

The role of BTEC courses and colleges in supporting progression to HE: Implications for practices in HE

BTECs supporting HE progression: evidence from research

1 in 4 of all HE applicants have studied BTEC qualifications (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018)

BTECs are an entry route for those living in areas with low progression rates, working class backgrounds and BAME students. (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018; Kelly, 2017; Shields and Masardo, 2015)

Increasingly a route into HE rather than into careers (Kelly, 2017)

BTECs issues and concerns

Fewer BTEC students achieve 1st and 2:i degrees (Kelly, 2017)

High drop out rates (12% compared to 6.2% of all students) (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018)

Highest completion rates at 1994 Group institutions lowest at Russell Group institutions (Kelly, 2017)

Patchy careers advice means students are confused about routes (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018)

Mismatch of subject matter on some courses, particularly if HE courses contain scientific or mathematical component (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018)

Different modes of assessment (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018)

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Outline of the Study

Type of study: small scale qualitative research study of attitudes to and conceptions of HE

Location: de-industrialised area of multiple deprivation. Low GCSE results/ low progression rates

Participants: BTEC students in 6th Form and Further Education (FE) colleges (disciplinary clusters). 1st generation in family to progress to HE

Focus group with staff at the 6th Form College

Conceptual Framework

'Habitus' (institutional/ collective, familial and individual), 'capital' and 'field' (Bourdieu, 1986)

'... various components of institutional habitus influence the choice-making process and, concomitantly, choices of higher education' (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 39)

Possible Selves

'According to Markus and Nurius (1986), the repertoire of possible selves held by an individual at a given time is influenced by her or his past experiences, sociocultural life context, and current situation. Further, these future oriented self-conceptualizations, or possible selves, vary according to three factors: valence, level of elaboration, and psychological accessibility' (Bosker, 2009)

Conclusions and Next Steps

Rebuild collaboration between all 14-19 providers, employers and HE in order to focus on impartial CEIAG, progression, skills and routes (Hodgson and Spours, 2014)

Further and HE institutions should work much more closely together, particularly on progression routes (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018)

A focus on pedagogical connections and disciplinary fidelity

Findings

BTEC supporting HE and vocational identities

BTECs provided a progression route for students who had felt excluded from HE

Experiential learning was motivational, providing opportunities to experience and find out about career possible selves

Professional context is important

BTECs offer new learning opportunities and support the development of successful learner identities

But...

The majority of students were progressing to post-92s (wage premium associated with elite HEIs)

BTEC routes often highly gendered and influenced by family (especially in health/caring professions)

Institutional effect: FE and 6th form colleges

Moving from school to a college environment was seen to support progression to HE

FE students labelled '**B-tards**'. BTECs were viewed negatively and not as equivalent to A levels

'Natural' progression from 6th form college to HE ('a fish in water?') - promoting progression amongst students who had not considered HE as an option

Focus at the 6th Form College on progression to HE (displays, maps, mentoring, careers events, open days, personal statements) meant students tended to be better informed, better prepared and more confident

Fragile identities as HE students: familial habitus was often at odds with emerging HE identities

