HE also represents a site of ‘higher’ learning. FE is seen as part of a progression in which HE is the ‘next step’ to achieving a higher level of personal development and knowledge:

I would like to develop my own skills and to have more knowledge.

Well for me basically just to further your knowledge about things. Going to college is just like the basic stage so you want to move up into what areas you want to go to, so university as they say is higher, for more knowledge and to go deeper into the subject itself, the areas that you want to go to. So when you go for work you know more about what you’re doing.

Yes I see it [HE] as a stepping stone.

For some, this sense of progression has a specific career-related component:

Thinking of skills, I think sometimes with some students they fail on that because they say I want to be a lawyer and I don’t have any people skills which I need to be a good lawyer. I do have the skills for the career path that I want to go to yes, but its very important that people connect their skills with what they want to do, they can’t just say that they want to be a lawyer because it’s a lot of money or I want to do this because it will give me a chance to travel to many countries, no. The students have to work out if they have the skills for that.

I mean if you’re doing something you don’t expect to stay there; you expect to grow, go up and learn from people around you and their experiences because hopefully at the end of it you will be much better qualified. If you want to stay at the same level but if you want to gain more skills and try something different and gain more skills and try something different then you want to move around.

I think for more knowledge, with what course you want to do at university. And I think I want to be a criminologist, so if I go to university I can get more knowledge about criminology.

The link between HE and career was also evident in one student’s view that HE offers an opportunity to develop work experience:

I can say that when I get into university I’m looking forward to going on a placement, because we will be put in a clinical placement in a hospital so I’m really looking forward to that…because it’s going to teach me about, I mean I have worked all over but I’m working at the same time. I mean I could do voluntary work now, but there are only seven days in a week I don’t want to push myself, being at college four days, doing voluntary work two days and then be at home studying just one day, so I don’t know, it’s about balance.

In addition to enhancing career prospects, the idea of personal development is central to motivations to enter HE. As one student put it, ‘I am going to university to be empowered’. Other similar comments included:

And when I finish, in three or four years time, I will be the one who will be teaching someone else, and that is where there is the big excitement. In three years I will be done and will be in position to help others.

…to be proud of yourself.

I am looking for more. Even if I have, for me I would always like more and more, I would learn to have more. Even if someone told me that my skills were perfect I would like to learn more.

I think everyday we learn something and we need to keep learning more. I think I’m good and I can do it but I think I need more.
I think that as long as you can communicate and you’re open minded and are confident with different people of different ages, nationalities, race.

For me I would like, I would love [to go to Uni], this is like a dream.

The focus group data from FE students clearly demonstrates that learners actively reflect upon the purpose of entering what they consider to be a higher form of education. The data also shows that motivations for entering HE are multi-faceted but are primarily centred upon ideas of ‘career’ and personal development.

**Perceptions of HE**

The students identified a number of anticipated differences between FE and HE. The general expectation was that HE would be a very different experience to FE:

The atmosphere in university is completely different to that in college.

I think it would be different from college…I think it would be very different because it is not the same life that you have in college.

At university I think there will be more mature people, older people, and in the college there are a lot of youngsters, a bit rowdy and things…I’ve left my kids at school and I come here and it’s like there are kids, its like going from one noise to another noise, I find it a bit hard to concentrate, especially in the library and you’re trying to work and they’re around you and they’re noisy and their phones are going. It’s a bit disrespectful really because everyone knows what the library is there for. And a couple of times the staff have had to tell them time and time again to keep it down, turn their phones off, and its like a bit immature, there are a lot of immature people here and I think at university it is going to be a lot tougher.

The style of learning in HE was also expected to be significantly different to methods of learning in FE. Generally, students expected the level of education to be higher and the style of teaching/studying to be more challenging. Comments included:

Even the lessons are different, there are no handouts, and you actually have to follow what the lecturer is saying. You have to be always present and paying attention as well.

I think it will be difficult because you don’t know what you have to write when the teacher begins to talk, you don’t know what’s important because here they just write everything on the board, so we have to collect the important things.

The teachers don’t write on the board because there is no board there is just the teacher standing there not talking and you just write. It’s very different because when I was in younger it was this is different because they just spend all day writing on the board and the fact that the people stand up and just say you have to write, to take the good points from that, it is very different from that, you don’t have to write everything.

So how’s it going to be in uni? It has different things in it, so that’s what I think. No, we have to go and find out about the business and the different types of businesses, so that is too much for us, for people who come from our level. So if you go to access or Uni how is it going to be? First of all we need someone to talk, a teacher or anyone from a university to say what we need to develop or what we need to pay attention for so we will be ready for next year.

There is a different pace [in HE].

I think in higher education we will be reading like mad.

The students also expected HE to engender a more advanced level of personal progression and development in which independent study would be paramount:
At university you are independent, it is up to you if you attend, the teachers don’t follow you up like they do in college, in college if you don’t come in for three days or four days they call you up to and ask you why you’re not coming into college. At university it’s not like that, if you’re not there you’re not there; it’s up to you as a person to take that responsibility.

So if you want to do something, you have to develop yourself.

Sources and evaluation of IAG

When asked about sources of information, advice and guidance relating to HE the students identified informal sources such as family and friends as important, although this was largely to reaffirm existing ideas:

I’ve been to stuff like open days and talking to people outside, like families and that. At home. I’ve told my family that this is what I want to do so for the next three years please be patient, because I need to do it but three years is a long time, and you want to achieve things at the end of it.

For me as well I was more like asking people to think what abilities I have. I know my abilities but I needed confirmation from the people who all said that you should do this career, you should do this career, and finally I have to speak to my sister. People who I have spoken to about what I think and they say oh yes it is good. Seventy per cent of it, you know, who already have it, like your interpersonal skills. And then to apply that, it’s not going to be much struggle.

In relation to IAG services in FE college, the students were critical of a perceived lack of early advice:

Like what we’re doing is level 2, but how many years will we have to wait until we can go to university? Can we go straight off into university after this level or do we need to do another level in order to qualify for us to go to university?

Can we go straight from this? We need to talk about this to be honest. I mean I did ask our tutor but she said it was too early to speak about this. But I’m thinking to be honest after this year what I’m going to do is access university I don’t understand…they never do care about when we finish this level what can we do, university or no, because some of them say this is your individual progress. You can do this, you can do that, but it is clear that we have to do two years for this level. They don’t give any more information about what we have to do.

…the head tutor says what are you going to do next year. I did ask her first before I did enroll but she said it’s too early to be talking about it lets see how you do this year. But if every tutor is going to say the same thing to me every year then it would be a waste of time. Because I’m pre-entry now so I need to go as soon as I need access. Not spending whole years in the College.

Subsequently, the students were generally keen to receive more advice on career development and educational progress:

I’ve been with this college, this is my third year and I think that one of the problems in the college is not looking at. We are here, we are here at the door and information is given to us at the last minute. I just think that the more time, the more areas would be better. We have to do a group and they still don’t know what you want to do or what pathway they want to follow. By March 20th we have to come up with something, and can you see yourself in that situation? We feel lost, we feel frustrated at the same time. So the areas of information need to be better and a greater time to prepare and to decide.

They [friends] say to me what are you doing? I say business then they say what is your future career? I say I don’t know. Until now no one’s talked to me about career future,
about salaries and what I can do with this subject, and what I can do as a job. No one has spoken to me about this.

The perceived lack of information was identified as problematic by several students:

I think I need more information about what courses I need to do because I've got some friends, they want to go to Oxford to do university but when they say to the personal tutor he says no, they can't do it because they have been in this country for one year, your English is no good, you need to stay in the country for more than four or five years.

You feel lost, you can't do anything. And then you get confused.

I’m happy with my course but I’m not happy with the information there because I feel like I don’t know anything, if someone asks me what am I doing next year I don’t know if I can now access university or I don’t know if I can do it or not. But I’m ready to learn. I’m not giving up on it.

More generally, the students referred to a desire for more basic skills development (with particular emphasis on language skills). This was seen to be integral to progressing to a higher level of learning. Comments included:

…obviously I am English but I think that with other people where English is their second language I think they need more support, I think that maybe because they're not speaking up or there’s no one letting them know that you can go here or you can go there. They may be interested in extra maths or something. So I think that the College needs to be pushing that a bit more.

Yes and another thing in this college is, I wouldn’t say it was discrimination but if your first language is not English then they take you in another way. For me English is my first language it has been my whole life, but when I come in they say no, English is not your first language. Basically you can’t go on the course because English is not your first language.

But as long as you get there the amount of work the pressure can get so much that you end up leaving the course. Therefore it is very important for you to have the information that yes I can do it. I have two people in my class that, they can speak English but they are not ok writing, you know, prepared to go to university do you understand what I'm saying? So if you go, you might end up going because actually the universities are looking for clients but you're not going to perform well you’re not going to succeed.

In relation to improving FE/HE links, the students were very keen to receive more information about HE. They also referred to a desire to hear directly from HE staff and students in a face to face manner:

I would need to see the [HE] tutor. I think that would be really useful.

I think actually what people from universities what they need to do I mean you are here today. That would be a good thing, they need to do it more regular, so that you come into the colleges and promote yourself

Come and talk to us, sell yourselves.

You should come and sell yourselves to us and show us why you think we should come.

…that’s one of the reasons why we would like universities to come and tell what makes that place different from college and tell people what they can expect and what they will be expecting from them so people can start preparing for it at this stage.
5.2 HE students

This section presents the findings from the interview data collected from current HE students who have entered university from a FE background.

Motivations for entering HE

The majority of interviewees were attending university in order to pursue their career aspirations. One student referred to the desire to ‘get a good job’, whilst another had entered HE for ‘better opportunities for a job in future’. Other comments included:

I actually thought that if somebody has a degree they have a better chance of getting a job than somebody who hasn’t been to university.

For the career and job. I wanted to carry on and get a degree for my future career prospects.

If you don’t have a degree it is difficult to get a job and it puts you on equal terms with a lot of people, so these days it is much more important to have a degree.

For many students, this aspiration was linked to professional development and career direction:

[To] get that extra edge in employment because if you have a degree you may get a better opportunity for a job in the future.

[HE] was the first step.

To further my education and career.

If you go to university it opens doors.

I wanted more for my working life and I felt that I was capable of more.

…for development of your skills and to get a good job you need to go to university

…at the end of the 3rd year I should be really prepared for my career.

I decided I wanted to increase my prospects a bit further than just working and to be able to broaden my horizons and gain a degree.

…and to get to where I wanted to be in the future I had to have a degree.

For some, entering HE was part of a ‘life plan’ based on educational progression and personal development:

Always planned to go to Uni

I have always wanted to come even when I was in college and before I went to college. It has always been my plan.

I’ve always wanted to go to university it wasn’t like someone had to convince me that it was important, I always had it in mind.

…and to get further knowledge and get more of the atmosphere of learning in a bigger environment.

Being the first member of their family to go to university was important for some students. As one put it:

I was the first person in my family to actually want to go to university and that inspired me a lot because I wanted to make it and be that person to get to university
For others, entering HE was more of a family ‘norm’:

Both my parents went to university so that was norm for me to definitely have that in mind.

Everyone in my family and my parents had been to university and it was expected of me.

The ability to be a role model to family members had been important to some interviewees:

…it is an example you give to your child to keep going.

My family were very pleased for me and I think they had faith that I was doing something that was going to make me very happy.

Interestingly only one student stated that they had entered HE to ‘make friends’. These vocational learners were generally focused on career development and progression as a motivation for entering HE.

Sources of IAG

Advice about attending university came from a variety of sources including careers officers at college; work; friends; parents and college tutors. There was no evidence of one dominant source of information. However, the vast majority of interviewees said that they felt supported by family and friends about their decision to go to university:

My friends and the people that I worked with were all very supportive and encouraging.

…my mum said whatever I wanted to do, she would back me all the way.

My parents were also supportive.

Similarly, tutors and progression staff at college were generally identified as a positive influence. The value of pre-entry support/advice was highlighted by this comment:

Everybody was 100% and optimistic about it just trying to be as helpful as they could and encouraging.

Choice of HEI was overwhelmingly based on university location, as most students lived in and around London:

I can travel to the university on one bus which takes 35 to 40 minutes…one reason was that it was closer to me I wanted to stay at home and I wanted to go to university from home.

I chose this University first and foremost because of residence as it is not too far from my house and I live at home. The thing I had the choice of two universities to go to, one was Brunel but it was too far for me to travel and I couldn’t go there so decided to come to Westminster.

I only live about 35 to 40 minutes from the University.

[University was] quite close to home also, only 2 hours on the train or 1½ hours to drive, meaning I could live at home

…it was convenient for me to stay at home.

I looked at all the universities and I have a little girl and I didn’t want to go too far as obviously I need the support network that is here…my journey to university takes just under an hour.
I was offered other places but this university is really close to my house, my brother went there and it was convenient and I am still able to live at home.

Having pre-existing friends at university was also important for some:

I also knew old students from there who gave a good account of the university.

My friends played the main role...some of my friends who I was on the same course with knew people who had gone to Westminster and so they knew about the uni and they told me it was good and everything was okay,

I had a few friends who were already at Westminster and we meet up regularly and one or two of them were already at Westminster and they gave a few good reports.

The interviews also demonstrated that multiple factors can influence choice of university and the decision to enter HE:

Apart from parents, my tutors at college gave general advice and we had a careers advice service at college also which was excellent, I also went to open days at universities and it was generally going onto websites to find out what the courses were about, attending the open days and talking to my careers advisor, everyone was really helpful.

For one student, the university was seen to be welcoming to mature students:

I had brochures from this university and I think I looked on their website and I liked the look of it from that and I think there was a lot of stuff about becoming a student so it was quite relevant to me about making the transition and they cater very well for mature students and there was a lot of information in respect of that. With some universities you get the feeling that everybody is 18 but with this university it was very nice to find that there was a lot of information about mature students and I got the feeling that there was more of them there and that they had given it some thought as well.

Several students also visited the University and were impressed with it:

I knew straight away because it had a different atmosphere and it had what I call the London attitude – it was much more open minded, multi cultural and they had really thought about everything from the students point of view, what it must be like coming in, everything was organised and it just really impressed me.

I liked the look of the university when I came to the interview and had a look around

Despite the emphasise on career trajectory in relation to motivations to enter HE, only a minority of interviewees identified choice of course as a reason for choosing a specific university.

Teaching, learning and assessment experiences

The majority of students interviewed found HE, at least initially, more difficult than FE. While there were a variety of individual reasons expressed as to why they found it more difficult, overall it seemed that the demand from university for more independent working is the most significant adjustment. The workload required by the transition to a more independent form of learning was particularly challenging:

It was very intense…I was doubtful that I would be able to do it, but you just had to plan your work

The biggest challenge I think has been pressure, so much pressure at university. If you cannot cope under pressure then it becomes hard for you.
It has been pretty demanding... it is a pretty demanding course because the amount of work you get for the first few months it was just one subject and then another three were brought in so it was four subjects to do during the week and a different subject every day, so it was trying to get that done for the next week and it was very demanding.

One Access entrant found the degree less difficult than expected:

I think the Access course was more intense because everything was put into one year. I think this year it wasn’t as intense as we were told, it wasn’t that bad.

Nonetheless, the issue of ‘independent learning’ was highlighted by numerous students as the most challenging aspect of the HE style of learning. These quotes demonstrate the impact of this upon FE entrants:

I would say independent learning is huge, they tell us that this is what university is all about. You are completely responsible for finding things out and understanding and if you don’t understand it is up to you to go and find someone who can help you.

Adjusting from daily tutor involvement with assignments in FE and detailed feedback to very little tutor guidance and support with coursework at university was difficult for some students. One student said that this was quite stressful and he ‘felt like quitting at times’.

It was quite difficult and stressful at the beginning knowing that just to do a lot of course work for different modules and I was thinking of how I could manage to do all the course work and sometimes you actually feel that you are not able to and you feel like quitting uni at times. As time went by I saw that you had to put a lot more effort in than at college and that teachers are not going to chase you about your course work, so it is just a matter of putting in that extra effort, reading books and learning as much as you can about the course. You can go to lectures and double tutorials and join with other classes and you can get your friends to help you if you don’t understand things.

At university it is more pushy and you have to know and you have to learn.

…you learn because of yourself not from your teachers or anyone else. It is much more student led.

It’s the transition from being spoon fed to having to do your own research and self motivate yourself and no-one is going to remind you to do things.

There is so much to be done on your own, so many things that you have to find out, so many new things that you need to adjust to in terms of the depth of research that is required of you, there is a lot more that needs to be done in the standard of work and it is very difficult to adjust to when you have come from somewhere that is telling you what to do and how to do it. The lecturer at uni just gives you a brief but you don’t know what style he wants so it is quite difficult.

At college you just basically brought in first draft, second draft and the teacher would bother to look at it a few times until you actually got it right but obviously at university you can’t do that because the tutor can’t do that for 200 or 300 students, so it is just a one off mark.

The workload and the course work and the learning ways, the way they teach you at university compared to college, it was hard to handle and at times a bit difficult to get used to it.

I had to learn what was expected and what was needed and why we were doing it, in my mind I thought you had to say what you thought the tutor wanted to hear and it wasn’t that at all, it was about the value of ideas etc,

It is demanding because there is a lot of research you have to do and when it comes to the analysis – a whole lot and some of the text books you read you sometimes don’t
understand because of the big words and you have to be able to present your thoughts precisely and you have to check your grammar etc because they will reduce your marks.

...some of the tutorial or courses that we do, no one checks it whether you are going the right path or you try doing it at all. When you go for seminars the lecturers or the tutors are not strict about whether we did the seminar works or not. The course work we have to submit so if you don’t do it, it will go against you but the seminar work they give you like research or reading and the work that will prepare us for the tutorials, they don’t really check on it and they are not really strict about it. Some people do it and some don’t so when it comes to tutorials some don’t participate and are sent out of the class. So you are finding the fact that they don’t check up on it and there is no reprimand if you don’t do it you find that tricky.

There is a lot of written work over here. Apart from that the lectures are longer, usually one lecture covers a lot of material and you have to do a lot of reading outside the lectures as well whereas when I was at college you would get handouts ready for us with things highlighted showing what you would need to read this particular paragraph very important and will come up in the exam. So in that way it was much more guided where as here you do what you want. If you pass that’s fine if you don’t you are going to have to deal with it. So again it’s good in a way especially as you do have to read a lot anyway.

I can think of one person who found it really hard to get some help from our professors and she has been literally chasing people. And even if she asks them direct questions which, fair enough, it’s not the best way to learn as obviously you have to read a lot but especially when it comes to statistics. She struggles basically and there is a particular professor as well and every time she asks him a question he never gives a straight answer he also says something like read up on it but when it comes to statistics especially you have to have someone sit you down and talk you through it, so she has been complaining a lot since she started and she is in the second year as well so it is really hard for her.

I think it was because in college you can talk straight away to the teachers. In university you can’t do that kind of thing so you have to go through a lot of things to get something like that. If I had problems at home and couldn’t make it to an exam when I was at college it was arranged to do another time but at university you have to have mitigating circumstances and take proof and that bit is very stressful.

Some people struggle and when you ask someone [i.e. a lecturer] a question, they refuse to answer. It is very pressuring.

If I ask a question they [lecturers] will answer it but they don’t volunteer any information.

I was in contact for most of the year with the person who was marking my work and she kept telling me to go to see her, so I would go but she wouldn’t be in her office or she would e-mail to say that she was not in today and so I never actually got to meet her so never had explained to me what I had to do. It left me a bit in limbo and unsure of what I was doing and I really had no idea, it did stress me somewhat because I really want to come back next year, I would like to carry on.

Interestingly, several interviewees found this challenge of adjusting to independent learning as a positive aspect of entering HE. For these students, HE was a higher level of learning that represented a progression from FE in a way that they had anticipated:

Biggest challenge: Obviously trying to be independent and trying to work out what I am still doing wrong rather than being told this is what you got wrong and this is how you do it. In that sense yes, that was a challenge for me but then again I do enjoy my freedom in that sense and I do like to experiment and see what I can get for my work and how can I improve it.
I think it has been better in a way because the tutors on my Access course I only saw once a week, whereas there is more of a community at Westminster and they do make it very clear everything that is available to you.

I prefer university however. College gave me the basic foundation that I needed but it didn't challenge me, it just gave you the opportunity to get where you want, which is a good thing.

**Assessment**

In relation to assessment in HE, the majority of interviewees said that it was qualitatively different to assessment in FE. Several interviewees said that the courses they completed at FE were assessed through one hundred percent coursework, and that they therefore felt unprepared for the examinations they were required to take at HE.

…there is a really big one [difference in learning styles] because with this one when you do any work you have to find evidence to support it and the type of research or the way you have to put your report or course work, the wording of it is a bit higher so that is more demanding because there is a lot of reading and research you have to do and you have to come up with a whole lot of different ideas or research.

The course work can be very demanding compared to what we had to do in college and it takes a lot of getting used to.

…it [HE assessment] is more research based, the essays in college didn’t really require much research it was just more knowledge but at uni it is more actually going out there and go right in depth on the subject that they have given you.

It was very lax in college, you have your own individual project or team work but the level of research you have to do is minimal, you are not expected to go in depth or provide references etc. It is in depth at university and plagiarism comes up so much, whereas at college it was hardly there and hardly mentioned but at university you have to reference every single thing that you put in.

The general work wasn’t as difficult as I expected, but the assignments were a lot more difficult than expected.

…the differences are the mock exams because we didn’t get to do any mock exams and the one we did do was informal and no-one checked. So it was just the course work and the exams at the end of the year at Westminster which I don’t think is sufficient because the course work is just around the area you have been given for instance we did a whole lot of topics on contracts but the course work we were given was only on the first part which was the offer and acceptance and you don’t get assessed on some parts.

…you can get three pieces of course work that need to be handed in at the same time or same period and you have to deal with that but at college they give you pieces of course work but then you don’t need to hand them in at the same time and if you can’t hand them in at the same time you can go to your tutor and explain that you are unable to hand it in but will hand it in, in two weeks and they will accept this which is a different case here, if you haven’t handed it in then it is your problem.

In college it was mostly practically based, we had to write about what we had just done, so if I did a 3 minute speech on shopping then I would have to write how I put the piece together, how I thought it went, who it was aimed at etc. At university it is nothing like that, my practical work is all done and then I give them a script and then my essay will be on something completely different.

At college once you were given the course work, the teacher would sit down with you and go through it with you, look at draft work and go through it straight away and give you feedback and then you would re-do it, whereas in uni it is nothing like that, it is just the one time, you do it and you hand it in, whether you fail or pass.
I did need extra support with the first two assessments because they told me that the writing style wasn’t correct and we had been taught a different style of referencing, so it was hard to change and difficult to put into practice, that was the only thing I found hard.

The prevalence of exams was especially significant to a number of interviewees:

College was different because it was 100% coursework. We had no exams which I think is a shame because it would have helped just because when I did my first exam last year I hadn’t done them since I was 18 for my A levels.

…the difference might be when it comes to exams, we don’t have so many exams in the first year, we had one or two exams and then in the second year you have about six exams, that’s when some people might find it a bit challenging or a bit harder.

When you come to university it is a two way thing, you do exams and you do course work but just because in the first year you concentrate on exams only, which is what I was doing with my BTEC so it wasn’t that challenging, probably it gets challenging in your second year when you start doing both exams and course work.

I like that way of learning because they make you practice on things that you will have exams on at the end of the year.

Generally speaking, the interviewees found the assessment in HE to be a major challenge, at least initially:

It was basically the course work I was finding difficult because it was as simple as just handing out the course work to you and it was just a case of getting used to it because in college in wasn’t the same. So at uni there was no explanation. here were lectures at times but there wasn’t too much detail about how you should do the course work, they would give you handouts, you would go to lectures and talk about the module and what you need to do but there wasn’t help once you were given the course work. A lot of people struggled.

I think it is a bit harder for me on the serious side because I am not used to doing essays of 3000 words because I didn’t have that at college, so I struggle a bit with that and I find it a bit difficult.

All of our units in college were pretty much course work. I had I think two exams in college so everything was course work where you handed it in and they would push back the data bit and you could hand it in again later and then you could get it graded and they would give you a second chance for you to clean it up and bring it back. In university to be fair a lot of our assessment is course work but it is a lot more demanding and we also have exams

I do have issues regarding writing the long theory based essays and really struggle.

…which is something I find a bit difficult because when they say we need this from you, I end up going into what I did at college and my lecturer will say that it is completely irrelevant and they don’t need any of that so it is hard that way because I have to try to differentiate as to what they want.

The marks were low and obviously our assignments, according to some of the tutors, weren’t actually written properly, but we didn’t really get enough guidance beforehand.

The learning style in terms of assessment; in college you would give in work and have it marked and then it would be given back to you for you to make it better but in university once it is done, it is done and it counts towards your final grades at the end of it.
I don’t feel that they were spread out enough, we had a few at Christmas which was a couple of weeks after we started that subject and I felt that we didn’t actually have enough time to take that subject in before we were hit with an assignment.

The assignments were mainly essay based, we were given a problem question on which we hadn’t really had much guidance in how to answer a problem question, we hadn’t really had to deal with that in college so it was the first time a lot of us had encountered a problem questions and there wasn’t any guidance from anybody on how you answered it and how you go about it and the question was a really long one and a lot of us did find it hard.

They [assessment] were different at college. We had some which were just essay based and some were role play, where we had fake court, so they were better because everyone learns in different ways and doing it that way it builds up your confidence when you have to speak in front of a class and you put your case forward. But with uni it really is just essay based or the assessments. At college it was more practical.

What we did in college, compared to what we do at university is a big difference. When I was at college I was quite happy with what I was doing, I didn’t find anything challenging or demanding, it was just meeting deadlines and deadlines could always be pushed back a bit whereas at university you have to meet your deadlines and you have to do certain things and your work has to be up to standard.

The first term was quite hard and then you get used to it but it is the initial stages when you first go in and you have your first deadlines and nobody is there to remind you. It is a little more difficult than I thought it would be.

On a general level, a number of students referred to HE as being a more ‘strict’ learning environment than FE:

I think it [HE] is more strict in terms of criteria and the grades.

At college you can always say to the teacher that you will give the work in later.

College was not as strict.

However, there was a sizable minority who found the HE form of assessment to be a ‘better’ form of assessment, particularly in relation to skills development. This perhaps reflects the desire for a ‘higher ‘ form of learning evident amongst some FE entrants:

I think the coursework at Access was more mechanical, you didn’t really have to think too much you just had to make sure you had included the right things whereas I think at uni it is more about going away and finding evidence to support your points.

The assessments at Westminster have been quite varied, there has been written assessments and there has been presentations and group work and obviously exams as well so it has been varied which I think is fairer because every type of student finds a certain type of assessment easier than others so from that point of view it has been better.

At college it was mainly long assignments so it is quite different and I believe the way you do it at university you learn much more.

There is a definitely a difference, they are stricter which is good and the deadlines are more definite than at college.

Similarly, some students found the transition to HE to be a natural progression:

It was because the course that I did was all about course work and if you haven’t done course work in your FE and you go to university there is so much course work that you get and it puts people under pressure a lot so if you can’t deal with that it becomes a
big challenge but because I did the same kind of thing, it wasn't that hard because I knew what to do, I knew how to handle things like course work.

I have coped pretty well because at college I had to do a lot of presentations and reports as well so they knew what was coming and prepared us.

…all the work is similar but just a little bit harder because obviously I am not at college any more, I am at university so it is a little more difficult but I feel that I am just carrying on from where I left off.

Contact with teaching staff

A major difference between FE and HE identified by a large number of students was the different type of relationship to lecturers and tutors. It was generally felt that academic staff in HE were far more difficult to access compared to FE. This was raised as a significant issue by almost all of the students:

The difference is that with the college it is just a small group of people and everyone in the room knows the lecturer and the lecturer knows everyone but with the university there is a lot of students on the course and the lecturers do not know us personally and all they can do is just give us their office time and room number so that when you need them you can have a talk with them at that time on a one to one basis so I think it is alright.

It is totally different to college because in college the classes were smaller and the teacher gives you more attention.

At college my tutor was my teacher so I could see her every week and she was available all the time. In university you see your tutor once a month or every 15 days, something like that, for an hour talking about things but if you need any help you can send a message and book an appointment but to be honest I wasn’t very happy because every single question we asked, he didn’t know because although he works with the course I think he is a teacher of the 3rd year. We had a tutor but at the same time we didn’t.

At university, the teachers don’t know you and there could be 300 students in the class so you have to do things for yourself.

In college they give you details and the teacher sits down with a few students and you can see your progress, where you are stronger or weaker but at university the teacher is going to be teaching the whole class, there are no special requirements for any students because they don’t have time for that as they are teaching 200 students and he can’t know who needs help.

In college the teacher wants to talk to you or wants to meet up with you and you get a tutorial once a week but in university I rarely get a chance to talk to the tutor and at times it can be difficult when you need support for course work and it is actually very hard to reach them because they are only available certain days or times so it is difficult, so the transition is hard knowing that there is not that one teacher who can talk to you and support you.

I was hoping you would get more chances to talk to the tutors but it is not like that, it was more open, just based on your knowledge and everything and you learn as you go along.

It is hard to see tutors because a lot of the times that they are free and you would be able to see them would be during the time you would have a lecture, or it would be after hours so if you have children, with no child care it is hard to get them and get back and I don’t feel there is enough

Access to tutors is not that easy [in HE]. You can spend a whole semester here without seeing a tutor. It is so different at college. You could see a tutor every day any time
you wanted to as long as they were not busy. They were so accessible…you get feedback when you have done course work if you want it but if not you can just go without getting it.

To be honest with you I don’t have a personal tutor which I am supposed to have but I think that part is very disorganised. I think I have only heard of two or three people being in touch with their tutors so basically compared to my college it is very anonymous.

It is one of the main differences [between FE and HE]. Like you may get a piece of course work and you don’t understand anything but you ask your tutor and they say they are not supposed to help you so you have to work it out for yourself, that is the biggest difference that is here.

[At college] my groups were obviously much smaller than here. Every lecturer knew what problems I was having and knew what my strengths were so obviously that was helpful because I felt a bit more comfortable with other people whereas over here you just hand in your work and get it back and that’s it.

…in terms of actually knocking on their door and talking to people it’s really hard because everyone seems to be busy very at all times. If anything I just e-mail people. There is no such thing as a personal tutor.

It was different at college because we had a tutor lesson every week so you knew you could meet them and you could discuss things whereas the tutor now would be head of other departments as well and bigger things. The tutors have office hours but I haven’t taken that up much. You can e-mail them and set a date but I never did this.

I am quite an independent person anyway so I actually like it in a way but then again if I had a problem it’s pretty hard to get through to someone to get it sorted.

I got the support I needed by going back and they would tell us what we were doing wrong but it was trying to get the appointments with the tutors involved because they wouldn’t talk to you during the lesson, you would have to see them in their own office hours or make an appointment for after uni hours. I wasn’t able to do that because a lot of the times they were free I had a lecture or I had another seminar, so it was hard to decide what one to miss out on.

At college you could see your tutor pretty much any day, at specific times but any day Monday to Friday and at the end of the day for 30 minutes or an hour whereas at university it is quite difficult to get hold of your tutor in person and even if you e-mail them they are probably quite busy because you are not the only student that they have and probably not only that class because they may have a year 3 as well or a first year. You need to book slots with them and they only have a particular amount a week so it can be quite difficult, that is a downside when coming from college to university in terms of personal one to one.

In the beginning we went to see our tutor quite a lot but then after a while it just faded away and you didn’t need to see them as much as you did. It was quite daunting at the beginning to think that you didn’t have their help every day.

This transitional issue was identified as particularly difficult in relation to obtaining assessment feedback:

The feedback is not as much as at college. There will be some of course but you have to bear in mind the amount of students they are marking. Definitely there is less feedback but I have been able to move forward from the feedback.

Feedback at university by tutors is just by handing in your course work and then you get your mark, whether you pass or fail which is a bit difficult because we make mistakes and it would be best to give us feedback, just let us know what is necessary to pass.
...it [feedback] is written so you don’t see the tutor. At college you had to see the tutor, who would try to help and guide you or tell you what to do better or how to improve your work. Here it is not the same thing, you have to work out things for yourself, it is more independent.

I don’t think the tutors were as available as they were in college where we had a lot of feedback because we would have a certain amount at the end of our lessons, so if anybody had any questions we could go back and they would go through the essay. At uni they give feedback but a lot of it is pretty basic and it doesn’t really help us improve for the next assignment. It would say that you haven’t really gone into it enough and it wouldn’t give you a reason why or where you haven’t gone into it enough it is just basic so you have to keep reading it through to see where you have gone wrong, whereas they could point it out and that would allow you to put that in place for your next assignment, you wouldn’t make the same mistake again.

Learning styles

The style of learning in HE was generally seen as quite different to FE. Specifically, one to one contact or smaller group work was seen as more desirable or productive for vocational learners/FE entrants:

…the seminars are the main important fact. You have to attend the seminar because the seminars help you understand more of what was taught in the lectures, it is more interactive and you get more tutor time in the seminars.

I have heard of people going to the lectures but not the seminars which I think is a bad idea because it is the only time you are within a group of 15 to 20 people and you can ask questions and have someone sit in front of you and talk you through stuff.

I am the sort of person who learns better by listening to people and then I am able to remember a lot more of what is said. I had to do a learning styles questionnaire at the beginning of university and they said that I was the sort of person who enjoyed oral learning so I am better when someone is actually in front of me saying something. I prefer the people content rather than books.

I think I learn better when I am being spoken to and not reading from a computer screen. I quite enjoy the experience of being in a lecture room.

For some interviewees, large-scale lectures we re experienced as difficult for FE entrants:

…to be honest I found a lot of the lectures hard to cope with because they basically give out notes etc or they do a presentation and that presentation is already available on Blackboard so all they do is just read from the board and I am sure if I was at home I could read the presentation myself from the board and sometimes I find it difficult when I go in, so sometimes I just stay at home and read through the lectures because the lecture is on line and I don’t feel that going to the lecture added much to the notes. At the lectures, the lecturer just reads out the presentation, a lot of people try to ask questions and the lecturer just goes on with the presentation.

…a lot of times at the beginning you see a couple of hundred students but as time goes by you see just 30 or 40 students and they say there is no point in going to the lectures because if they are just reading from the presentation then so can we. If they would go into more detail, describe it and take questions then it would have been easier.

I think the only reason some people go to lectures is because they take the register.

Attendance

The majority of interviewees tried to attend all lectures and seminars. This was generally thought of as important in succeeding in their course:
I attend all lectures firstly because I want to, secondly because I think I may miss something.

I attend most lectures because they are important, if I am doing an essay on something and I miss the lecture, then I don’t have the information that I need and it will make it extremely difficult for me, more difficult than it already is to try to write an essay or do a presentation on that subject.

I didn’t need to attend all the lectures as I could get all the information but some lecturers give extra information.

I came because there is a better atmosphere rather than sitting at home and doing it.

I thought it was important to go to all [lectures] as I felt if you missed one lecture sometimes it can be very hard because it is quite fast paced as it is and if you missed one lecture there is not always the time to go back to that lecture.

…some of the tutors would read from the lecture and some will actually give their own notes and their own reasoning and if you miss that then you miss the whole point, I feel that is the reason why I felt I always had to be there.

In college there wasn’t really a need for lecture notes because everything was very brief and it wasn’t so in depth so you could easily understand what was happening and you could always go to a lecturer if you didn’t understand something.

I have never missed one because even though lecturers put up lecture notes they don’t say everything that’s on there in the lecture or vice versa so you are bound to miss something and that could be one of the most important things.

Level of commitment

A large number of interviewees identified a desire or need to ‘work hard’ in order to overcome the challenges of making the transition to HE. Generally, a high level of personal commitment was seen to be crucial to achieving success in HE. As one student put it, ‘I didn’t have much choice, I just had to adapt’. Similar comments included:

It was very demanding, it seemed to be very high level to me, and the workload was immense…. but I got through it and [it] felt good in the end

The whole of my first year has been a big challenge for me. I had to read books I had not read before that I don’t even understand but I have to try and make sense out of it.

The whole year has been a challenge because it has been a different way of learning.

…it is just a matter of you working hard towards what you want to achieve.

…it wasn’t impossible but it did take a bit of effort and work.

I realise now that I have gone through the first year you really have to be committed with the course and you are being provided with all the skills you need to survive on the course and I think I will get what I want from the degree.

The course is really demanding you have to work hard to succeed as a law student, I know about that but I don’t think the course work or the lectures are too much for us.

…it is a bit hard unless you are so, so clever because the people that don’t need to read they just go for the lectures they put everything in their heads then, they don’t need to go back and read so they just wait for the exam and do it. I’ve seen friends of mine that don’t need to read they just grasp everything.

I had to be in university for 3 days a week which doesn’t sound very much but when I am not at uni, I would start at 9 until 5 so I would treat it like a job and I use to study all day but I have worked quite hard on my degree.
I would say it has been challenging but it’s been challenging in a good way.

Everyone understands it is not the easiest thing to do but once you get into it and you get encouraged and motivated, it gets easier.

For a small number of interviewees, the transition during the first year of a degree was not as challenging as others experienced it:

The demands of the course, I think it depends on the personalities of people really because some people dropped out in the first year but I don’t think the first year is really challenging, it might be if you haven’t put your all into it but it is not all that challenging…I think I did find it easier than college, it was in much the same range.

I must say it was pretty easy. I felt pretty relaxed. It was easy to get a grade for me to pass the modules without having to worry about a 2.1. 2.2. or a first. Pretty relaxed and it went smooth.

I can’t really think of any challenges, it seems to have been a bit too easy for me

It was quite an easy transition, I didn’t actually find any problems.

Self-identity

When asked about issues of self-identity as vocational learners (as compared to A-level entrants), a large number of interviewees thought that there was demarcation between those students that came from an academic route and those that came from a vocational route:

…it does seem that they [A-level entrants] were taught differently as well. It seems they are more laid back because for them it is three years that they have had learn about the subject, whereas with the Access it is only one year to learn what they have in three years. I think we are more on our toes and they are a bit more laid back about things.

A level students, you can tell they did A levels because they seem brighter, they seem more into the game.

I believe it does affect the younger students, where some think they are smarter because they have done A-levels.

A-levels are more intense than for example a BTEC which is not so intense, so those students without A-levels have to work much harder.

I would say there is a difference in the needs of both students. I hang around with the girls who are straight out of A-levels and if we talk about it our experiences are very different.

…there was one tutor that said to us that it doesn’t matter what course you have done, we have to start from scratch at uni, it doesn’t matter whether you have done an access course or A-level, forget what we have learned before and start afresh. That did help.

…it is so difficult when you come from a route that is not A-levels because they know what they are doing. When you come from the FE route you are confused about what you are doing and what is happening and UCAS points and how to translate them, you get bogged down unless you have somebody telling you exactly what is going on. It is so important because at those stages you can get so overwhelmed and you don’t understand what is happening and where to get any help from. The Diploma and Access courses are a way to get to university but it can be tough at times.

One respondent identified social differences as significant:
…obviously factors like age, your background unfortunately as well in terms of your parents obviously it does affect your not abilities but how prepared you are for the university itself. Obviously there will be individual differences.

Age was also identified as a notable demarcation between vocational learners and traditional entrants:

I think there is [a demarcation between vocational and A-level students] because of the age difference. If you come from an Access course or a different type of education you will likely be older. Whereas A level students will be 19 or 20 so obviously they stick together.

I think the mature students have had more to cope with because I think the younger ones are more in the pace of education and it is all they have always known and I think for them they grasp the concepts and the technical stuff very quickly and that is something that mature students are usually not always aware of and it takes more of conscious effort to get to that stage. I always felt that the university was aware of that and I didn’t ever feel that I didn’t understand it and everyone else was rushing ahead, we were encouraged that we would get there in the end. I think the university handles it every well.

With the Access course everyone is over a certain age and the majority of us have been out of school for so long I think it is a bit harder when it comes to writing essays correctly because we were taught a different method of writing essays for Access course which is not applicable for the university course and we were given the essays back, saying that this was not really how you write an essay and I think I would have needed a lot more support.

if you are a mature student you have been out of school for so long, to go back to school and put your brain to work again takes a while.

There are two issues, the age and the amount of responsibilities that a mature student has which is totally different from an 18 year old, and the type of course. For example I don’t have chemistry whereas most of my friends have an A level in chemistry so I had to study much more than they did.

Another group of interviewees disagreed with this, believing there to be no demarcation between traditional and vocational students:

…it wasn’t obvious to me and the only demarcation is the fact that some people had been on the gear up to study course at the beginning but there doesn’t seem any demarcation to me.

I think it depends on the student, the university gives you the tools so you have to learn how to use them.

To be honest I don’t think so. I think the first year in university no matter what background, whether A-levels or BTEC etc, the sort of experience you get from college where everybody is going to be studying the same thing it is just a matter of time to get used to it. It doesn’t really matter. Some people who have taken A-levels have actually struggled with university life and it just depends on how much effort you put into university life, and you just have to get that extra edge. It just depends on how much you needed the opportunity to go to university, some people might take it for granted whereas some people find it a good opportunity to go to further education and it just depends on the individual and not your background.

Not that much to be honest because everyone seems to be getting on with the same thing, they are not treated any differently. Most people find it equally difficult or equally easy.

Interestingly, some respondents felt that vocational entry qualifications were more useful in some HE courses than traditional A-level entry routes:
I did feel fully prepared because most of the things we did in BTEC we are doing them now, we did them in the first year so I mean at least they talk about marketing you know what it means, and as for that you are credited compared to somebody that did A-levels, because they did A-levels in history etc. so they talk about something like business management and you know what they are talking about, that’s the good thing about it. It depends what course you have done in your FE. [Business Management student]

The course I did at college was pretty much the same so I didn’t feel that I needed any extra help and I think the A-level students were at more of a disadvantage than I was, because if they were doing A-level media, they were more or less doing the serious side of things they weren’t doing the practical side and my course at college was quite practical based. I think it was a bit easier for me.

Some of them [A-level students from traditional routes] do struggle.

Even people who did A-levels, some of them struggle.

This manifested itself in, for example, FE entrants being more focused in certain learning situations such as group work:

I think the group work is good and bad inasmuch as we are told we need to learn to work with other people but it can be frustrating when you work very hard with other people who are quite immature because of their age and they don’t contribute as much and you might all then get the same grade so you are faced with the situation where somebody lazy gets a grade they don’t really deserve or they bring the whole group mark down and I think from that point of view it is difficult. I understand why Westminster want us to work in groups and I think their reasons are perfectly sound but equally for the student it is very frustrating and it is not encouraging for you to work hard on a group project unless everybody else is in the same mindset. However they have said to us that this is life and you have deal with it, you get loafers in jobs and you have learn how to handle it. It is a sort of 50-50 situation but I suppose having the exposure to it is probably doing us good.

There was a few group works but at times I found the group work disappointing at uni because you are put in a group which you don’t get to choose, however if you get individuals who are not making an effort in a group, whereas in college the teacher understands who is making the effort, whereas at uni it is just seen as group work and it is not seen as who has made the effort or who has done all the work. I think college tutors are more aware of the effort because they just have 15 or 20 students and knows those who are working hard and those who are not serious about their work but at university the teachers do not actually go into detail of say 400 or 200 students and they don’t have the time to go into individual work and look at each person individually. I think it is just a bit harder and just a matter of trying to persuade your group members and pushing yourself at the same time.

Another interviewee felt that of one to one advice negated any differences between vocational learners and A-level entrants:

I don’t think so because there are individual differences and when I was coming I knew that if you don’t understand something you can have a one to one with someone so depending on your abilities etc you have got someone you can talk to about it, there is no way you can have difference sections for people on the same course so I don’t know how that would be. So you knew there was specific one to one tutor help if you needed it. Everyone has got their areas of strength or weakness. If you know you are weak somewhere you have to get someone to help you to see what can be done about it.

Furthermore, one interviewee felt that university was actually less demarcated than FE:
Not on my course. One student will have the knowledge on something that somebody else won’t and we can help each other out whereas I think at college where I did A-levels my first year and then a BTEC the second year, and I feel that the people who had just gone straight into a BTEC, sort of frowned upon me being a second year in their first year, because I had to do a second year. Everyone is a lot friendlier at university.

Progression and personal development

The interviews show that for the majority of students, HE is seen as a ‘higher’ form of learning which requires more commitment and effort than FE. Reflecting the comments about assessment, several respondents referred to HE as more challenging than FE:

….what have been the biggest challenges for you?
I think keeping on top of the workload because it was a part time thing for me on the Access Course whereas at uni it has been full time.

I think just getting your head around the actual day to day concept and putting it all together I would say has been a challenge. The pace of the second year was more intense and it was more challenging, I think you really didn’t have time to not understand, you had to be thinking on your feet all the time.

….trying to find the style that they are looking for, just making sure that I get the appropriate mark that I am looking for, that has been the hardest thing.

For a number of respondents, FE was perceived as a ‘basic’ level of study when compared to HE:

At college you get so much help you don’t really feel that you are learning.

I think college gives you the base of what it is going to be at university.

The BTEC was a bit more general but now I am focusing.

University should hopefully equip me more with the skills I need rather than college and give me certain skills that professional companies need and that extra knowledge. For instance in college you learn up to a certain area but in university you are actually given the opportunity to work on it for yourself, which gives you the opportunity to force yourself to learn and helps you out a lot.

It [HE] is good and different. It has to be because you are moving up a level, more team work and group work and putting minds together, building for your career.

This ‘hierarchy’ is very prevalent amongst FE entrants to HE when reflecting on ideas of progression. Indeed, for one student, the competitiveness inherent in entry to HE was attractive:

A few of my friends applied and it was quite difficult for them to be accepted and it showed just how competitive it was, they didn’t just accept anyone and it showed how good the university was.

Interestingly, some respondents differentiated between students who had followed differing FE entry routes into HE. For example:

…it depends on the courses they did. If somebody did courses like courses that are not as competitive as A-levels, not on the same grade as A-levels, you can tell when you are in class that somebody didn’t really go through A levels but for some who did a BTEC because BTEC was a bit challenging, and the thing is because we did a few subjects that you find in university like business management and all those so you don’t find it so hard to understand what they are trying to teach and for somebody that probably did Access courses they probably find it a bit harder… it depends what course you have done in your FE.
‘Social’ participation in HE

For a number of interviewees, there was less or no involvement in social activities at university:

I don’t have any social life. I just go to work, go to Uni and then go back home.

I don’t socialise in the week. I only socialise at the weekend. You cannot socialise at the same time as concentrating on books.

It [social life] has changed, you try to connect with your friends at college but it is different because you are at different universities, you cannot link up with them all the time, you just need to make new friends.

You know how I said that the professors don’t really interact with us? It’s pretty much the same with my peers because every single module is with a different group. I see people I know them by their face but I don’t really talk to them that much...in terms of my social life, just my private friends from different places rather than the university.

There is no such thing as going out as a group if anything there will be 2 or 3 people and their friends from the outside and my friends from the outside...there’s no social life in terms of being a university student and going out with your fellow students.

It is very different. At college you have friends forever and at university I don’t know if it is because my course is very competitive but people didn’t talk to each other...there are 300 students in my class but they just don’t talk or help. College was much better.

Everyone talks about getting drunk a lot more but I don’t live on campus so I don’t get to take advantage of that, I stay at home and I have my own little group of friends that I go out with.

As I am the oldest one in my group, they all go out a lot and seem to really enjoy it but I don’t get involved with the social life because I have to go home and do my work which was the same at college.

For others, university offered an opportunity to become more involved in social activities:

University social life is much better, a different atmosphere, it is more fun and more exciting. At College it was mainly people who were working and trying to fit the Access course in so it was more like a stepping stone. I did make a couple of friends there who I am still in touch with but it wasn’t a case of all meeting up and socialising because we all had busy lives, whereas at university it is a full time thing. There are more places to go – they make it very easy to go and sit and relax and chat with people so there is always somewhere you can do that.

Everybody seems a lot more together at university, at college there are little cliques – each course seems to stick together and they don’t really talk, it is friendlier at university. At uni, we know each other – we talk to the year above etc which is quite nice.

I think the people you study with at university are more mature and work minded so it was easy to be accepted.

I think I have coped with the transition regarding social life and friends.

At university we play football together and other activities and it is much better because there are things available in university like pool, and if we had time before a lecture we would play some pool, it is more social.

I think in college it wasn’t as university, because at college it was attending two or three times a week and then you would go home but you spend a lot more time at university,
in the evenings you do group work or you come in at the weekends and get work done, you have a lot more friends and a lot more interaction it is a lot busier there so you do get out with a lot of your friends every so often.

For some students, it was necessary to take proactive steps in order to become involved in social life at university:

…the thing is if you don’t get involved or if you don’t make yourself know what is going on at the university of course you are not going to know that there is something going. I have heard people say that they don’t do anything at this university, but they do. They put posters around, the students union, organising a football club, organising a club night, if you don’t involve then you wouldn’t know it is happening.

I think people choose not to because leaflets do go around, they send us e-mails asking if you are interested, pay such an amount and then attend. If you are not interested then you ignore it. The thing is they have got communities as well, this is the things they tell us in our induction and if you are interested in these then you can contact the appropriate person. If you are not interested then you just let it go.

Sources and evaluation of IAG

For FE entrants to HE, IAG came from a combination of sources, the most commonly cited being university IAG and from FE tutors and FE careers advisors. Others referred to peer support as a source of informal advice. For example:

I had a second year student that was also helping me and you get to know other students and you go through it together.

Support and advice was seen as important when making the transition to HE. For example:

I coped with the transition because I had really good help and support, felt quite at ease knowing that I had somebody who would help me if I didn’t know what I was doing, otherwise I would have felt completely lost.

In relation to preparation for entry to HE, students were generally positive in their evaluation of FE tutors/careers advice:

They were so helpful and encouraging and due to the fact that I hadn’t been in this country for long and had taken my GCSE’s back home in Uganda so it was a bit of a challenge though and that actually gave me so much courage and they actually made me a mentor of other students, it really helped me.

I went to the careers adviser and she actually introduced me to something called an Access course because I wasn’t aware that something like that did exist at that time…because it was an Access course everything was focused on universities so that helped us apply to different universities and all the forms and every single kind of a lecture. It was a pretty small group more like a seminar and they would talk to us about how it was going to be a little bit harder, what they would expect from us and how independent and responsible we have to be to go to university so it was really helpful.

I was a bit unsure about my capabilities and he [FE tutor] reassured me that I had nothing to worry about and from that point of view he helped me to make that decision.

…I left it up to me, nobody pushed me into any decisions, they were there to advise me if I wanted it. They just gave general advice about going to university, the careers advisers were the same.

The opportunity to visit a university and to have some knowledge of HE were seen to be valuable. For instance:

Summer Scheme: that actually helped me and showed me what university life is because we went to universities and spent the whole day there and saw what was
going on and it gives you more courage to want to go to university. Instead of just study, study, and study and you have to know whether the social life is going to be interesting or not.

The university itself wasn’t a completely unfamiliar thing to me so I knew what was going to happen more or less, I wasn’t freaked out by anything. It was pretty easy.

In relation to awareness and evaluation of careers advice/IAG in HE, the students were generally positive in their comments:

I only use the careers advice which was really helpful; they give us the organisations that we can join. We had a lot of information about doing out CV’s, it was really helpful.

…we also have the CaSE service as well which helps us with interviews and doing our cv’s and other things which are not directly academic.

Westminster were very helpful, they gave you everything you needed.

I am quite well orientated now, I know where to go to get help etc

For some respondents, it was seen as important to be prepared to seek out advice when studying at HE:

I think at university you are pretty much on your own and I think it is understanding that the tutors can only do so much, at the end of the day it is up to you to go and find out or to overcome your problems but they are more sort of there if you need the advice rather then being able to do it for you and I think a lot of my friends who are quite young, unless they are given the solution in their hand they don’t see advice or guidance as of any particular value.

I know that if you need any help at university there is always certain help available for any purpose and I know you can speak to your tutors about it, or student union, student office and they will mostly direct you to what you are actually looking for. I haven’t had to use the services

Interestingly, the majority of students interviewed said that they were aware of the IAG services offered at university but they did not seem to identify themselves as potential users of such support. In this sense, there was some tentative evidence vocational learners creating demarcations between themselves and ‘other’ students who needed support. For example:

There is a careers service and other sort of services that you can use. I have never really felt the need to go to them but I know that they are there which is sometimes enough and I am sure next year when I am in my final year that I will probably go to them then and need to draw on that service more than I have.

I haven’t really asked for any advice so far, I think the majority of what I have needed to know I have usually asked a colleague in one of my classes.

We have been given information about certain people we can go to and we have our personal tutors or we have guidance counsellors, so we have been told who we can go to if we do need information but I haven’t needed any yet.

There may have been support when I needed it, but I didn’t look for it.

Initiatives such as GUTS were seen as a valuable source of induction for FE entrants to HE:

It was brilliant, really well thought out and just helped to settle our nerves a bit and help us to know what to expect and they even asked us to present on the last day because we would have to present during our degree, which we have done and it was brilliant because it really helped a lot of people who were really nervous. Later on we had assessments with presentations and things and they did small things like getting
someone to walk us round so we knew where places like the library were which is in a separate building, so it was just another thing that wasn’t going to make us nervous.

Similarly study skills support in HE was positively rated:

They do some study skill workshops which I went to at lunchtimes and they were marvellous and really helped me a lot and they have a learning advisor, Maria O’Connor and I went to sessions with her when I was struggling and she was really helpful and very enthusiastic and helped me to see how much better I could be studying. She was a really good role model.

The majority of students attended an induction at the beginning of their course, and most found it a valuable experience:

When coming to university it is difficult to know what to expect and a different experience for everybody. I think if you are able to attend the orientation day when you come in and induction week it is very helpful and if you don’t go to those you are kind of lost.

Yes definitely as it was the first time to meet people on your course and was beneficial.

I actually think it is a very good opportunity and I sort of regret missing it because the first day you are actually looking for places and you struggle and you don’t know which teachers to ask for help or which teachers are going to be teaching you. So it is a good opportunity to learn a lot of the practicalities.

It was very useful because as the university was new to me there was a lot of information and other things in general that was really helpful like finding your way through, how hard or easy it was going to be and they gave us a lot of tips, especially for us that have children, regarding time management and general things that weren’t really mentioned to us before but it was mentioned that week so it helped us to prepare, we had that extra week to prepare for things that we might not have thought of.

It was very useful. There were some people that needed the guidance and some people didn’t but they made everybody aware so that if you needed anybody they made sure they were available just in case.

HE was generally perceived as better resourced than FE, particularly in relation to access to learning resources:

I think the university resources are much better than the Access course. The university is much better equipped, they try to do everything they possibly can, there are always resources in the library, aside from the books and journals there are leaflets on how to improve how you study.

There is a lot more, in the library there are a lot more books, a lot more copies, there’s more computers, a lot more resources there so it was a lot easier to go in there and do the research.

Supporting FE to HE learners

When asked about ways in which vocational entrants could be better supported in HE, the following comments were made:

In terms of extra support for vocational students starting University, it appears to be the mature students who have been out of the education system who feel they could do with support initially with things like essay writing.

I think it would improve if a once a week tutorial could take place where a group could just sit down with the tutor for discussion. I think it would be very helpful and they would get to know their students more. I don’t remember having had any tutorials at uni, I
think at the beginning the tutor came to one of our classes just to introduce himself and say if ever we needed him, he was available in a certain room and at certain times. We have tutorials for modules with different teachers but that is about it.

For extra support at university I entered a mentoring system, they would give us inside information such as this is what happened to us in the first year and this is what you could avoid by doing it differently and that was really good to have someone there who had been there and done that. I found out about the mentoring system by a lecturer of a particular module in our first year who was running a separate scheme, not to do with our module and she let us know about it and signed everybody up.

The use of emblematic case studies of vocational learners who have entered HE was put forward as a positive proposal:

I think if you have people who have actually been through those routes it would be helpful for them to be able to tell you when you can get help from or access the website for that information.

**Career development**

When asked about ideas of ‘career’ and career development plans, the students viewed HE as a space for focusing on the development of their career direction. In this sense, HE represents part of a developmental progression from FE:

In terms of a career I was confused when I was still in college…if somebody is not so sure of what they want to do in the future they shouldn’t go directly into something in the first year, like go for economics in the first year, they have to go in a broader option like business studies where you can specialise in your third year because it gives you more time to think of what you really want to do.

Similarly, a number of students viewed the FE to HE progression as part of a career continuum, or as a vocational route. HE was seen to offer the opportunity to develop career specific employment skills which could be used in the graduate labour market:

Yes, in terms of skills I think it does especially with things that they teach. It is not all the things that they teach, it is a few things that they teach that are actually connected with the outside world. There are a few modules that you would go for and you would think that this tells you more about the outside world…if you actually look at that type of module, it seems so hard and you cannot understand, but it actually tells you what they do in the outside world. It [my current module] tells you how managers should behave in an organisation, if it appropriate for managers to behave that way, how they should treat their employees, so it is linked to human resources which is what I want to do.

I think I will be as prepared as one can be. I have recently been to see a neuro psychologist, to talk to him and find out what he did and I realised that I have learned quite a bit being at university so it was quite nice and I felt that everything was pushing in the right direction.

Yes because it is basically giving me a complete insight of what it is I want to do so I will be completely ready to just walk into a radio station and start working. I will have the basic knowledge and skills. Obviously a station is going to be different but I will have the basic knowledge. I feel that over somebody else who has applied for the job I think I would have more advantage because of the course that I have done.

Yes the course will prepare me for the career which I am going to go into and all the skills that we learn, especially in the next 2 years…my degree course feels more vocationally based.

I think they generally cover the skills that we need…every year they teach you a little bit more in depth so I think that would provide all the skills we need.
I think I will have all the skills I need because they do give you a lot of support, especially for foreign students, although you do have to ask for help.

For me personally I think I will be ready for work.

I like what I am doing and find it quite intriguing and I feel that I am learning as I am going through...I feel that I am learning as I am going through. I think I am getting what I need in terms of skills and the knowledge etc…. I think I am gaining a lot out of it. As I go on, we learn so many things.

I chose modules that were similar and would help me towards where I wanted to go, relating to the property or business industry, trying not to take it completely out and go into something completely different, so something that was still relevant but would bring in a bit of change but still keeping it relatively similar.

In contrast, a minority felt that the degree was not preparing them for the employment market. For example one student felt that the degree needed to be more practical:

…to be honest you are not experienced in working life, it is just course work and you just have to work and learn certain needs but you are not gaining the experience that companies are looking for. If you are looking for a job in the future the university should be helping you more in that category because the course you do is actually widespread because you do different modules and different categories, which is not actually very helpful because there is certain things they are teaching which won’t benefit you but if you concentrate more on what you want to do in the future it would actually help you out more. I felt that college was the same, they are just doing different modules and different ideas, they should do more on certain areas that you need to actually benefit you and give you the knowledge that companies require. I need to specialise more.

For those who experienced HE as part of their vocational route, there were a number of examples of HE functioning as part of a professional route:

I was accepted by the other universities to which I applied but there is one thing Westminster has, they have something that when you finish you are a Biomedical Scientist and can practice whereas this does not apply at some of the other universities which was an important deciding factor.

I need to get some sort of post graduate qualification depending on the route that I choose, at the moment I would like to either go into clinical psychology or possibly neuro psychology so it would be one of those two but they have different qualifications for each pathway so I have to make that decision.

I thought I would go to university to get a psychology degree because it is a pre-requisite to get a Masters so this is all the first step.

Being at college and having a similar sort of course as at university, it just seemed normal.

I saw a few courses that carried on what I wanted to do as I had done media studies and then I found the radio production course and decided that was definitely what I wanted to do.

[I wanted to] learn more about law because it is a passion I have.

I know I want to work, I want to be a solicitor

We learn a lot of skills which are the most important thing because if you work in a solicitor’s office it is easier than going in there and not knowing what you are doing.

My property course goes through this long standard of having to be RICS accredited which is the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the course I am on at the
moment isn’t accredited so at the end I will have to either do a Masters degree or do a conversion course to get my course accredited, so I am thinking of doing a conversion course at Westminster. After that I have a basic idea of where I think I am going to but I am not absolutely sure.

The course is quite general which is a good thing meaning that I don’t have to go directly into property or business, I can mix the two. We learn quite a lot of things in terms of valuing properties and in the business sense as well we learn a lot of economics and a good mix of marketing, it incorporates a lot of things and not just basic business and basic property, it goes into the whole flow of everything.

I think the technical knowledge that I will gain will definitely equip me. It is a little difficult to say how to separate your experiences and knowledge because it is always building and I would take into account the things I did before my degree but I think it has given me more confidence in my abilities and in what I think and to know what is acceptable and what isn’t.

A few interviewees identified graduate employment as a separate stage in their personal development. For these students, the work of work is very different from HE:

…obviously my work here is being measured by the grades, whereas once I graduate obviously it will be money and there is actually like real life coming into it as well and that will be definitely something new for me like writing a report and getting paid for it. It’s all a bit different.

I believe that a lot of skills [developed in HE] will definitely be used all the time in my professional life. However I still believe that there is a lot waiting for me and definitely I will be surprised by some of the things that I will have to deal with at some point.

In a similar vein, a number of students identified the importance of work experience. In this sense, a degree was seen as not necessarily sufficient in itself:

I didn’t think I would get everything from my degree, I thought I could probably get some work experience because I have had a few voluntary jobs outside when I was at college and it really contributed a lot to the work experience that I needed to go out and say that I have got experience in this and that but if you just come up with qualifications with no experience it doesn’t help, you need both.

…that’s the reason why I wanted to do voluntary work whenever I can so once I finish this semester I will definitely try to do as much as possible, the reason being is because, especially this university concentrates on the scientific side of psychology, there is no practical side of it being taught we don’t sadly go out and talk to people, we don’t go to hospitals or prisons there is no such thing so you read about being a psychologist but you don’t get to feel what it is like being a psychologist.

I actually think it would be helpful to have work experience because to be honest once you leave university people find it difficult to find jobs and when you apply for work they always ask for experience but if most universities can give you the opportunity to work in your course for at least 6 months or a year, it would be very helpful and you could benefit a lot from it and you would gain that experience that most of the companies are looking for.
5.3 HE Graduates

This section presents the findings from the interview data collected from graduates who had entered university from a FE background and have subsequently entered the graduate employment market.

Motivation for entering HE

Interviewees had attended university mainly in order to pursue their career aspirations. The desire to pursue a ‘better’ career or change career direction was evident:

To be honest I had done a few jobs before and I just thought I could do so much more than this.

I had finished one career…didn’t have any qualifications so I knew I had to re-train so I went about doing that and knew I had to get a degree so that I could at least make more money.

Two respondents attended university as part of their Continuing Professional Development as a result of employer requirements:

It was a prerequisite of the job, they wanted me to get a degree in a building genre and because I was working in the building control department they wanted me to actually narrow it down to building surveying or building control surveying and my boss said I was better off to go for the building control surveying degree because it would probably guide me more in my job, so that was the reasoning why.

Again, location was crucial in choosing which university to attend:

I also looked at proximity because I have two children and I had to be able to drop them to school and then be able to be at uni on time and it needed to be within a good distance. I therefore chose Westminster because it was a balance of the distance and what I wanted to do.

It was the closest university that offered the course and I was able to stay with my brother who lived nearby.

Sources of IAG

Informal recommendations from friends and colleagues were important factors in choosing a specific course and university:

The thing that pointed me in that direction was the fact that my colleague went there, probably 2 or 3 years before I did and he suggested that I go there because he knew the lecturers there so I took his advice.

I had heard quite good reports about the department and also knew someone who was working there in the admin so I had an insight into how the department worked and heard that the team on board were quite good.

I did meet someone who had gone to university a bit late and he had a great time.

One respondent remarked on the value of contact with university staff:

I went there to talk to someone and I met a professor and he recommended a course for me and he gave me a lot of advice which was great….for me the principle thing and what made it all possible was meeting the lecturer…I really don’t know how I would have got in if it hadn’t been for him

Interestingly, a few respondents received no support or advice about HE:

I pretty much knew what I wanted.
I got a minimal amount of support, even in terms of financial support so it was all down to me but because I wanted to do it, I just put that to one side.

I had no advice from any careers adviser.

For those respondents who received employer support, this was generally experienced as positive:

Work was good, they gave me a day off work to do the course and then I had a small amount of study leave when it came to exams but generally if I needed any time off or any support, they were quite good.

Teaching learning and assessment

Again, the issue of workload was raised in relation to managing the transition from FE to HE:

The workload was immense…there was a lot of work all the time.

The workload was the biggest challenge. Having to do all the work whilst also in a job wasn’t very easy.

Echoing comments from current HE students, the general experience of learning transitions was also raised as challenging:

I found the transition from further education to higher education quite challenging to start with, mainly because when you write essays etc at university it is a very formal procedure, especially with regard to referencing and I had no experience at all of that prior to university.

It was very intense. I remember my very first lecture when the lecturer was going through what the requirements of the module were and what we had to produce, I was doubtful that I would be able to do it.

If you wanted to get good marks you had to put a lot more into it. You can follow what the lecturers give you but they are only giving you the skeleton and you have to put the meat on the bones. It was much more advanced than college.

Two respondents referred to problems experienced by other vocational learners that led to withdrawal:

Some students from the Access course did drop out because they struggled on the course and couldn’t cope.

I saw one or two that left straight away, it was obviously a bit too much for them, they were too young for it.

At the same time, a few interviewees felt that there were no problems with making the transition to HE:

I had the time in college to get the hang of things and when I came here it wasn’t daunting, it was a nice transition.

I adapted easily and I knew I could count on the lecturers’ guidance if I was stranded.

I had no issues with the transfer over.

Looking back on their HE experiences, a number of respondents referred to the personal progression that they experienced. For many it was a valuable confidence building experience:
You don’t see it coming it just happens gradually sometimes. You do the hard modules which you don’t like to do but it all makes sense in the end and you go away with something you are proud of.

I wasn’t sure what to expect at higher education but I dealt with the challenges as I went along.

It gave me a lot of confidence, being able to see the finished article and knowing that I produced it and had given it my best shot. That gave me a lot of satisfaction.

The first year seemed okay and I even took a few calculated risks in that year then in the second year there was a lot of work which I got through and thought the third year couldn’t be as hard as that so I started my major project but then once I started the third year, everything else started and it was hard to believe the amount of work but I got through it and felt good at the end.

Again, interviewees referred to HE as a HE as ‘higher’ form of learning. For example:

It took me really much deeper into understanding language and that type of stuff. It was my first excursion into the world of academia and I liked essays, all of the translation projects I had to do and I liked having deadlines.

Assessment

Again echoing the testimony of current HE students, the graduates recalled finding the assessment in HE to be more challenging than FE assessment:

It was very demanding, it seemed to be very high level to me…lots of exams and things that were graded and counted towards the end result.

There is a lot more emphasis at university on research and plagiarism and none of that was really touched upon at college so that was quite a difficult thing to get hold of.

It was more formal at university. You are encouraged to look at a much wider and broader range of sources whereas at college if you got a couple of books out then that was adequate.

There was a lot about grammar which I knew nothing about.

The assessments at college were very different. I think at university it is much stricter. At college they were relatively strict but nowhere near the levels of university.

However, one graduate noted that HE assessment was achievable:

They asked for a lot but it was all very structured and you could see it all made sense.

In terms of feedback received on assessment, interviewees again identified a difference between FE and HE:

At College we got sufficient feedback on coursework and exam whereas at university it depends on the lecturer. Some lecturers will provide it well and others don’t.

Contact with teaching staff

The issue of contact with teaching staff identified by current HE students was reflected in the comments of the graduate interviewees:

At College the class was much smaller in the lectures and seminars whereas at University we could be as many as 200 in a lecture on a core module and about 21 in the seminar.

I could easily walk into the lecturer’s office at FE to obtain the material.
At college it was much more informal and I think they were just as keen to get you through the course, so they were quite accessible.

It is worth noting that the graduates also had positive comments about the teaching arrangements in HE. For example:

The tutors were very good, they made me very comfortable, they really mapped it out. I didn’t ask that many questions but when I did ask how I should approach something, there was no problem. With regard to assessment of my work, I really liked the way they did it, they broke it down into components, being assessed on the grammar, the spelling, etc, they were really thorough. I had a couple of tutorials when I needed them and they were brilliant.

I attended because I enjoyed them [lectures] and out of a sense of loyalty. I respected the teachers and liked what they were doing.

**Learning styles**

The graduate testimony again reflected the comments from current HE students regarding a preference amongst FE entrants for interactive methods of delivery:

Seminars at university are more ideal and I learnt more in that kind of setting.

At FE it was more like seminar setting because the students are a lot fewer compared to HE.

The perceived need for FE entrants to ‘work hard’ in response to the learning style differences in HE was also stressed by the graduates:

I was just determined that I had to do it because I knew it would work out in the end.

...you just had to plan your work, especially as I was in full time employment.

The demands at university are a lot higher than at college but that is expected.

I think I got as much out of it as I put in.

It wasn’t plain sailing, I was deep in the books all the time.

The graduates all indicated that HE had been a significant challenge to them, particularly in terms of managing the rise in workload. As one graduate put it: ‘we just didn’t know what to expect and nobody was sure of anything’. The impact of the transition to HE was felt most significant on work/life balance. For example:

The main challenge for me was trying to get the study done outside of uni and trying to get a work/life balance. It was 3 years hard work.

**Self-identity**

The issue of a possible demarcation between vocational learners and traditional entrants was also evident amongst graduate respondents. Some felt that there was a general perception that A-level entrants to HE were better equipped than FE entrants:

There is still a stigma attached to people who are doing the vocational qualification route. In my opinion they are not seen as elite as A-level students so I think there is a difference there.

In my office I have colleagues from all aspects of life, some A-level and some vocational route, some straight to university without any qualifications and there seems to be a preconception that A-levels were the best way of doing things but I never did it.
Looking back on their experiences, others felt strongly that there was no tangible difference:

I didn’t think the A level students knew more than I did, I felt we were on the same level.

I don’t think the A level student had a better start than I did. I think the Access prepared me well.

Again reflecting the comments from current HE students, the graduates felt that a vocational or FE background was actually an advantage in certain vocational subjects (such as Business or Computing):

In terms of maturity and focus I think the FE and vocational students are more focused and pretty much know what they want to gain from HE. I think this is due to the fact that they are more mature than those from the A level route. This does not mean that FE students will perform well at all the times, I think some may struggle, and A-level students alike.

I thought everything was running properly from what I had studied at college because we did finance so I never had problems in my first year with managerial accounting.

Everything else was falling into place and I felt it was just adding on to what I had learned there, there was no big jump, there were no nasty surprises. I felt well prepared having been to college if I had just gone with my A levels….I could have struggled with things from IT etc.

In some things, like business law, formulas, etc. that we had done at college, they [A-level entrants] hadn’t done that so there was a few things I had done that they had never done.

I think there is a difference between part time and full time students, because when you are part time you are working towards something especially if you are in a job and you know it is relevant to your job. You have a bit more incentive to get the work done and you can extract more information because you know it is going to benefit you and the job that you are doing.

Supporting FE to HE learners

Some of the graduates felt that more support could have been provided for FE entrants in order to address the differences between FE and HE:

I have been asked by a friend who is a lecturer that as I have been through university life, if I might go to talk to his Access students in respect of what they can expect.

I think they need more support…without a doubt more support is needed [because of assessment differences]

I think at the very start it would have been useful if we had some sort of guidance on the quality of the work we were expected to produce. If we had been shown other students’ past work, it would have been very useful.

One graduate who was undertaking the degree on a day release from their employer highlighted the needs of part-time students in particular:

I was given all that information at the beginning of the course but I think it was more geared to full time students.

The use of Accredited Prior Learning for non-traditional enterants was also highlighted as useful:

I was granted APL’s by the course leaders so I was able to skip a few modules, so I was able to tailor it more to my needs than to theirs.
Social participation in HE

Generally, the graduates had become involved in some form of social life at university:

The first year was difficult in a sense that you learning the people around you. In the second year you know more students and you know the ones you want to hang with.

I’m always keen to know people. Social life at HE is fun, also the fact that [the campus] is strategically located. We never ran out places to go whether eating, dancing, museum or shopping. Fantastic.

At FE life was good but I didn’t get to spend so much time people in my class as many of them had family commitments.

In terms of socialising I don’t think coming from FE affected my socialising. I think this will depend on one’s confidence and willingness to mingle with others. It was important not to isolate myself otherwise I would feel lost and depressed.

Sources and evaluation of IAG

Generally, the graduates were satisfied with the support and advice they had received at FE when applying to HE:

The tutors at college helped me to make that decision and if they couldn’t answer my questions they would try to get somebody to help me and answer my questions so it was a great help.

Again, there was a sense that the graduate respondents were happy to be aware of IAG/support services in HE but were not generally inclined to use them. One graduate noted that ‘I could always get the support that I needed’ but the other respondents all appeared reluctant to use IAG services during their HE career:

I didn’t get too involved with that side of things because I was only there one day a week so it wasn’t really relevant to me.

Being part time you are only there one day a week and to be honest I didn’t use any of their services at all because on that one day a week you are there to study and maybe I was lucky that I didn’t need to look for it.

I think I was allocated a personal tutor but I never saw them, they never requested that I should go to see them and I never needed to

Similarly, module choices were generally made independently with no apparent desire for support or advice:

I had to make the course choices myself, some students needed that kind of support but I knew what I wanted to do and went off and did most of the research myself.

One graduate remarked that IAG and support should be targeted to the needs of specific student cohorts:

If it is not about you then you don’t really take any interest.

There was a general feeling from the graduates that HE was a more bureaucratic experience than FE, particularly when it came to accessing institutional processes such as mitigating circumstances:

At university…it is more bureaucratic and complicated with filling in forms and waiting for the board, which takes months. So much uncertainty, plus you never get to speak one on one with the board. I feel that meeting and explaining my personal problem on paper was insufficient and difficult to express myself in a way that I want. It put me off
claiming a number of services which I would have been entitled to but I choose to find
other ways.

At College you got to meet the people in charge and explain yourself. I felt this gave me
a voice as well as a chance to answer any questions that would have appeared
ambiguous in my absence.

Career

The graduates felt that the degree had prepared them for the employment market in terms of
developing key skills. As such, there was a sense that following the FE to HE route has
enhanced their career prospects:

At first it was difficult but through to the 3rd year you gain so much knowledge and skills
you could do your own business, work for many companies, you are equipped with so
much.

I finished the bachelors [degree] and I felt that I learnt so much and felt confident to go
and apply my skills and knowledge in the work place.

Doing the masters is giving a competitive advantage in the job market as well as
specialism in the area that I would like to work.

Yes it has been very beneficial in some areas. I don’t think there was anything lacking
in the skills or knowledge.

It helped me a lot in my job and it still does, it has given me a lot more confidence in
certain aspects, like the legal aspects.

I suppose so because in teaching you have a lot of deadlines etc.

It also prepared me to want to carry on studying, I would love to go back.

A number of examples were given by the graduates of weays in which the FE to HE journey
had provided a route into specific professional sectors:

My employer was keen for me to do the course as it was part of the process of
becoming a chartered surveyor and as I didn’t have that much experience in terms of
that position it was agreed that it would help me to get a better appreciation and it has
helped an awful lot in the job.

They [employer] were keen for me to finish off my education and I wanted to do
something building control related and the University of Westminster was the closest
one that offered that course.

I wasn’t sure [what to do after leaving HE] but I got the idea about becoming a teacher
about half way through and that seemed to be a good idea so I went for that. I am a
secondary school language teacher now.

I think from that course you could have gone into a number of fields.

I am now a secondary school teacher, teaching Spanish and French and this is the job
I have had since finishing my PGCE. It wasn’t easy getting on the PGCE and getting a
job teaching languages because I had to pass an exam in maths which was also not
easy. I had three interviews for jobs and got the third one. In September I will be
starting a new job at a grammar school in Buckingham.

Overall, the graduates were extremely positive about their HE experiences:

In the end I never regretted my choice of coming for HE

Met some of the best students and lecturers at University.
It was quite difficult working and doing a degree but at the same time I found it to be the best thing I have ever done.

It was very good. There was a good atmosphere and it was a good experience.

It was the best thing I have ever done with my life and I would do it again.

The lecturers were very supportive and I would recommend anyone to do the course there.
5.4 FE IAG Staff

This section presents the findings from the interviews with IAG staff from a FE college in London. Both practitioners are involved in advising FE students on applying to HE and provide careers IAG.

Relationship between FE and HE

The IAG staff felt that the boundaries between FE and HE are less distinct than was previously the case, and are becoming increasingly fluid:

I think it’s interesting that it feels more fluid now, possibly with foundation degrees and sort of franchising out from universities through FE colleges… So it’s a question of the lines are becoming more blurred.

In terms of promoting the courses, that distinction that was very clear just a few years ago is now much more of an overlap.

Interestingly, FE students perceive this blurring in a negative way. The hierarchical distinctions between FE and HE are actually often welcomed by students, according to the IAG staff:

And there’s an interest from students about that as well, sort of saying that I don’t want this foundation degree because it means going to a college of FE and I’m in a college of FE and I that doesn’t feel like a step up to me. So there is a little bit of reluctance.

And there are certainly there are more options for students but on the other hand there’s that kind of, you have to explain and break down the difference, you have to explain that it is fine, it is a Level Four course, if you like, you know, that you’re not staying still.

For the IAG staff, there was a feeling that there should be a continuum between FE and HE, particularly in relation to vocational subject areas:

I think as well as that, you do a lot of science degrees, you do a lot of engineering?...we don’t do any of that. So that reinforces the fit that’s there already. With it being practical. I think there’s a continuum going on here isn’t there?

I’m thinking particularly of the art and design students who can avoid having to do a foundation year, they’ve already got their kind of skill set. So it does depend on the person and on the course as well. So going on to something that is very directly related, then they actually might feel more confident and stronger in it

FE student knowledge of HE

There are low levels of knowledge about HE amongst FE student populations:

I think personally that FE and HE and looking at things from a student perspective there is still an awful lot of ignorance and confusion from young people about higher education…just about everything. You know, courses, particular universities, despite all the mountains of money and initiatives about learning and schooling, there are hordes of young people who I think with UCAS forms and with regard to things they’ve done in preparation for higher education is zilch.

So I think FE and HE, whatever we’ve done, and we’ve done, you know it’s been a positive, there are still big segments of that HE population who start off, at the beginning of the second year of their level three course, with their head in the clouds thinking what’s going on?

Specifically, the UCAS process is poorly understood:
They don’t know what a sandwich course is, don’t know what UCAS is. When it comes to actually completing the application form, they’re all at sea. So you’re still having to do some quite very basic work.

This was seen to reflect a wider issue about working with young people as they were seen to be focused on the ‘here and now’ at the expense of forward planning:

I think that sort of fits in, to a degree, with how young people make decisions and what is important to young people in their lives. And what is important to a lot of young people is the here and now – what’s happening today, what’s happening tomorrow. Research, planning and preparation, you know six months or a year down the line, they are completely foreign things to loads of young people.

I don’t know if you noticed but I got the sense when we were doing a lot of the UCAS application forms this year that it was almost a bit of an inconvenience. I don’t really see what’s the point of all this? And the point is obviously you do it now and 10 months down the line you can study at university. But like you said they’re so much in the here and now. The idea of a forward activity that will come to fruition in a year’s time seems a bit, you know, what’s the point really. Not everyone generally but it was a current that picked up a bit.

Enhancing FE student knowledge of HE

The IAG staff referred to the value of disseminating emblematic role models or case studies of students who have made the transition from FE to HE:

I think if there were some role models out there, it would be helpful. We are doing that already to an extent but it needs to be more out there more of a statement.

I think making use of student ambassadors like students in first year of their courses who perhaps came from Westminster Kingsway, I mean that would pitch courses, we’re helping you, you’re helping us. I think that’s the way forward, you know, the personal exchanges are much more effective than reams and reams of paper and the internet, web links and all the rest of it.

It seems to me a good way of using that group tutorial with a sort of progression sort of thing into the Level Two courses would be to have someone from Westminster or somewhere else come in and do ‘this is my story’ at a Level Two.

A lot of what is going to help these youngsters on these courses here are people that will be coming from outside and online information.

What would be really helpful from that would be case examples that perhaps you could supply to us so that we can put in our prospectus and in our other places online, all the rest of it, to reinforce what we’re saying when students come onto our courses. That at the end of this course, you can actually go on to university and here’s an example of somebody who’s done it.

Related to this need to extend FE student awareness of HE was a need to develop forward planning amongst students:

Because these feelings of, sort of, trying to steer people in a direction later, they need time to grow. They need six months, they need a year, maybe two years to grow.

And that’s actually we’ve sort of mixed up. Right at the beginning, we are so focused on ticking all the boxes on the induction, you know have they had the student handbook, when the fire alarm goes off, that you actually forget the bigger picture, which is why they are here. And for them to be aware of that right from the word go. So when you talk about UCAS, they see it as a two year project, rather than one term.

However, as one of the IAG staff pointed out, there are resource implications in meeting these needs: ‘I mean, there is a resources issue here, you know we’ve got a small careers team’.
FE student backgrounds

The IAG staff highlighted the social backgrounds of students as a significant factor in raising aspirations amongst vocational learners, particularly in relation to HE entry:

Also many, many of our students come from a background where they may be the first person in their family to go to university, and sometimes there's no kind of...obviously our support facilities are quite limited, they might get half an hour or an hour once maybe or a bit more often. But then it's something that can come across as a little bit scary, a little bit intimidating, it's like something they don't do. And they haven't got that kind of casual support where they can go home and say to mum and say you know I did that, I got that, they haven't got that kind of connection at all, it all seems rather alien to them.

At the same time, it was recognised that this is not always the case any longer:

I mean okay you still have quite a number of students who are going to university who's the first person in my family, but we now have, we now get up to the second generation whose parents or their sibling or their aunt or whatever went to Westminster, so that reinforces it again.

Motivations for entering HE

According to the IAG staff, HE represents the ‘next step’ for many FE students. This is particularly the case for those engaged in vocational educational routes:

For some of them I think that because it’s a natural next step really…

But also for students on vocational courses they’ve entered those courses with a particular profession in mind that may well require a degree to get in there. A lot of the health and social care for example like nursing or physio or things like that, so they kind of entered it because they want to work in the health service and this was the next step is to get the qualification.

If you’re on a Level Three course, on a vocational, go to university, although it doesn’t look too good on the job front at the moment, but if you go to university, do a sandwich type course, I mean it would be really good.

For these students, HE is seen very much as aspirational from a career development perspective:

…one would also like to think that some of it also somewhat aspirational.

I think it goes back to what I said before about quite a lot of our students don’t have an HE background in the family. The idea of going to university is possibly a little alien. But it is a gateway to often a good profession, a good career and a better lifestyle. So I guess they want something more than, I mean obviously a degree in itself is going to be invaluable but it brings with it things.

I think that we do see aspiration in this college, we can see that from the personal statements. Sometimes that desire is fuelled by the fact that things went a little awry in their teenage year. FE is a second chance and they are determined to make the best of the opportunities they’ve been given.

The IAG staff stressed that the approach to HE had become more ‘instrumental’ in recent times with FE students begin focused on qualifications and career prospects at the expense of a wider form of personal development:

That’s the bit that I don’t I see quite as often when I talk to students about going to university. They talk a lot about the qualifications and maybe it’s because they think that’s what I want to hear. But very rarely do people say I want to do it to benefit my life
generally… but generally it’s I want to get the qualification and not to get the good or the benefit.

I do think that going to university means a different thing now than it was 20 or 30 years ago, you know my generation. You know, going to university was a multifaceted thing. You went because, one, you were capable from an academic point of view and then in terms of that you did go. You know there were the apprentices and the job market was much more buoyant than it is now. If someone drummed it into you four, five years ago that you were going to university, you know you can groom that sort of special 10 percent. And I think certainly for my generation university was as much about an adventure. A social thing, as much as any qualification. But I think all that changed a lot. I certainly think, most certainly young people…and probably if you’re older, you’re making sacrifices to go to university based on a personal level and a financial level, and you’re going to university very much with the thought ‘I’m doing this for my career’. ‘I’m doing this for my career’.

**Influences on HE entry**

The IAG staff felt that a major impact on the decision to enter HE were informal influences such as peer influence:

…coming back to the ground level, I think a lot of students decide to go to university because their mates are going, to be quite honest.

Bit like a conveyer belt almost.

Which is why they all apply for the same university and the same courses that their mates apply for.

Indeed, it was recognised that IAG in FE is often a ‘secondary’ source of support after informal advice such as family:

And when we’re considering major influences on people when making decisions of any sort, its people like parents, close siblings and friends. I think also teachers, because to me teachers also have close links with it.

We are kind of like a secondary source actually. They’ve already spoken to someone else and they kind of come to you to check out. So we come in at a slightly different level.

Location was identified as one of the biggest influences on choice of HE institution:

There is the element I think with some students of more than likely they pick their FE college because it’s easy to get to.

I particularly think the geographic thing might be the larger factor there. I think there’s a real fear and suspicion around the whole student debt, student fees, whatever, and a lot of people seem to feel more comfortable if they can really almost carry on as normal. But instead of coming to us at 9 o’clock on a Monday they come to their local University. I think the economic climate has left people more cautious about jumping into the unknown. Something that’s familiar, there’s something rather comforting about that. I can still go there and do whatever it is that I would like to do.

This was seen as somewhat unsatisfactory from an IAG perspective because as one of the member of staff put it: ‘On the other hand justifying somewhere because I can walk it in ten minutes isn’t a good enough reason’.

**Delivering IAG in FE**

It was clear that students tend to be reactive rather than proactive in relation to applying to HE. Again raising the issue of forward planning, the IAG staff noted that students tend to visit IAG services at specific times of the year in response to UCAS processes:
But there is a lot of fallout round the summer after they come in for their AS level results, and found that it wasn’t right.

With the majority, we see them all at the beginning of their final year and dealing with UCAS forms, that will often trigger a lot of visits.

It was noted that IAG involves intervention that entails advising some FE students that they may not be suited to HE:

In terms of what proportion of students are very definitely applying for HE because it’s something that they have started I can’t put a figure on it, but there’s as many of those as there are students who perhaps are aspiring to university when in actual fact they are not quite sure they are university suited.

There are some students who may not appear ready, either because…we get a few at the at the end of the first year because they’ve been told that it’s not going to be appropriate for them to carry on unfortunately and also ones who sort of bumping along at the bottom of a class who say I am worried. So at that point we would intervene and look at options.

On occasion, the impetus for this type of intervention comes from the students themselves:

So sometimes it comes from them…they’ve often got a realistic expectations or pretty realistic picture of where they are.

As well as managing student expectations, there was evidence that IAG in FE is also about raising expectations:

But there was also a couple of candidates who had never thought of Oxford or Cambridge and were encouraged to do so at the very last minute and were worthy candidates. I think if you then multiply that very, very small sample by the numbers of potential candidates for example for the Russell group, you get into bigger conflicts between those people who’ve been well advised and well informed, and those people who haven’t, or haven’t made it their business, or are sort of halfway through Level Three and thinking ‘Oh, shit, I’ve got to look around next year, what am I going to do now?’ I think there’s as much, you know, let’s look at this in terms of putting a bit of realism in but also lifting peoples aspirations up…we see all of the UCAS forms that go off, you see all of them, if we see people who are they are undervaluing themselves in their university choices and their claim to a place we will challenge them… So you will go through them all individually and say look this looks like a really strong candidate who is applying for places they could walk into tomorrow, why is that?

It was noted by the IAG staff that there was ultimately variation in attitude to HE amongst FE students:

I would say it varies from person to person. You sort of get on a continuum from I can’t go to university to the very confident that their course is going to give them a lot of useful skills that they wouldn’t have got on an A-level programme

**Vocational learners and traditional entry routes**

It is important to note that the IAG staff were aware of a perceived sense of inferiority amongst vocational learners when compared to A-level students, particularly in relation to making the transition to HE:

BNDs often come onto their courses thinking that they’re not quite as good as A-levels...so they’re already under the feeling that they’re second class in fact some of them therefore feel that they can’t go on to university.

If the National Diploma student started off their National Diploma thinking I’m probably going into a job, or I don’t know what I’m doing after this, I don’t even think that far. And
then to think through, and the whole university experience is a bit of mmmm ... they’re more likely to feel ‘It’s not me, it’s for the A level lot’. So I don’t think there is an easy answer. Well you could say there is a high proportion getting into bigger financial debt, the more become late parents.

It was felt that UCAS did not help this situation:

I don’t think to a certain extent UCAS helps terribly students who aren’t doing an A-level. The core is with A level and the this is a bolt on with the rest of you. If you look at the book we use al lot, when you open it all you see is all A level grades. And you have to look up other things separately. So again its just that sort of you’re not quite in the norm. You’re a bit different. I don’t think that’s terribly helpful. The message it send s out is you’re a bit different because you have to look up your thing separately.

The IAG staff were aware of transitional challenges faced by vocational learners in HE. They made reference to the difficulties experienced by FE entrants in the early period of entering HE:

I wonder how many students are lost in the first couple of weeks quite simply because this all seems so odd that they are kind of freaked out by it and feel that they might not be able to cope.

However, it was also felt that these challenges can be beneficial for some students:

I also think for some it probably raises their confidence in their own abilities. Not necessarily anything they don’t already know but just makes them feel I can operate in this setting. Because this is difficult for a leaver, they’ve been here for two or three years and they’re on the highest possible course they can be, and they start again and they might not have a lot of support outside. For many of them they’re not living in, they’re living at home and they might not have that kind of fear of all the student residents type stuff going on. It makes them think yeah, this is going to work before they’ve had the essay deadlines and stuff.

Supporting FE entrants

It was felt that vocational leaner entrants would benefit from extra induction or pre-entry support:

It might be again because the BNDs it’s more important to have some sort of pre-starter at the university over the summer, that may be brushing up on key skills sort of stuff. That may be more suited to the more typical BND rather than the A-level. But when one looks at our A-level students, how on earth did they get on to their programmes in terms of their individual maths and general ability in those areas? So I think that might be a general future objective of providing for BNDs in terms of trying to sort of level the playing field in terms of their success and their achievement at the end of their degree.

I think it would be much more generic about working within teams, confidence building, writing essays, time management, all that sort of stuff, the softer sort of side. A lot of students struggle with that anyway, whether they are coming from A-levels or vocational, so it would be useful for the A-level lot as well. Don’t forget that typical students have been out of education since probably, well, beginning of May?

It was also suggested that HE should provide practical information to potential FE entrants:

I think it would be really useful to have in the prospectus an example. Specific examples of people’s individual timetables doing a course. Because when you look in a prospectus and the options are da da da da da da. Oh that’s very interesting, a bit of mandatory and a bit of optional work. What does that actually look like on paper? Because then a lot of students, okay, if I look at my timetable I think, ooh, timetable, is that every hour, or is that what I’ve been working for? One or the other options. of I think that would be really useful to have in a prospectus just as an example, that side. I think what can we do prior to them getting to their course? I don't think we could be too
specific about individual timetables, because that information may not be available at that point.
6. Conclusion

This report has presented the research findings of the FE to HE Transitions Development Project.

The report is designed to summarise the key findings of the data. Further dissemination of the data will be undertaken during 2010 (see Appendix 7 for a summary of project outputs produced up to May 2010).

It is hoped that this research has contributed to an enhanced understanding of the educational and career expectations, experiences and aspirations of vocational learners. A series of key findings have arisen from the data relating to the transitions experienced by vocational learners across the FE, HE and graduate labour market spectrum (as presented in sections 5 and 6 above). This data also suggests a number of further research questions relating to learner progression in HE and beyond. These include:

1. Understanding the FE to HE transition

   The qualitative data indicates that it is the initial transition from FE to HE that is the most challenging. More research on this area (e.g. a longitudinal tracking of vocational learners across the first few months of study) may be useful in understanding the learner experience.

2. Raising aspirations through example

   The importance of emblematic case studies of successful vocational learners was raised by students and IAG staff. The fe2he website is an example of this. It would be useful to know how much impact this type of resource has and also to develop initiatives drawing upon face to face interaction between vocational learners in HE and FE students interested in attending HE.

3. Expanding the scope of the research

   This research has been undertaken in only one FE college and in one university. It would be instructive to carry out similar research in other educational institutions for comparative purposes.

4. ‘Doing’ career in the FE to HE journey

   The qualitative data has shown that the issue of ‘career’ is integral to progression amongst vocational learners. More research could be undertaken in the post-graduation period to unpack this complex area in relation to self-identity, decision making and ‘doing’ career development work.

5. Vocational learner withdrawal

   It would be useful in any follow-up research to interview vocational learners who have dropped out from HE. Understanding the reasons that have led them to withdraw from study at level 4 to 6 might open up opportunities for offering support or IAG that could enable vocational learners to continue.
Acknowledgements

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Contact details

Dr Wayne Clark
Senior Manager - Research & Development
CaSE (Careers and Student Employment)
1st Floor
Cavendish House
101 New Cavendish Street
London
W1W 6XH

Tel: 020 7911 5000 ext 66091

Email: W.Clarke@westminster.ac.uk

fe2he website: http://www.westminster.ac.uk/fe2he
CaSE website: http://www.westminster.ac.uk/careers
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Graduate employment destinations

University of Westminster Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) 2007/08: Non-Traditional Highest Qualification on Entry by Employment/Further Study Circumstances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Highest Qualification on Entry</th>
<th>A: Full-time paid work</th>
<th>B: Part-time paid work</th>
<th>C: Voluntary/unpaid work</th>
<th>Total in work (A, B, C)</th>
<th>D: Work and further study</th>
<th>E: Further study only</th>
<th>F: Assuming to be unemploymen</th>
<th>G: Not available for employment</th>
<th>O: Other</th>
<th>X: Explicit refusal</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>GNVQ/GSVQ level 5</td>
<td>1 50.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1 50.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 50.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1 100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 100.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>HNC or HND (including BTEC &amp; SQA equivalents)</td>
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<td>6 6.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>57 64.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dip. HE</td>
<td>4 66.7%</td>
<td>1 16.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5 83.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1 100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>NVQ/SVQ level 4</td>
<td>1 100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>ONC or OND (including BTEC &amp; SQA equivalents)</td>
<td>42 48.3%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Access course (QAA recognised)</td>
<td>28 31.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Access course (not QAA recognised)</td>
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<td>25.9%</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total Non-traditional entry 136 44.9% 32 | 10.6% | 4 | 1.3% | 172 | 56.8% | 22 | 7.3% | 16 | 5.3% | 50 | 16.5% | 7 | 2.3% | 6 | 9.9% | 30 | 9.9% | 303 |

Total 'other' qualifications on entry 133 | 2 | 45.5% | 22 | 7.7% | 44 | 1.5% | 160 | 0 | 54.7% | 8 | 9.2% | 26 | 1 | 8.9% | 8 | 76 | 11.6% | 56 | 2.6% | 45 | 1.5% | 7 | 11.5% | 2925 |

Total sample 146 | 8 | 45.5% | 25 | 7.9% | 48 | 1.5% | 177 | 2 | 54.9% | 8 | 9.0% | 27 | 7 | 8.6% | 8 | 83 | 12.0% | 38 | 2.6% | 51 | 1.6% | 7 | 11.4% | 3228 |
### University of Westminster Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) 2007/08: Non-Traditional Highest Qualification on Entry by Level of Employment

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<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>HNC or HND (including BTEC &amp; SQA equivalents)</td>
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<td>83.8%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>80.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>ONC or OND (including BTEC &amp; SQA equivalents)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Access course (QAA recognised)</td>
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<td>55.6%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
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<td>Access course (not QAA recognised)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total (non-traditional entry)</strong></td>
<td><strong>131</strong></td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td>32.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total 'other' qualifications on entry</strong></td>
<td><strong>1275</strong></td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td><strong>585</strong></td>
<td>31.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total sample</strong></td>
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<td>68.2%</td>
<td><strong>648</strong></td>
<td>31.4%</td>
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</table>
Appendix 2
Interview guide - FE Students Focus Group

1. Intro

- Introduce ourselves
- Explain project + use of data (website, report, journal article)
- Anonymous
- All consent to recording?
- Outline purpose + format of focus group

2. Student expectations of HE

- Why are you planning to go to University?
- What are the factors that will/have informed your decision to choose a particular Uni?
  + Has anyone helped you make the decision about attending Uni and which Uni to choose?
    - Prompts: Parents, FE teachers, careers advisors etc
    - Probe: How have they helped you?
- How informed do you feel about going to Uni?
  - Probe: Have you sought out info yourselves or has it been given to you?
- Have you received any information yet about the student services available at University?
  - Prompts: Accommodation; Counselling & advice; disabilities; international office; financial advice; health services; Careers services
  - If Yes, what information and where did it come from? **Probe** whether they have accessed any)
  - If No, do you think it would be useful to have information about the student services at University before you go?

3. IAG at FE

- What IAG on applying for Uni and Uni life have you been given while at college?
  - Probe: How useful have you found this?
- What IAG on careers have you been given while at college?
  - Probe: How useful have you found this?
- Is there anything you would like more info on?
- Do you think that vocational college entrants to HE need different support from A level entrants?

4. Student aspirations - career

- How important is your career to you at the moment?
- What does the term ‘career’ mean to you?
- What do you plan to do after you graduate?
- What types of careers do you want?
- How has the decision to apply to Uni been influences by your career plans?
- Do you think a degree will equip you with the skills you need for your career?
• Do you currently work? Does this relate to your career plans in any way?

• Is choosing a vocational route related to your career aspirations?

5. Financial issues

• Do you have any financial concerns about going to University? If so, what?
  o Probe whether they were put off by financial concerns at all? If so, what help them get over these concerns?
• What information have you been given about the financial support that is available to you?
  o Probe: Student loans, benefits, hardship funds, letters for council tax, student bank accounts, childcare provision, employment and workplace issues.

6. Conclusion

• What do you think is going to be the biggest challenge for you when you enter HE?

• Any further comments?
• Complete Student Details form
Appendix 3
Interview guide – HE students and HE graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Prior Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Prior educational institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course</td>
<td>Supplementary Employment</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **Student Aspirations and Expectations**

   To begin with we would like to ask you a bit about why you decided to come to university.

   1. When did you decide to apply for University? *(Probe whether they had always planned to go to university or this was a recent decision)*

   2. Why did you decide to come to University? *(Probe whether they are coming for the qualification, the experience, the skills)*

   3. Why did you choose Westminster University? *(Probe whether the student had access to information about all the institutions at which they may thrive.)*

   4. Are you studying your first choice of course? If not, why not?

   5. Did anyone help you make your decision about attending university and which university to apply for? *(Prompts: Parents, teachers, careers advisors?)*

   6. How supportive were the people around you about your decision?

   7. What do you plan to do after you graduate?

   8. Do you think that your degree will have equipped you with the skills and knowledge required for your chosen career? *(Probe specifically the skills and knowledge they either feel they have been equipped with, or are lacking.)*

2. **Information, advice and guidance**

   In the second section of the interview we are interested in the IAG you received both in FE and HE.

   9. What IAG on applying for University and University life were you given before prior to Westminster? *(Prompts: about course choices, careers, housing, finance)*

   10. What advice and guidance have you received while at the University of Westminster? *(Probe how they compared)*

   11. Are you aware of the student services available here? *(Prompts: Accommodation; Counselling & advice; disabilities; international office; financial advice; health services; Careers services)*

   i. If Yes, then how did you find out about them? *(Probe whether they have accessed any)*

   ii. If No, then do you think they would be useful to know about?

   12. Did you take part in an Induction to the University of Westminster?

   i. If yes, how useful was it? *(Probe how it was helpful,)*
and whether or not it could be improved)

ii. If no, why not? (Probe whether an induction was offered, and whether they would have found an induction to HE useful?)

13. Is there anything you wish you had been informed about before starting your course?

14. Do you think that vocational students coming from FE need more/different support in their transition to HE to students coming from more traditional (A Level) routes?

3. Financial Support

The third section of the interview is a short section specifically addressing issues of financial support as this is often perceived to be an important issue in relation to attending University.

15. Did you have any financial concerns about coming to University? If so, what? (Probe whether they were put off by financial concerns at all? If so, what help them get over these concerns?)

16. What information were you given about financial support prior coming to University? (Probe Student loans, benefits, hardship funds, letters for council tax, student bank accounts, childcare provision, employment and workplace issues.)

17. What information/support have you been given since being at university? (Probe whether they think the financial support could be improved in any way)

4. Teaching, Learning and assessment

In the fourth section we are interested in understanding your experiences of Teaching, learning and assessment while at FE and HE, and how they compare.

18. How have you found the demands of your course? (Prompt in terms of its pace, intensity, mode of study, tutor support and feedback? Probe is it easier/more difficult than expected?)

19. Has there been a change in learning styles from your previous studies? If yes, what are the changes? (Probe how they have coped with these changes, are there any skills not being utilised)

20. How have you found access to course materials at HE compared to FE? (Prompts: Supporting lectures, course handbooks, assignment briefs and schedules, library and computers.)

21. How have you found the transition from FE to HE in terms of academic support and pastoral care? (Prompts: How often they see their tutor; feedback on assignments)

NB. Explain that the following question is not to check up on their attendance, we are interested in whether students are customising their studies.

22. Do you attend all lectures and seminars?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Student experiences</th>
<th>In the fifth section we are interested in ‘student experiences’ while at FE and HE, and how they compare.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26. How flexible do you find the provision at University? (Probe does it easily fit around the rest of their lives? Was it different to FE?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Do you work alongside your studies?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. If yes, why do you work? (probe whether they feel it is beneficial or not to their studies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Have you had any work experience placements while at FE or HE? (Probe how useful these placements were, and what they gained from it)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. How satisfied are you with the opportunities you have had to undertake work placements while at FE and HE?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Do you feel that your course at Westminster is going to prepare you for the world of work? (probe in what ways do they feel prepared or unprepared for work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. How does the social life in FE compare to the social life in HE? (probe how well they coped with the transition, whether they embraced HE or stuck with FE friends)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Do you think there is a demarcation between those students who have come through an FE/vocational route with those students who have come from the more traditional A level route?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. overall</td>
<td>33. In your transition from FE to HE, what have been the biggest challenges for you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4
Interview guide – FE IAG staff

1. Routes into HE

[Emphasize the vocational entry route element of the research]

- What are the main reasons your students decide to go to University?
  - Probe: whether they go for the qualification, the experience, the skills, job prospects
- What proportion are interested in HE? IS this higher or lower than it should be in your opinion?
- How do FE applicants perceive going to HE?
- What criteria (if any) do you use when advising the HE route?
- In what circumstances is HE the right route for students, from your point of view?
- Are vocational students encouraged to go to university by the college
  - Probe: parental support/encouragement?
- In your opinion, what are the benefits for students coming from a vocational route to HE?

2. IAG at FE

- What support do you offer students applying for University?
- What type of advice and guidance does FE provide? Is there info on HE subject areas and qualifications? Is it useful to students? Do students use it? Are students advised on careers/jobs related to courses?
- What are your priorities in relation to preparing students after they leave FE? Further study? Employment? What does it depend on?
- Are there any issues you can imagine/anticipate arising for vocational students going on to HE – i.e. learning styles, assessment, pastoral care
- Preparation for HE – what form does it take?
  - Is there enough?
  - Is it useful?
  - What are the needs of FE entrants to HE?
- How important is an Induction programme for HE, to vocational students?
- Do you do any destinations tracking (i.e. do you keep in contact with former students?)
  - If so, are you aware of any transitional/progression issues from these students?
- Do you think many students are put off from attending university because of financial concerns?
  - Probe: whether these are perceived or real concerns
- Any suggested resources for FE students planning to enter HE? (inc HE + careers)
3. HE provision for VLs

- Do you think that vocational students coming from FE need more/different support in their transition to HE to students coming from more traditional (A Level) routes?

- Does HE need to be come more oriented towards the needs of FE entrants? How can this be done?

- Is there anything you think vocational students should get more information about in their transition from FE to HE?

- Do you have any good/bad case examples of FE students going to HE?

- Our stats show that is a higher drop-out/lower progression rate amongst vocational students than traditional entrants - why do you think this would be?
### Appendix 5: Coding frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest qualification on entry</th>
<th>First Degree</th>
<th>Other UG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40 Any comb of GCE 'A'/SCE 'Higher' &amp; GNVQ/GSVQ/NVQ/SVQ at Lev3</td>
<td>6693</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97 Other non-UK qualification, level not known</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 ONC or OND (incl BTEC &amp; SCOTVEC equivalents)</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 Access course (QAA recognised)</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 A-level equivalent qualification not elsewhere specified</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Foundation course at HE level</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 Baccalaureate</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 Mature -on prev exper (w/o formal APEL/APL) &amp;/or ent exams</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Other credits from UK HE institution</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 Other non-advanced qualification</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 Foundation course at FE level</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 HNC or HND (incl BTEC &amp; SCOTVEC equiv)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Access course (not QAA recognised)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 First degree of UK institution</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Other HE qualification of less than degree standard</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Graduate of other overseas institution</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99 Not known</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Graduate of EU institution</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98 Student has no formal qualification</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Dip HE</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Professional qualifications</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Cert or dip of education (non-graduate ITT qual)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Higher degree of UK institution</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Foundation Degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Graduate equivalent qualification not elsewhere specified</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 O.U. credit(s)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 GCSE/O level quals only; SCE 'O' grades &amp; Standard grades</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92 Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (APEL/APL)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 PG dip or certificate, excluding PGCE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 GNVQ/GSVQ level 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 NVQ/SVQ level 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 ACCESS course (only if COMDATE before 01/08/2002)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14&amp;15 GNVQ/GSVQ level 5 &amp; NVQ/SVQ level 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11148</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Vocational learner cohorts used in this project are highlighted as bold
## Appendix 6: Respondent profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent group</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>FE course</th>
<th>HE course</th>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>HE year of graduation</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FE students</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Access to Nursing</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Access to Nursing</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>BTEC Business &amp; IT</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>BTEC Business</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>BTEC Business</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>BTEC Business</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HE students</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Access to HE (Law)</td>
<td>LLB Law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BTEC Information Technology</td>
<td>BSc Computer Systems Technology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Access to HE Diploma (Humanities &amp; Social Science)</td>
<td>BSc Construction Management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>BTEC Health Studies</td>
<td>BSc Biomedical Science</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>BTEC Media Studies</td>
<td>BA Radio Production</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Access to HE Diploma (Law)</td>
<td>LLB Law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Access to HE Diploma (Business)</td>
<td>BA Property w/Business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Access to HE Diploma</td>
<td>BSc Psychology</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>BTEC Business Management</td>
<td>BA Business Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Access to HE Diploma</td>
<td>BSc Psychology</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduates</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Access to HE Diploma (Business &amp; Finance)</td>
<td>BA Business Management</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BTEC + HNC Building Studies</td>
<td>BSc Building Control Surveying</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>BTEC + HNC Building Studies</td>
<td>BSc Building Control Studies</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>BSc Professional Languages</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Information not provided
Appendix 7: Project outputs

1. Online resources

'fe2he' website

http://www.westminster.ac.uk/fe2he

Linking London Lifelong Learning Network invitation to bid flyer (using FE to HE Transitions as a project template)

http://www.linkinlondon.ac.uk/partners/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69%3Ainvitations-to-bid&catid=9&Itemid=40

2. Reports


3. Articles


4. Conference presentations


5. Miscellaneous presentations
