



Institute of Health and Society

Allied Health and Applied Social Sciences

Preliminary Findings:

**The role of the Foundation Degree (FD)
in enabling students to achieve work place
success or progression**

Learning and Teaching Funded Project

Dawn Goodall, Lisa Mauro-Bracken, Rose Snook and Maggie Reeves

Presented at the Learning and Teaching Conference, University of Worcester

16th June 2016

Table of Contents:

Introduction.....	3
Aim and Objectives.....	3
Objectives	3
Literature Review	3
Methodology	4
Methods	4
Initial findings	4
Learning and Teaching Impact.....	5
Future areas for development.....	5
References.....	6

Introduction:

The central premise of the Foundation Degree (FD) is the role of Work Based Learning in connecting theory and practice. Further identification of the relationship between academic study and the work place is integral to developing Learning and Teaching that is in line with the Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark (2010).

Research into the impact of FD study on a student's opportunities to progress at work has been of continuing interest to the team. Another driver for this area is as a response to frequent questions from both current students and potential students at interview about the careers options that are available after study. While a number of students increasingly use the Foundation Degree to access nursing, staff are aware that this is not the only career destination of choice. Staff are keen to have a more comprehensive overview of the patterns of career choices and how the experience of the FD course has impacted those.

Aim and Objectives:

To explore perceptions around the impact of FD study on the career prospects of previous University of Worcester Foundation Degree (FD) students who graduated prior to 2014 and who are not currently studying a top-up degree at this Institution.

Objectives:

- To record the current work/study destinations of students from previous FD cohorts.
- To explore the narrative accounts of the impact of choosing Foundation Degree study on career aspiration and achievement.
- To provide teaching staff and University of Worcester (UW) Communications/Marketing with data to inform current and prospective students about the potential benefits to their career of undertaking a Foundation Degree at the University of Worcester.
- To inform further developments of the Learning and Teaching curriculum.

Literature Review:

Innovative and interesting Foundation Degrees have been specifically designed to meet an employer's needs, for example those developed in conjunction with NHS North West to develop skilled Assistant Practitioners. Other providers developed courses that sought to address the wider employment need for a more skilled work force and in some institutions Foundation Degrees have replaced the existing HNC and HND courses. The number and type of Foundation Degrees on offer to prospective students has grown from just over 4000 students enrolled in 2001 to in excess of 100,000 in 2011 (Department for Employment and Learning 2011)

Outside of the major employers who have already embraced the Foundation Degree, it has proved more difficult for students to capitalise on their academic success. In 2011 the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL 2011) determined that, of the students who had attained the Foundation Degree, only 5% saw their success recognised and rewarded by their employer. However, 43% of students who went on to study for a higher degree responded that having the qualification had helped them to find a better job.

Employers remain unaware of the value and importance of Foundation Degrees when seeking to promote and recruit new employees (Ooms et al 2011), confirmed by students responding to a DEL questionnaire (Department for Employment and Learning 2011). Rather than promotion, Foundation Degree students seem more likely to be given increased responsibilities within the role they currently perform (Snape et al 2008).

Despite the limitations on assistant practitioners' progression due to Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) accredited first degree requirement (HCPC 2015), it is important to consider how a Foundation Degree helps to raise standards by offering a better informed workforce (Griggs et al 2015). In models such as NHS North West where the role of assistant practitioner was integrated within the Foundation Degree qualification, staff gaining the Foundation Degree were seen as valuable resources and as successful Assistant Practitioners (Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) 2007). Therefore, encouraging and promoting employer involvement with the Foundation Degree development and delivery may be one of the key requisites for the successful employment prospects after graduation (Smith and Betts 2003).

Methodology:

The research took a qualitative approach. Data which had already been gathered by Careers at UW was examined to look for patterns and trends of employment since the FD began in 2008. Students were then followed up to identify current employment/study. The narratives of students were gathered using a semi-structured interview to allow a phenomenological study of the FD experience in relation to preparation for career change and development.

Methods:

A sample of 8 to 10 previous FD students was identified for interview to offer a narrative account of their perceptions around the impact of FD study on their career prospects. These students had graduated prior to 2014 and were no longer be students at the University of Worcester.

Eight students were interviewed by the student researcher to avoid any issues around power and bias. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006) was used on the transcribed interviews to identify particular areas that were seen as beneficial for career development.

Initial findings:

Academic skills are enhanced.

Values underpinning care are understood and position them to be more reflective.

Communication skills enable them to understand the strengths and needs of service users and to work with colleagues more effectively.

It is not only about destination, but about the growth of the person and capacity building.

Recognition of their abilities to achieve and to reach for new destinations was also linked to increased social and cultural capital building for the family.

Learning and Teaching Impact:

The key benefit of the project for Learning and Teaching is to better articulate the impact of a positive student engagement, not on future career aspiration as expected, but on the importance of supporting intrapersonal reflection on their own changing capacity. Students joining the Foundation Degree in 2016 will have an extended 2 full days of timetable which will be about better locating themselves at the start of their 2-year journey. They will be supported to identify their own learning needs, articulate their aspirations and recognize their transition into Higher Education. This may help address current discussions around the student as consumer of education. This is in line with Regan (2012) and the importance of students and lecturers identifying their role obligation. The future reward for articulating the shared responsibility for educational development and its attendant return should lead to higher levels of retention, better academic success and increased career progression.

Future areas for development:

Students need to be enabled to take ownership of their learning and how to work together with staff to achieve this by recognising skills and attributes they bring to the course. Therefore, an area for staff development is improving mechanisms to support students by scaffolding their learning without creating dependency.

References:

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V.(2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3 (2) pp.77-101.
- Department of Employment and Learning (2011) *Evaluation of Foundation Degree Forward*. [On-line] Available from: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/10337/1/foundation_degree_forward_evaluation_report_-_final_version.pdf. [Accessed 1 August 2015].
- Foundation Degree Forward (2011) *Foundation Degrees: Developing the Workforce of the Future in the Health and Social Care Sector Work, Earn and Learn – Turning Care into a Career*. [On-line] Available from: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/foundation-degrees-developing-the-workforce-of-the-future-in-the-health-and-social-care-sector.pdf> [Accessed 15 August 2015]
- Greenwood, M. & Little, B. (2008) *Report to Foundation Degree Forward on the Impact of Foundation Degrees on Students and the Workplace* [On-line] Available from: <https://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/CHERILSNreport.pdf>. [Accessed 5 September 2015]
- Griggs, C. , Hunt, L. and Reeman, S. (2015)),"Education and progression for support workers in mental health", *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice*, Vol. 10 Iss 2 pp. 117 – 123
- Health and Care Professions Council (2015) *Protected Titles*. [On-line] Available from: <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/protectedtitles/> [Accessed 25 August 2015]
- HEFCE (2008) *Foundation degrees Key statistics 2001-02 to 2007-08* [On-line] Available from: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/7544/1/08_16.pdf [Accessed 15 August 2015]
- Ooms, A. , Burke, L.M. , Marks-Maran, D.J. , Webb, M. & D. Cooper (2012) Students' perceptions of foundation degrees, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 36:3, 403-421
- QAA (2010) *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/foundation-degree-qualification-benchmark-may-2010.aspx> [accessed 15 March 2016]
- Regan, J-A. (2012) The Role Obligations of Students and Lecturers in Higher Education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. 46(1), 14-24.
- Smith, R. & Betts, M. (2003) Partnerships and the consortia approach to United Kingdom Foundation Degrees: a case study of benefits and pitfalls. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 55 (2)223-240.
- University Alliance (2014) *Closing the Gap: Unlocking opportunity through Higher Education*. London, University Alliance.