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| Institution: University of Derby | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 23 | | |
| Title of case study: Diverging pathways and liminal practice in further education | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2009–2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Liz Atkins | Professor of Vocational Education & Social Justice | 2018–present |
| Bill Esmond | Associate Professor | 2015–present |
| Hayley Wood | Head of Discipline: Secondary and FE ITE | 2012–present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 January 2016–31 December 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Derby researchers have drawn attention to the potential for the increasing salience of learning at work in post-16 education to widen the gap between the experiences, and potentially the outcomes, of further education (FE) students in more advantaged social categories and those in marginalised groups. This work has called attention to the need and possibilities for innovative and more socially just educational practice in the liminal spaces now emerging between education and work. Impacts of the research include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Changes to the implementation of technical education policies 2. The development of more socially just curricula for low-level learners 3. Alternative models of teacher professionalism and professional formation <p>Beneficiaries have included: Policymakers, agencies and advisory bodies: Department for Education (DfE), Education and Training Foundation (ETF), Gatsby Foundation, Edge, Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP); Further education colleges, students and educators in England and Guernsey.</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Researchers at Derby have demonstrated that international policies prioritising learning at work, and the mode of their implementation in English further education, have the potential to deepen the differentiation of young people's transitions into employment and adulthood. Increasing policy emphasis on apprenticeship routes and the workplace learning for full-time students, introduced following the Wolf and Sainsbury Reviews, have created spaces for advantaged young people to negotiate specialist learning opportunities unavailable in educational settings; whilst marginalised groups may be directed towards workplace experiences dominated by socialisation into the routines of low-skill, low-wage employment.</p> <p>This divergence creates new problems for educational practice in spaces where curricula could be reduced to the performance (or imitation) of workplace routines in the liminal spaces between education and work. These dangers are complemented by narrowing conceptualisations of teacher professionalism and teachers' professional development that also prioritise workplace practice as a substitute for underdeveloped pedagogies in vocational subjects. The following studies have made significant contributions in these areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technical education and workplace learning, 2016– Studies following the Sainsbury Review demonstrated fundamentally different processes and outcomes for the upper strata of further education students and more disadvantaged young people's experiences of learning at work. | | |

Esmond had taught in the FE sector for twelve years, gaining a Doctorate in Education from the University of Sheffield and publishing articles in the *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, before joining the University of Derby (UoD) in 2015. His study of work experience on Level 3 study programmes, funded by a grant from the Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2016–) and published in 2018, reported significant variations in student experiences across subject areas, with opportunities to negotiate placements differing across social groups [3.1].

When the DfE began to pilot industry placements, Esmond joined a team led by the Institute for Employment Studies evaluating this important project: this provided further evidence of the different ways young people were prepared for learning and labour market entry, noted in Esmond's contributions to the final reports published in 2018 [3.2].

A multi-site study by Esmond of opportunities for 'bridging' between general education and vocational routes at 18, funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, and a further study of workplace learning opportunities by Esmond and Atkins (2020), analysed the diverging social processes entailed in 'technical elite formation' and 'welfare VET' [3.3].

2. Low-attaining youth and the curriculum, 2018–

Atkins is an internationally recognised researcher in further and vocational education, who has held posts at Northumbria University (2015–2018), Federation University Australia (2014–2015), The University of Huddersfield (2011–2013) and Nottingham Trent University (2004–2011). Her studies of low-attaining youth, which began in 2009, and which have continued following her move to UoD in 2018, have theorised the educational marginalisation of low-achieving young people and informed an extended project at Guernsey College (2016–). This project has been supported by UoD via Atkins and The Rothschild Foundation since 2018 and has established possibilities for a more socially just level 1 curriculum.

The project led to a reduction in students becoming NEET ('Not in Education, Employment or Training'), sustainable transitions to work and further education, and increased achievement rates to 100% in June 2020. Findings from the project have also contributed to policy development on Applied Qualifications below Level 3 [3.4].

3. Reconceptualising teacher professionalism and professional formation, 2015–

Policy emphasis on occupational expertise has undermined established notions of teaching professionalism in favour of workplace learning models where the teacher's role is ambiguous or absent. This has raised questions about changing forms of professionalism, practice and professional formation for educators in vocational settings. Esmond and Wood's 2017 study of workshop tutors problematised 'dual professionalism' discourses at a time of precarity in the further education sector, and pointed to limited conceptualisations of pedagogy in this area [3.5]. Wood is UoD's Head of Secondary, FE and HE initial teacher education.

Esmond's work on changes in apprenticeship practitioners' roles from assessor to trainer following the Richard Review identified new possibilities for conceptualising professional development for these educators, and by extension other vocational educators [3.6].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

UoD researchers are indicated by black, underlined text:

3.1 Esmond, B. (2018) "“They get a qualification at the end of it, I think”: Incidental workplace learning and technical education in England", *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 70(2), 193–211. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2017.1393000>

3.2 Newton, R., Esmond, B. et al. (2018) *Evaluation of the industry placements pilot*. Research Report. London: Department for Education. Available at: [Evaluation of the Industry Placements Pilot \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684441/evaluation-of-the-industry-placements-pilot.pdf) (Accessed: 25-07-2020).

3.3 Esmond, B. and Atkins, L. (2020) 'VET realignment and the development of technical elites: Learning at work in England', *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 7(2), 193–213. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13152/IJRVET.7.2.4>

2. Low-attaining youth and the curriculum

3.4 Atkins, L. and Misselke, L. (2019) 'Pride and prospects: The impact of the implementation of a more socially just vocational curriculum at lower levels' in Stalder, B.E. and Nägele, C. (eds.) *Trends in vocational education and training research*. Vol. II. Proceedings of the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), Vocational Education and Training Network (VETNET). Bern, CH: VETNET, 29–37. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3358906>

3. Reconceptualising teacher professionalism and professional formation

3.5 Esmond, B. and Wood, H. (2017) 'More morphostasis than morphogenesis? The "dual professionalism" of English Further Education workshop tutors', *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 69(2), 229–245. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2017.1309568>

3.6 Esmond, B. (2020) 'Apprenticeship practitioner roles in England: Conceptualising the subaltern educator', *Vocations and Learning*, 13(2), 179–196.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12186-019-09233-0>

3.1, 3.3, 3.5 and **3.6** are peer-reviewed articles published in international journals. **3.2** is a research report published by the DfE, 6 December 2018 (additional material on specific industry routes added, 19 May 2019). **3.4** is Atkins & Misselke's report on the Guernsey project, published in the peer-reviewed proceedings of the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER), published by its vocational educational network (VETNET).

Grant funding of research projects

| Category | Funder | GRID No. | Grant No. | Total fund (GBP) | U of Derby fund (GBP) |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------|------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Technical education & workplace learning, 2016– | Gatsby | grid.453189.2 | GAT3505/HS | 19,750 | 19,750 |
| | DfE | grid.433524.7 | 2017/013 | 243,505 | 27,813 |
| | Gatsby | grid.453189.2 | GAT3398/JA | 19,900 | 19,900 |
| 2. Low-attaining youth and the level 1 curriculum, at UoD from Sept. 2018– | Rothschild Foundation | N/A | N/A | 50,000 | 25,000 (transferred) |
| 3. Challenges to teacher professionalism 2015– | Education and Training Foundation | N/A | N/A | 291,050 | 291,050 |

4. Details of the impact

The research projects listed above have had significant, multi-level impact:

| Code | Area | Direct beneficiaries |
|------|--------|---|
| e | Policy | DfE; Gatsby Charitable Foundation; and the ETF. |

| Code | Area | Direct beneficiaries |
|------|---|--|
| f | Professional practice | Practitioners and professional development bodies in English further education colleges and in Guernsey. |
| i | Understanding, learning and participation | Young people in post-16 education in English further education colleges and in Guernsey. |

1. Technical education and workplace learning

The impact of these studies reflects the engagement of Derby researchers with the implementation of policy and with consequential developments in education practice. Esmond's study of work placements on 16–19 'study programmes' was presented to the policy community at an invited Gatsby seminar with DfE representatives and invited college principals (28-06-2017) and at the Westminster Education Forum (03-07-2017); and reported in the education press (*FE Week*, 06-11-2017; *Times Education Supplement*, 15-02-2019), including publications in T Level areas (*Nursery World*, 17-09-2018). The DfE then commissioned large-scale pilots for 'T Level' industry placements in 2017–18 and Esmond joined the evaluation team led by the Institute for Employment Studies to, "co-lead ... action research elements with providers' and co-author important elements of the reports" [5.1].

This project informed the 'emerging principles' for industry placements set out in the T Level Action Plan, which noted that the evaluation had: "*helped to shape the substantial programme of support in place in 2018/19 to help post-16 providers and employers to build their capability and capacity to deliver placements*" [5.2, p. 31]. The results, as reported to the evaluation team, included specific changes to models in construction, digital and engineering routes, SEND facilities, split placements and policy teams set up to address the key challenges identified [5.1]. Related work for Gatsby on the 'bridging' provision envisaged in the Sainsbury Review, which shows the complementary difficulties of vocational pathways and students moving to general routes at HE entry, was acknowledged by the Foundation [5.3]. **This strand of research has therefore impacted both the implementation of policy (e) and young people whose experiences of placements have benefitted from improved design (i).**

2. Low-attaining youth and the curriculum

The Rothschild project on level 1 provision, building on Atkins's significant expertise on low-attaining youth, provided empirical evidence to the Guernsey state's review of a proposed restructure of post-16 education and its potentially negative impact. The proposals were subsequently withdrawn. The study has had a direct impact on students, with evidence of a year-on-year decrease in level 1 students becoming NEET, improved retention, particularly in respect of the most challenged students, in addition to improved progression to further education and sustainable employment. For example, data shows sustained improvements across a range of benchmarks (see figure 1).

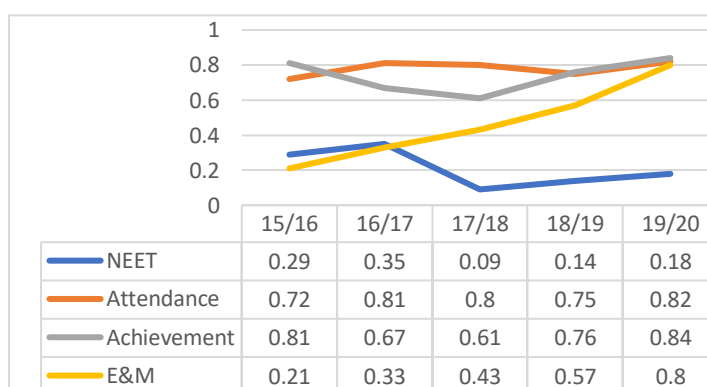


Figure 1. NEET levels, attendance, achievement and English/maths achievement over the Guernsey project duration.

Guernsey employers, who face particular recruitment problems associated with population size, are direct beneficiaries of this work (*Guernsey Press & Star*, 03-07-2019). The Rothschild project has involved working with employers as well as academics in the development of a curriculum that better articulates with the local labour market. Evidence shows significant numbers of young

people progressing from college directly into sustainable employment [5.4, 5.5]. More widely, this work, which draws attention to the possibilities of a more socially just curriculum in wider settings, has contributed since autumn 2019 to the ongoing review of Applied General Qualifications at below Level 3 [5.6]. **This research has therefore impacted on professional practice (f) and on young people whose placement experiences have benefitted from improved design (l).**

3. Reconceptualising teacher professionalism and professional formation

Derby research has provided new research context for conceptualisation of the expertise and professional formation of teachers and other educators in further education. This has generated resources promoting innovative practice in the further education sector, for apprenticeship practitioners, college higher education tutors and teachers supporting students on T Level placements. Modules developed during ETF projects on apprenticeship were trialled at 5 centres, with online CPD resources accessed by 71 trainers at 45 independent training providers (ITPs); those on college HE were trialled at 5 colleges and training organisations, with online CPD resources accessed by 91 staff at a further 12 colleges, 11 ITPs and 2 universities [5.7]. The research led to entry opportunities for apprenticeship staff onto FE teaching qualifications and alternative routes for college HE tutors. The research influenced the development of apprenticeships for FE teachers and early years educators. Wood's research-based expertise was described by a leading professional in early years as, *"fundamental to the[ir] development"* [5.8].

Atkins, Wood and Esmond presented findings on FE teachers' professional development to the Board of the development body for FE teachers, the ETF. The Board agreed, *"that there was a need for ETF to focus more on year 0–5 of the FE teacher's career"*, and consequently the need to lobby policymakers for substantial investment in professional formation [5.9]. The synthesis of our policy critique with the development of resources to support the sector has been widely shared with the FE sector via policy briefing and supporting multimedia resources. Feedback from colleges indicates the impact of this research on the work of colleges and practitioners. As a Vice-Principal who has worked with Derby researchers at more than one college has observed: *"They engage with the sector to work with professionals to consider different perspectives and research the real conditions in the sector to formulate policy or new ways of working"* [5.10]. **This strand of research has therefore impacted both on the implementation of policy (e) and on the work of practitioners (f).**

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Technical education and workplace learning

5.1 Institute for Employment Studies (IES) Deputy Director of Public Policy Research, and Project Director to the Industry Placements Evaluation: 2018 project contribution note.

5.2 Department for Education: *T Level action plan* (2018). Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779002/T_Level_action_plan_2018.pdf (Accessed: 25-07-2020).

5.3 Representative of the Education Team at the Gatsby Charitable Foundation: Email response (21-02-2019) to higher education 'bridging' project.

2. Low-attaining youth and the curriculum

5.4 Guernsey project report, December 2019.

5.5 Testimonial from the Principal at Guernsey College, corroborating impact on Guernsey College, local employers and individual students (31-10-2019).

5.6 Email from Post-16 Qualifications Review Team (October–November 2019).

3. Reconceptualising teacher professionalism and professional formation

5.7 Module resources showing practitioner support materials developed within, 2017–19.

5.8 Testimonial by Workforce Improvement Advisor on Early Years apprenticeships (16-01-20).

5.9 Chair of Education and Training Foundation, email (20-03-2019) corroborating the impact of presentations by Derby researchers, on representations made by the ETF to the DfE.

5.10 Vice-principal testimonial on Derby researchers' role in FE staff development (09-07-2020).