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**EFFECTIVE EMPLOYER  
ENGAGEMENT IN FULL TIME  
CONSTRUCTION-RELATED  
FOUNDATION DEGREES, WITH  
PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON  
WORKPLACE LEARNING**

J S D PEARSON

Ed D

2014

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WORKPLACE LEARNING**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the University of  
Northumbria at Newcastle for the degree  
of Professional Doctorate.

Research undertaken in the Faculty of  
Health and Life Sciences

January 2014

## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

All ethical clearance appropriate to the research presented in this thesis has been sought from and granted by the School Ethics Committee.

**I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 72,631 words**

Name: **John Stephen David Pearson**

Signature:

Date:

## **Acknowledgements**

Throughout my 40 years in the construction industry, spent firstly as a student, then as a practitioner and most recently as an academic, I have held the belief that “hands on” workplace learning was one of the most powerful and effective learning tools that could be given to the student. The need seems most pressing for students engaged upon Full Time study, denied the day to day experiences afforded the Part Time student, whose life is spent largely in an employment setting. I undertook my study in response to a concern that I had as to possible inequalities between the standards and content of workplace learning between differing Foundation Degree Programmes and between students sharing the same programme. I sensed that these may be due to a combination of factors, logistical as well as human, and wished to investigate these.

Now that the above is concluded I wish to thank the following, without whose assistance my own work could not have been effectively conducted, if indeed it has been ...

Firstly, those who have been the most immediate help to me; my supervisors Dr. Nicola Reimann and Rosie Cunningham, Emeritus Professor. In the early days they both nobly took over from others. Ever since, both have been a constant source of help and advice, long suffering and remarkably patient in the face of my stumbling to reach the required quality and style. If and where I have failed in this I have only myself to blame...Thank you.

Also the Employers, Academics (Providers) and Students who supplied me with data and/or granted me interviews but who, by virtue of the nature of my research, must remain anonymous. .. Thank you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to the creators of Foundation Degrees, effective employer engagement involves participation in programme design and review, together with the provision, delivery and assessment of content: also the offer of workplace learning.

The principal focus of the current study is the management and assessment of workplace learning modules for full time built environment Foundation Degrees, and the participation in this of each stakeholder group: providers, employers, students and Professional Bodies. Certain factors have been identified, deemed critical to the success of this essential element of the curriculum. Nowhere in the existing literature are the perspectives of all the stakeholders, sometimes conflicting, brought together in a single empirical study, particularly one which takes account of current recessionary pressures.

The current study, qualitative in nature, examines the standpoint of each stakeholder: seeking their interpretation and experience of, and satisfaction with, workplace learning in the light of their own needs and expectations, and identifying common ground. Data is drawn from questionnaires and interviews involving representatives of all stakeholder groups, focusing in particular on six providers offering contrasting examples of practice, and the employers, students and Professional Bodies associated with each. All interviewees were asked for indicators of successful workplace learning, for the factors which in their experience promoted and sustained effective engagement, and for any possible barriers to this.

Various forces are found to operate upon the stakeholders, ranging from large-scale commercial pressures (particularly in time of recession) to small localised issues. Employer engagement calls for relationships involving understanding, commitment, sustained effort and effective communications on the part of all key stakeholders and not just the employer. There is room for greater standardisation of the management and assessment of workplace learning, and some form of framework is thought desirable by the majority of respondents, although nothing too prescriptive. A draft framework has been created which seeks to satisfy as much as possible the needs and expectations of all the key stakeholders, based on the critical success factors referred to above. Whilst Professional Bodies are generally respected by the other parties, their present input to and control over workplace learning appears limited.

The findings of this study are intended to inform all parties to construction-related vocational education, particularly those involved in the provision of Foundation Degrees or Honours Degrees, where a period of workplace learning is a required element.

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## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

<b>APC</b>	Assessment of Professional Competence - the final stage in the admissions process to the RICS for holders of Honours Degrees – not taken until one or two years after graduation.
<b>ATC</b>	Assessment of Technical Competence - the final stage in the admissions process to the RICS (Technician Grade) for holders of Foundation Degree – not taken until one or two years after graduation.
<b>BIM</b>	Building Information Management – a revolutionary system for design, costing and management within and of the whole construction process.
<b>BTEC</b>	Sub- Degree level technical qualification, superseded by HMNC/HND in mid 1990s.
<b>CAD</b>	Computer aided design – mainly the province of Architects, though the QS and Construction Manager will use CAD drawings as a routine part of their work.
<b>CIBSE</b>	The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers – a professional governing body.
<b>CIOB</b>	The Chartered Institute of Builders, the professional body for Construction Managers.
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development – in-service-training , usually a stipulated requirement of Accrediting Professional Bodies once a qualified member – some is also offered to students.
<b>CSF</b>	Critical Success Factors.
<b>FD(s)</b>	Foundation Degree(s).
<b>fdf</b>	Foundation Degree Forward, established in 2003 by the (then) Department for Education and Skills, closed down June 2011. Fdf was initially tasked with developing innovative approaches to the creation and running of Foundation Degrees, with a very clear focus on establishing employer engagement in Foundation Degree development.
<b>FE</b>	Further Education / the FE sector.
<b>FT</b>	Full Time (students) – in this context those who are enrolled as full time students and with employers just for the period(s) of workplace experience.
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education / the HE sector.
<b>HNC/HND</b>	Higher National Certificate / Higher National Diploma – the Full Time and Part Time pre-cursors of the FD in most institutions –some still running.
<b>Hons</b>	BSc. Honours Degree – onto which successful FD students may progress.

<b>ICE</b>	The Institute of Civil Engineers, the professional body for Civil Engineers.
<b>Interns</b>	Persons engaged to learn and perform basic professional tasks, usually for little or no pay.
<b>NVQ</b>	National Vocational Qualification.
<b>PT</b>	Part Time (students) – in this context those who are in ongoing employment but enrolled on FD programme as a part time student.
<b>Provider(s)</b>	Educational Institutions offering Foundation Degree Programmes.
<b>QAA</b>	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.
<b>QS</b>	Quantity Surveyor(s).
<b>RICS</b>	Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the professional body for Quantity Surveyors.
<b>SME(s)</b>	Small to Medium Enterprises (low staffing levels) – The majority of employers within the Construction sector would be classified as such.
<b>WBL</b>	Work Based Learning – a term used to cover any learning born of exposure to and use of materials obtained from, or based upon those available within the work place. A term used by some to also encompass work place learning.
<b>WRL</b>	Work Related Learning – as above.
<b>WPL</b>	Workplace Learning – The term I have adopted, meaning learning born explicitly of hands-on experience gained through a placement in the workplace.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **1.1. Introduction to this chapter**

This chapter introduces the background to my study of the engagement by employers with Foundation Degrees (FDs) in a part of the Construction Sector. This highlights and begins to explain the differing perspectives of the principal stakeholders involved; employers, providers, students and Professional Bodies.

#### **1.2. The subject of this research**

All those involved in the provision of vocational education appear to appreciate the value of including within the curriculum at least some element of practical Work Based Learning (WBL). This can be either simulated within the classroom, when it might more accurately be described as Work Related Learning (WRL), or offered through some form of industrial placement, a period spent in a workplace setting, which I shall refer to within my study as Work Place Learning (WPL).

The terminologies used above have led to discussion elsewhere;

*“This is because of the absence of any agreed definition and universal understanding of what constitutes work-based learning. In addition, confusion exists about the different terms such as ‘work-based’, ‘work-related’ and ‘work place’ learning” (Gresson,2005:20)*

Longhurst, (2009) addresses the question “what is work-based learning” from the perspective of the Fdf

The matter is explored further in sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.2. herein

The construction industry presents its own particular characteristics and indeed some very real physical dangers, as witnessed by accident reports by The Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2011). Most practitioners believe that education for entry to any of its trades or professions must incorporate at least some period of hands-on experience within the workplace.

FDs, the first examples of which date from the early 2000's, were the epitome of a hands-on approach to vocational education, stipulating a combination of classroom and workplace learning. Wilson et al. (2005) details the background to and early development of FD programmes, .Developed initially in response to Dearing (NCIHE,1997) these were

aimed primarily at employers seeking to increase the skills of their existing workforce. The then Secretary of State for Education, referring to plans for the creation of a new “Foundation Degree” (DfEE,2000) spoke of HE as “*a continuum of learning*” (Blunkett,,2000). Blackstone, (HEFCE,2000) joined the latter in providing economic and social arguments which served as drivers for FDs. All this was picking up on policy developments regarding intermediate qualifications in the U.S.A. (Ostermann,1999)

As will be seen, FD provision has expanded beyond the realm of Part Time (PT) mature students, over half of the current student body being in Full Time (FT) study, their WPL provided through periods spent on placement with appropriate employers.

From its outset the FD called for close working relationships between educational providers and the relevant industry or profession. They recommended a partnership of equal status between these two stakeholders with a mutual involvement in the development, delivery and assessment of learning. Gallacher et al. (2009:7-8) refer to QAA (2004), one of the documents which expressly called for “*authentic and innovative work-based learning as an integral part of Foundation Degrees and their design*” - a philosophy explored in more depth in Chapter 2.

The FD model is worthy of consideration by all involved in the provision of vocational education. However, it appears that in most cases, whilst reasonable working relationships exist between the parties, seldom are shared development, delivery and assessment all in evidence. Various factors militate against these QAA criteria. In some cases a remedy may be possible, whilst in others matters appear to lie beyond the control of the parties concerned. Effective employer engagement would seem to be key to this. However, not only the extent to which employers engage with other stakeholders but also at the extent to which other stakeholders engage with them must be considered.

This study focuses chiefly on WPL provided for FT Students on FDs in a part of the construction sector. It examines the principles underlying WPL within the FD, both immediately and in the wider context of the qualification, seeking to establish both its importance and its viability. An attempt will be made to create a framework, populated by certain guidelines based on Critical Success Factors (CSF), my own nomenclature, matters deemed to be critical if workplace learning is to satisfy all possible stakeholders. Whilst sandwich degrees operate to different timescales it is suggested the above analysis and its conclusions may also be of some relevance in this much larger field.



### 1.3 Practice Context

Over the most recent 26 years, my personal roles at Northumbria University (UNN) have involved me in the development, delivery and assessment of a range of subject matter on various construction-sector programmes. These have covered Professional Exams, BTEC, via HND or HNC to Sandwich and Masters Degrees through distance learning and for most of the past 10 years, Foundation Degrees. The strong vocational thread running through all of these, and the need to locate academic studies in a setting appropriate to the intended working one, is integral to students' success.

Work in the construction sector is rarely totally office-bound, concerned only with dry words or figures. Construction education calls for delivery and, where possible, assessment of some hands-on experience. Seldom is experiential learning so evident as where a student is up to his or her knees in mud, more rain is due and there is work still to be done!

Most student feedback suggests a demand for accurate, topical teaching materials, informed by current practice. The highest scoring programmes at UNN in the National Student Survey (NSS) are those offering higher proportions of hands-on experience, study visits, and work experience. NSS (2011 and 2012).

Since their creation, FDs have been increasingly populated by FT students, school-leavers some of them. These last impose a special onus on those responsible for delivery and assessment to incorporate as much work-based material as possible, coupled with as much hands-on experience as curricula, timetable and the local economy will allow.

The challenges to the provision of effective WPL within construction FDs are familiar to all those acquainted with the construction industry. Firstly, the diverse nature and scale of construction operations create difficulties in applying specific learning outcomes.

Price, and Edmond, (2006:77) warn of the possibility of "*different experiences of learning for different students on the same programme*"

Secondly, the whole industry is experiencing negative effects from the recent economic recession,

*"The latest UK Construction Industry Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), published today, reveal the impact on the industry of the harsh market conditions endured over*

*the last four years, with average profitability falling to a new low of 2.7%, in marked contrast to the 9.9% seen in 2009. The KPIs are based upon data from thousands of*

*construction projects completed during 2011 and are produced for the industry by Glenigan and Constructing Excellence with the support of BIS". (Parker,.2012)*

*"The construction sector has been affected disproportionately since the recession of 2008. In 2007 the construction sector accounted for 8.9% of UK GVA, but by 2011 [this had] declined to 6.7%. In early 2012 the construction contracting industry returned to recession for the third time in five years." (DBS,2013:v)*

*"Overall, greater consumer uncertainty and restricted credit conditions since 2008 have dampened demand for a range of construction products" (DBS,2013:7)*

The above present very real threats to any provider's expectation of a certain level or type of office or site experience for their students. Finally, there is the difficulty of maintaining Employer Liaison Committees generally. Initial enthusiasm and desire to engage with education at the first meeting is followed by diary difficulties at the second meeting and a third meeting will usually prove totally impossible.

Add to the above, threats to the continued existence of FDs within the Higher Education (HE) sector. These include changes to education funding, (Longhirst,2011) the drive within some provider institutions towards a research-rich persona, a possible elitism (Green, 2006:29) coupled with the requirement for ever-higher entry standards and concern at lower retention rates on FD programmes; 82% FD, 88.6% average. (Academic Standards,2011:5) . Interviews reveal that a growing number of universities are abandoning their FD programmes. Increasingly, provision is being left to the Further Education (FE) sector. There are doubts, voiced specifically by one of my own interviewees, about whether their quality can be maintained, particularly regarding the workplace learning components.

My study and the resulting proposals are made from a belief in the strong educational value of experiential WPL as a component of vocational education. This thesis seeks to facilitate effective WPL in the face of moves away from such provision, offering a workable framework in which, hopefully, this can be achieved.

#### **1.4. Aims and Objectives**

##### **Aim**

This research aims to identify factors critical to the success of the relationships and interactions between the different stakeholders in Construction-related FDs, and to create a strategic framework for effective employer engagement.

## **Objectives**

The main objectives of this research are:

1. To review the historical development and rationale for the operation of FDs.
2. To examine the pedagogical significance of workplace learning to FD Programmes within the construction sector.
3. To examine, through previous studies, factors governing the relationships between the stakeholders, their capacity for and inclination towards engagement.
4. To conduct empirical research amongst key stakeholders into their part in the conduct of workplace learning within FDs, examining the level of engagement of each, particularly that of the employer.
5. To review the perceptions of each stakeholder group regarding others.
6. To critically review the role of the Professional Bodies.
7. To identify factors instrumental to the effectiveness of work based learning within the FD – referred to herein as Critical Success Factors (CSF).
8. To develop a draft framework for the effective collaboration and engagement of all stakeholders, informed by the CSF developed above.

### **1.5. Research Question**

How important is effective employer engagement to the successful execution of workplace learning as an element of a Full Time Foundation Degree within the constraints of a Construction –related setting, and what are the success factors critical to this?

### **1.6. Background to the Foundation Degree**

#### **1.6.1. General History**

The FD was created early in the present century, in a climate of general expansion within the FE sector. Industry generally was perceived as suffering an in-house skills shortage. Greenwood et al. (2008:5) tell of a succession of Skills White Papers (2003,2005) and a Further Education White Paper (2006) suggesting an increasingly demand-led system of skills training, specifically to meet employers' needs. Leitch (2006:13-14) in his report highlighted the degree to which the UK as a whole continued to fall behind its main international competitors in provision of skills training. In response, the Government of the day, in 2007, set the goal of the UK being a world leader in skills by 2020, with 36% of

adults being qualified to Level 4 or above.

*“Foundation degrees are indelibly linked to the wider economic policy agenda around developing the intermediate level workforce skills which are seen to characterise associate professional and advanced technician levels of employment.”*

Little (2005) examined the relationship between employers' needs and the vocational education available to their employees, both current and prospective. Traditionally, employers had neither seen, nor expected, a good match between vocational qualifications and their own needs. Little previously tested the strength of the relationship through a series of interviews with employers and professional bodies (Little, 2005:3). Engineering/ Construction employers tended to trust Higher National Certificate / Higher National Diploma (HNC/HND) and other sub-degree qualifications as equipping their potential workforce appropriately. They felt that the HNC or HND offered good training, with the opportunity of progression onto higher academic studies. Since it emerged that many employers had themselves taken the latter, this trust is perhaps understandable.

Even prior to the creation and widespread take-up of the FD, the sub-degree qualifications (BTEC and then HNC/ HND) were seldom seen as an end in themselves, but rather as steps on the qualification ladder, leading better students on, through Honours Degrees, to eventual professional qualifications. Statistics provided in Little's (2005) study suggest that those with just an HND generally did not progress beyond associate professional or technical levels whereas those with first or higher degrees were more likely to progress to professional or management positions. The suggestion is made that HNCs/HNDs have been made more “*academic*” in order to ease the passage from HNC to Hons Degree. For some, FDs are perceived as retaining a more “*practical*” aspect which one employer involved in the above study suggested would be “*much more relevant to [the students'] needs*”. It is suggested that if FD holders use it as a stepping stone to move up through the Hons Degree route (as was the case with HNC/HND), rather than step-off at this point, then there will be no distinctive role or place for the FD (Little, 2005:145). The question is posed by Little (2005:135) as to the value of the FD in itself when new posts in industry tend to be filled by holders of Hons Degrees, particularly in recessionary times. This concern is shared by another author (Gibbs, 2002:203)

Price and Edmund (2006:74) suggest that the FD is;

*“Not just about filling a gap in level of award but creating a new kind of HE Programme.”*

Even today, some years after its establishment, it appears that few employers are creating posts specifically for those with FD qualifications only.

Longhurst, (2007:5) illustrates how, many years after their creation there is still contention over the “vocational” label, this last being associated by some stakeholders with something less challenging, and “dumbed-down”

### 1.6.2. Foundation Degrees within the Construction Industry

National figures for the sector between 2006 and 2009 (the latest published in this format) support the strong trend towards FT students on FD programmes.

**Table 1:1 Number of Students enrolled on Architecture, Building and Planning FD ( Based on HEFCE 2010, Key Statistics, tables 12 and 13 )**

No of Students	2006-07	2007-0 8	2008-09
Part Time	585	665	565
Full Time	275	420	565

At UNN the FD route was created specifically to accommodate applicants lacking adequate qualification levels for direct entry to an Honours Degree (Hons). For this group of students the FD served as a way into FT Hons degree education for, amongst others, school leavers. As explained above, this route was not the scenario envisaged by the original founders of the qualification.

The presence of a significant cohort of FT students within what is essentially a PT qualification increases the need for the incorporation of a specific work-related learning element if the QAA’s vision is to be satisfied. Whilst PT students can be assumed to be receiving a substantial body of WPL, a FT student cannot. This lack is reinforced, in the context of the FD, where the work place is seen as a principal, if not the principal place of learning. (Burke et al.,2009:16)

**1.7. The Stakeholders** Of those involved in the situation under review, each has a part to play in the equation: the manner and extent to which they work together, it is suggested, must determine the effectiveness of the student’s learning experience.

**1.7.1. Provider:** the academic institution at which the FD has been developed and by whose staff it is now delivered and managed. For FT students the provider incorporates a period of workplace learning when designing the FD. This study has looked

in some depth at 6 selected HE institutions though the FE sector is also a provider of FDs.

**1.7.2. The Employer:** An organisation working within the construction sector, providing work experience at their offices (or at a building site), to FT students. Usually such work placements are unpaid and for a relatively short period not exceeding two months.

**1.7.3. The Graduate / former student:** for the purposes of this study, the term “student” unless stated otherwise, applies to a FD graduate within the construction sector, associated with one or other of the providers.

**1.7.4. The Professional Body;** to which trainees and employees within the construction sector may aspire to belong. In this case The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, (RICS), The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE). As will be seen, they are involved to varying degrees depending upon whether or not they accredit the provider’s FD programme. The principal Professional Bodies associated with the construction sector date from the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Without exception, their formation pre-dates by decades the creation of the FD.

Originally, all such bodies set their own professional entrance examinations, focussed on testing specific technical skills. As degree programmes have evolved, Professional Bodies have looked increasingly to these as a measure of the potential professional competence of applicants, relinquishing their own hold. This is specifically stated by the RICS, for example, in their training guidance

*“Up until 1994 the RICS ran its own examinations, but since [then] there has been a progressive change towards qualification through accredited courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. “ (RICS,2008, cited in Perera and Pearson, 2013:9)*

Gradually, multi-stage professional examinations were abolished, entry resting on the outcome of a single “Assessment of Professional Competence”, (APC) taken after the candidate’s acquisition of an accredited degree. Whilst no longer having direct control over the day-to-day learning and assessment of candidates for membership, some influence can still be exercised through the accreditation process. The overall curriculum and syllabus for a programme seeking accreditation still has to be cleared with representatives of the Professional Body in question. This retains some influence over content and, to some extent, standards.

More recently, two of the above professions have lessened their hold over the Hons Degrees and/or FDs associated with their discipline. In addition, the CIOB allows entry by

students from degree courses which they have not actually accredited, though without allowing credit for any WPL acquired within these.

Those operating academic programmes are aware of the core competencies stipulated by each Professional Body and will generally be guided by these, thus assisting their students in any subsequent attempt at gaining professional qualification, and adding some strength to the relationship between professions and academia.

## **1.8. The Background to the Construction Industry Sector**

### **1.8.1. Structure of the industry**

*“ an overwhelming [number] of small firms with only a handful of workers, restricting the possibility of developing a rigid internal division of labour and specialisation.”*  
(Gherardi, 2006:121)

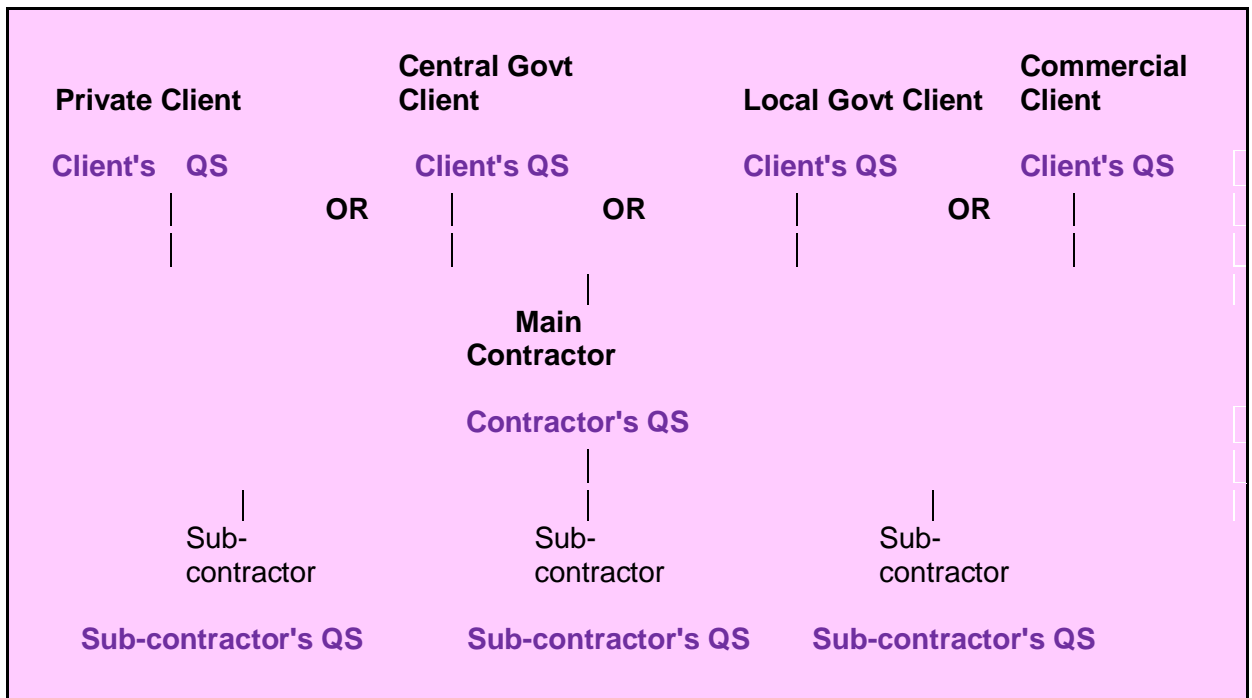
Although a description of the Italian construction industry, the above would be equally true of much of the UK construction sector. Almost any textbook or experienced commentator will characterise the construction industry as both fragmented and litigious.

(Cartlidge,D.,2011:3; Ashworth, & Hogg, 2007:4) . By “litigious” they refer to the stance taken by the parties against one another in many of their business dealings. By “fragmented” they are referring to the fact that the industry is subdivided into groupings: clients, (who might be private, Central or Local Government, or commercial concerns); main contractors and sub-contractors (who may be major companies or two-man operations). Consequently, the Supply Chain is a complex one. (Cartlidge, 2013:3-5 )

I have represented the above groupings myself in Fig. 1.1.below. Projects can vary enormously in size and value, from a small domestic kitchen extension worth, say, £15,000 up to the London-based Cross Rail Project worth £15 Billion. In all cases, the financial and legal dealings between the parties are managed, to a greater or lesser extent, by the Quantity Surveyor (QS)

A student seeking a work placement is faced with a large and potentially confusing set of options, as shown. The nature of their experience will be determined in the first place by their position on the above chart and secondly by the amount and precise type and scale of work with which their particular employer is involved. To this add the problems caused by the recession. This matter is addressed in section 1.8.3, below.

**Figure 1:1. Employment/WPL options for the Quantity Surveyor.**



### 1.8.2. Role of the QS; some detail

#### Aspects of training a QS – Is mud is important ? – a personal reflection

Most research literature looks at the construction industry as a whole. Indeed, the QS is just one player within the sector. Is there anything about the QS and his/her working practices which would justify any more, or any less, training specifically based within the workplace, or is it a training that could be carried out entirely through the medium of simulated exercises ?

This depends on the academic's opinion of what training in the workplace should be about. If WPL is concerned chiefly with the "atmosphere" of the workplace and ways of working, then the QS gains from it as much or as little as any other would-be construction professional. If all the necessary skills of the QS are seen as, essentially, paper-based then what is the case for WPL?

The different respective roles of the Client's and the Contactor's QS are summarised in **Appendix A**.

The private practice QS is, for the greater proportion of their professional life, an office-bound creature whilst the contractor's surveyor is, for most of theirs, site-based, in the



thick of the action and possibly given quite a lot of responsibility. The two “sides” will come together whenever the client’s QS is sent out to meet the contractor’s QS for the purposes of carrying out and agreeing valuations. Some of the richest learning experiences for the student could be those which are the muddiest. Carrying out a pricing exercise in a warm classroom when it’s snowing outside is one thing; carrying out the same exercise in a cold site hut when it’s snowing is another.

In this way, WPL can be seen as having two important components. Firstly there is what you do and secondly there is where and how you do it. The latter is, I suggest, important to the learning experience. It is not impossible that a student who always performs excellently in classroom exercises (and even goes on to gain First Class Hons) may fare less well (and be less of an asset to their employer) when faced with cold and damp, and real adversaries.

If workplace experience is primarily character- and self-confidence-building, both types of QS will benefit from WPL, whether this be in a professional office or on site, as will those in the other disciplines covered by this study.

### **1.8.3. Practicalities – the effects of recession**

Employers declare a clear preference for new employees who have already spent some time working in the Industry, a finding supported by research amongst over 300 RICS professionals (Perara and Pearson, 2011:38) and also by Canter (2006:24). However, a growing number of firms within the construction sector are currently unable to provide effective training to students, through placement openings, whether FD or Hons. The overall effects of recession on turnover in the construction industry have been well documented both within the construction press and more widely, as has the consequent fall-off in the number of full time or placement opportunities;

*“....one of the first findings from the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study - Construction workplaces suffered worse effects from the recession than any other major sector when looked at through the eyes of employees. ...72% of those employed in construction thought the recession had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of an adverse impact on their workplace. This compared with 47% across all industries” (Green, 2013)*

The above report goes on to detail typical management responses to recessionary pressures, namely, 21% respondents reporting compulsory or voluntary redundancy, 28% reporting recruitment freezes and 16% reporting cuts to training budgets

Specifically, within the surveying profession Perera and Pearson (2011:9) found a 30% decline in employer willingness to take on QS placement students. Where firms can still take on students (and a number are doing this by providing unpaid internships) they are unlikely to be able to offer the variety of work opportunities that they could ten years ago. Within any particular firm there is far less likely to be a range of projects up-and-running, of differing values and complexity. Thus a typical student, though they may secure a placement, will almost certainly be denied the chance to see one or more jobs through from start to finish, or to work on various stages and elements of (say) a major hospital or the like. This must influence the level and type of practical experience which can be relied upon by the provider, to supplement classroom-based studies, thus begging the question “what is a reasonable expectation of the work place experience?” How reasonable is it to expect the delivery within the workplace of specific Core Skills as set out by Professional Bodies, for example the RICS (2009)? Should we, instead, expect only the “soft” generic skills which may be universally available still, but which could be said to fail the test set by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher education (QAA, 2004) and others, looking in part for training in specific professional skills.

### **1.9. Overview of further chapters**

#### **Chapter Two:**

Explores literature relevant to the aims, objectives and research question and particularly the nature of learning within the workplace, the practicalities of its provision, its appropriate assessment within the curriculum and the overarching theme of engagement by the employer and others.

#### **Chapter Three:**

Examines the methodology underpinning this study, that of the Practitioner Researcher, offering a justification of the practical methods employed, and demonstrating the process undertaken.

#### **Chapter Four:**

Provides an overview of the findings of the research undertaken for this study. Results from each of the four principal stakeholders are reported and reviewed, both in their respective groupings and collectively.

**Chapter Five:**

Offers a discussion of the findings from the above research tested against the literature reported on in Chapter Two, above. It explains the basis for the creation of Critical Success Factors (CSF) and offers a framework within which these might be operated.

**Chapter Six:**

The thesis concludes with a summary of suggested Critical Success Factors (CSF) born of this study, demonstrating their place within the Draft Strategic Framework.

**1.10. Conclusions to this chapter**

In this chapter WPL has been introduced and set in context within the FD. It has been suggested that successful engagement by the stakeholders can be influenced by a number of factors. These will be studied further.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **LITERATURE – PREVIOUS STUDIES REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction to this chapter**

Through this chapter I seek to address Objectives 2 and 3, below, from a theoretical perspective, and objectives 6 and 7, below, through available literature from my own and other disciplines.

1. To examine the pedagogical significance of workplace learning to FD. Programmes within the construction sector.
2. To examine, through previous studies, factors governing the relationships between the stakeholders, their capacity for and inclination towards engagement.
6. To critically review the role of the Professional Bodies.
7. To identify factors instrumental to the effectiveness of work based learning within the FD – referred to herein as Critical Success Factors (CSF).

The chapter begins with a review of the WPL component within the FD; learning situated in the context of hands-on experience within the workplace, as opposed to simulations or project work conducted within the classroom setting ( more commonly under the umbrella of Work Based Learning). The vital role of employers in facilitating WPL will be studied next, drawing on their own perspectives as well as those of the others comprising the partnership essential to effective WPL. Next, literature relating to the pedagogical issues relating to WPL, its delivery and assessment and the manner and extent to which it relates to traditional classroom-based studies will be reviewed. The work of two key proponents of WPL is drawn on for some guiding principles. Finally simulation is considered in some depth in order to highlight key differences between this and WPL. The chapter will conclude with reflection on the key factors emerging as critical to the success of work place learning, maximising the involvement and effectiveness of each of the key stakeholders.

It might be supposed that the study entitled “Foundation Degrees in the Construction Sector; Analysis of Views of Key Stakeholders” (Construction Skills, 2008) might have achieved much that I have set out to do. However, whilst this study is fairly recent, and explores many facets of the issue, its sample size is very small (only 3 employer bodies were involved compared with 20 providers), no interviews were conducted to further detailed understanding and there was no relationship between any of the parties involved,

whereas I am aiming for some direct triangulation. Furthermore, it does not include students amongst its subjects, and neither does it particularly address issues relating to FT programmes nor WPL.

## **2.2. Work Place Learning - The FD Perspective**

### **2.2.1. Work Place Learning – a vital component**

Research carried out by Reddy,P. & Moores,E.(2011) concludes that the vast majority of students benefit from a period of WPL. Although their work related to Placement Years it is suggested here that the same will be true for students engaged on FDs.

Suggested definitions are born of various researchers' perceptions of WPL and their views of its appropriate volume and status within vocational education. Providers see a need for at least some proportion of the curriculum to encompass practical work-place skills. Whether such an association can be achieved effectively and satisfactorily merely through appropriate classroom exercises (WBL) or needs actual hands-on experience within the work place (WPL), is a debate crucial to my study. Without WPL, employer engagement takes on a different meaning, one still requiring some contact between providers and employers (the latter the source of materials to use in classroom simulations or project work) but asking little or nothing of the employer in terms of supervision, assessment or ongoing commitment. It is a debate which requires some understanding of what others have seen as the relative merits of each (WBL or WPL) as learning tools. "Learning", its delivery and assessment, is easier to measure in classical pedagogic terms in a classroom setting; less so in the varied and unpredictable world of the workplace. This last can be very enriching for the student but its content is not as easy to standardise or assess. Where should the emphasis lie within the framework of the FD?

### **2.2.2. Justifying the Workplace Connection – definitions**

*" At the heart of all Foundation degrees lies the idea of Work Based Learning "* (QAA, 2004).

As stated at the outset of this study, the FD was founded on the basis of WPL, requiring active employer engagement. Section 2.3 will begin to consider the extent to which this is perceived to be lived out in reality. What is certain, for it is clearly stated, is that where those who first developed the FD referred to WPL they envisaged a student's presence in the workplace. The following statements are taken from QAA (2010).

*“Authentic and innovative work-based learning are an integral part of Foundation Degrees and their design..... it involves the development of higher-level learning within both the institution and the workplace ... it should be a two- way process .... including real work environments.” (para.23)*

In this statement, learning and work are closely interlinked within FD programmes.

HEQC (2004:29) defines work-based learning as follows

*“ A component of a learning programme that focuses on the application of theory in an authentic, work-based context. It addresses specific competencies identified for the acquisition of a qualification, which relate to the development of skills that will make the learner employable and will assist in developing his/her personal skills. Employer and professional bodies are involved in the assessment of experiential learning, together with academic staff. “*

This suggests, again, that an employer is involved, and that the experience, or some part at least, is gained through active exposure to the workplace. Note the inclusion, within the final sentence above, of three out of four of the main potential stakeholders.

A number of authors support the above interpretation and vision, for example.

*“There can be no single or simple definition of what work-based learning entails beyond the notion that it is about learning (not teaching) and occurs in the workplace (rather than on the campus).” (Brennen et al. 2005:4).*

*“Work-based learning... is the means through which a discipline is delivered, not the discipline to be studied. So work based learning is not a subject of study – it is a mechanism for learning.” ( Gray, 2001:4).*

*“Authentic and innovative WBL opportunities are integral to the programme enabling students to take on real roles within the workplace and giving them the opportunity to learn and apply new skills and knowledge.” (Burke et al. 2009:16).*

Implicit in the above perhaps is the suggestion that the context is an essential component, as much as content perhaps.

### **2.3. WBL: – Employer Engagement and the Employer’s Role**

*“The role of employers in foundation degrees emerge[s] as a complex theme ... involved in the provision of work experience... involved relatively little in course delivery or assessing student work. “ Benefer et.al.(2009(1):4)*

The FD machine was born of, and related research continues to be mostly directed at, the provision of education and training for employees of existing commercial organisations and measures aimed at maximising its success. This tone runs strongly through the majority of the published literature, for example;

*“There is much yet to be done to encourage employers to use the services of higher education as a tool for workforce development.” (Gittus and Hemsworth,2006:4)*

Burch and Greenwood (2008) are amongst very few authors looking specifically at the planning or delivery of Full Time provision. Others include Yorke, 2010 and Higgins et al.,2010. They set a very enthusiastic agenda, one might even suggest idealistic, for employer engagement, one which findings from other research, my own included, suggest it may not be so easy to achieve.

### 2.3.1. Definitions

The broad characteristics of employing organisations have been viewed already (1.7.2). What constitutes “engagement”?

One of the QAA benchmarks for FD is that employers should be involved in every part of the programme including “*development, monitoring and delivery*” ;

**“delivery of course materials and work based modules, assessment of learning outcomes as well as delivery of a supportive learning environment** .“ (QAA,2010:paras 20 & 25)

*“Employers should, where possible, be involved in the assessment of work-based learning .... it may be necessary to provide **support in the form of mentoring or other types of professional development**.”* (QAA,2010:para.48)

*“Employers should **participate in the regular review** of those Foundation Degree programmes they are involved in ... **review should involve feedback from all work-based learning providers**.”* (QAA,2010:para.52)

The above excerpts encapsulate certain key issues (my enlargement and highlighting) within effective employer engagement as set out by the QAA, which will inform my own study. The study will chiefly examine possible difficulties in implementing these ideals in the context of FT provision.

Stinton et al. (2007) who conducted detailed survey of results from 157 FD programmes including a mix of course Materials , questionnaire returns and interviews considered the extent of integration between workplace and college, and how employer engagement can become more efficient. It emerges “*not surprisingly*”, they say, that employer effectiveness is greatest where employers are fully engaged in all aspects of the FD . Continued contact of a positive nature between the parties concerned will do much to support the venture, it is suggested, once it has been established. They recommend more staff exchange between education and the workplace. (2007:195)

Richard Benefer (2006:112) and (2007:211) provides justifications for the incorporation of WPL within vocational education, arguing that engagement has never been so important in trying to meet the Government’s requirements for an up-skilled workforce. Current

policy from Government and Professional Bodies such as the RICS for “employability” within the curriculum supports this approach. Aled Williams refers to the RICS requirement, since 2001, for a measure of employability of graduates in its accreditation documentation (Williams,A.,2004:154). Other Professional Bodies follow suite.

The precise extent, nature and quality of an employer’s engagement in the FD must depend both upon their willingness and capacity, this last both in terms of having appropriate skills within their organisation and having an appropriate type and volume of work available.

### **2.3.2. Levels of engagement**

Powell (2006:49) reports findings from his study into employer awareness of FDs; 40% had heard of FD programmes. All of his respondents believed that investing in their business was beneficial, but only 54% encouraged existing staff to obtain an HE level qualification. 22% expressed an interest in in-house bespoke programmes.

The above is supported by the findings of Perera and Pearson (2011) as to RICS members’ awareness of the FD route into membership, discussed on p.42

Perceptions differ amongst academics and the various stakeholders involved in WPL as to just what part each stakeholder can and should reasonably play. As will be seen, this may be coloured by the circumstances in which WPL comes into being and is maintained within a particular relationship. For their Report for Foundation Degree Forward, Greenwood et al. (2008) studied the perspectives of employers, providers and students regarding the operation of FDs. The research was conducted;

*“.... in the context of government support for FDs and continuing encouragement for an increased focus on employer -related, demand led, work-focussed programmes at level 4 and above.” (Greenwood et al., 2008:6).*

As such, its chief focus was on PT students in full time employment although both PT and FT stakeholders were sampled.

It probed the involvement of the employer in the design and development of the programme, and also the perceptions of the value and impact of the FD within their workplace. In all, a total of 20 FD providers, 37 employers and 300 students were surveyed. These ranged across a variety of sectors.

A recurring point of reference guiding the above study was three different possible levels



of involvement which they identified; namely, Active Involvement, Passive Involvement and No[ne] Involvement, based on earlier classifications developed by Brennan et al. (2006:50) for HEFCE. A brief explanation of each of each of these, although within the context of a PT student model, provides a backdrop against which to study the matter further.

- **Active Involvement:** The employer initiates contact with the academic institution, seeking a programme of study which will further their own ends, providing skills training and a qualification for their workforce. Such an employer is likely to accept and even welcome a “hands on” role, doing much to define the programme by setting learning objectives and providing teaching materials for use both in the academic setting and in the workplace. They are also likely to be involved in setting and assessing course materials. Such employers are likely to be fully supportive of their staff if they are engaged on such programmes.
- **Passive Involvement:** The employer, recognising the value of a particular programme of study (usually generic in nature) for their employees, actively encourages participation, usually offering various types of support. They will allow students to base assignments on work-place tasks upon which they are engaged and may provide source materials for these and other student projects. They may agree to participate in work-based assessments when asked, but are unlikely to demonstrate much enthusiasm.
- **None Involvement:** The employer may not even be aware of the specific course of study their employee is engaged upon. They are unlikely to show particular interest in its academic content and will be reluctant assessors if and when called upon. Support for students in the form of study leave, flexible hours or the like will be limited if offered at all.

It should be noted here perhaps that even working with employers of Part Time students, where links should be easiest and most positive, was seen as a potential challenge for providers from the outset. (Craig,.2004). A study by Yorke,.& Longden, (2010:38) suggests that only 54% of employers of PT students in their study took an interest in their progress on their FD.

Some employers in Greenwood et al's study 20% seemed to have had no involvement at all in developing the FD. This seems to surprise the researchers “*given the central tenet of the Fd for employer involvement*”. In one case the development was seen by the employer as a Government initiative, one to be followed but in which they had had no prior

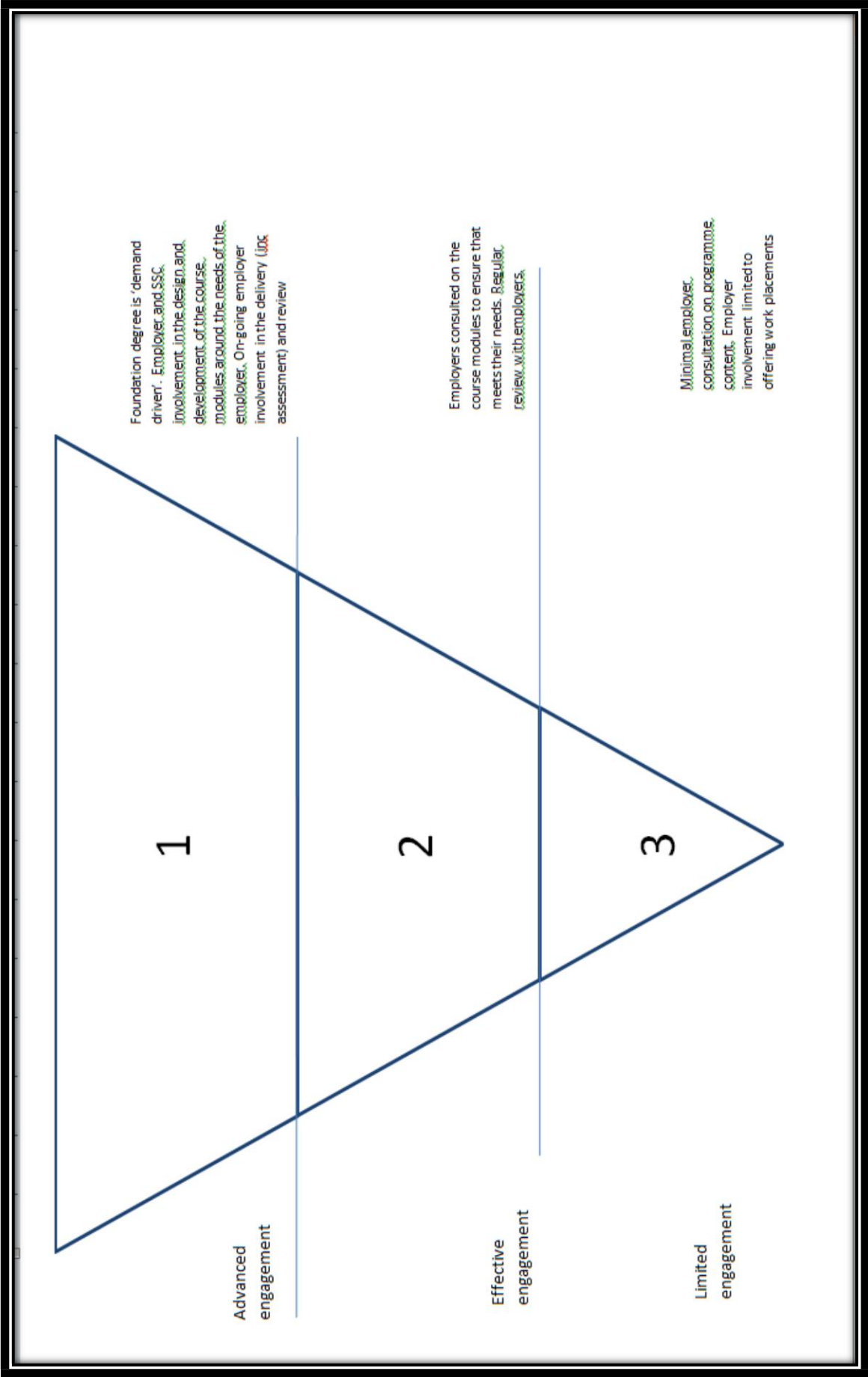
involvement and felt none now that it was up and running. The researchers were further concerned by the apparent reluctance of some employers to become more involved in either ongoing development or delivery.

*“Reluctance by the employers to get involved in what was seen as an imposition and a distraction from the business in hand”. (Greenwood et al.,2008:34)*

Perhaps where programmes are entirely college-developed employers will see no need to become involved with their subsequent development, delivery or assessment? This could account for some cases of lesser employer engagement – especially if coupled with a failure by providers to communicate to them the precise nature of the FD and their hoped-for / expected participation.

A similar three-level picture to that above is presented in diagrammatical form by Kumar (2007:14) suggesting the likely actual engagement of employers of PT students (**Figure 2.1**, overleaf). His findings suggest that good long-term relationships may be one key to effective communications within the FD set-up, although again this is said within a PT setting where these are more likely. His providers report that employer engagement was variable whilst employers are more positive about their engagement. Kumar (2007:13). An example of a mis-match of perceptions.

Greenwood et al. identify a fourth category of engagement: one relating to the FT student. (Greenwood et al., 2008:36). Employers in this situation differ from those above. It could be said that they lack a long-term interest in the success or failure of the student, as the latter spends only a matter of days or weeks with them before returning to full time study.



However, such employers have agreed to provide some kind of work experience, so must be assumed to be at least sympathetic towards the student's needs. Customarily, such employers will not be required to perform significant assessment exercises, due to the student's limited exposure to their procedures. This is examined more fully in section **2.3.6.2.** below. Usually, an approach would be made by the HE establishment to industry, seeking short-term placements. In several cases involvement of the employer is born of past/ existing relationships (their staff being alumni and the like) or through historical links between provider and employer. Unfortunately, Greenwood et al. (2008) do not study the above in as much depth as they do the Employers' relationships within PT scenarios.

### **2.3.3. Willingness of employers to engage initially with the FD**

Given that they may already have some employees undergoing PT study, a particular employer's willingness to engage with Providers over FT students might also be measured against any on the above scale of 3 used by Greenwood et al (2008). It characterises, in general terms, the stance taken by employers, outwardly at least.

For future reference, let us number Greenwood's levels of engagement from 1 to 3, adopting the designations suggested by Kumar, above.

The employer relating to Level 1, seeing specific advantages to be gained for their organisation and perhaps also possessing a philanthropic concern for the self-improvement of employees, will be very likely to support the latter through a FD. At Level 2, the employer sees possibilities but is unwilling or unable, for whatever reason, to re-structure their organisation to produce tailor made opportunities for their employees. The FD upon which they are engaged is of somebody else's design and making. It may be that it adequately enhances and "certifies" some basic skills which are in themselves satisfactory to the employer's needs. Such employers are genuinely seeking nothing more. Alternatively, the employer has neither the in-house skills nor the workload to support anything more adventurous on their part, as explored below. At level 3 we might dismiss employers as something of a lost cause but such employers deserve attention to see why they are so dismissive. Perhaps, in part at least, their organisation suffers from the same deficiencies as an employer engaged at level, but to a greater degree.

A further reason for investigating employer engagement at levels 2 and 3, besides a general concern for the support and encouragement of their employees, or those on a WPL placement with them, is that if FDs are to survive and thrive in accordance with their founding principles, then active employer participation is an important ingredient. Any

student on any FD degree, whether their programme be PT or FT, is likely at some point to need the type of input only available in the workplace. Ultimately, some form of education of employers, particularly those perceived as operating in the manner of Level 3, may be necessary.

Burch and Greenwood (2008) suggest that employers involved in their study on the proposals for the creation of FT programmes profess to be keen to be involved in planning, delivering and assessing the FD s with which they are to be associated. However, these same employers have qualified this with a variety of caveats, reasons which will limit the time they can ACTUALLY commit;

- *Their own availability “time to me means money”*
- *The demands of their job*
- *Being an SME [lack of staff capacity ?]*
- *Getting the right balance between business needs, teaching obligations and family commitments*

(Burch and Greenwood,2008:56)

#### **2.3.4. Establishing and Maintaining engagement.**

Responsibility for weak links between University or College and the employer organisation is variously attributed. Generally, academics tend to suggest that employers do not engage with them. Kumar (2007:13) reports a survey of 29 FD programmes in which 86% of providers agreed that employer engagement was “*variable*” whilst 97% agreed that “*most employers need to be encouraged to be engaged in design and delivery*” .Price and Edmonds, (2006:77) speak of employers “*continuing to resist engagement in education*” A specific list of characteristics / possible causes of non-engagement is suggested by Gittus and Hemsworth (2006:35-36), albeit these principally relate to PT provision. However, Greenwood et al. (2008: 37) report employer dissatisfaction with the providers, universities or colleges, these last being accused of not doing enough. Benyon et al. (2009(1):4) speak of employers who report no regular information from the university, despite expressing a willingness to be involved. Green, (2006:30) reports much the same, adding that providers could be more careful to target the right person within the employer’s organisation if communications are to be effective. Might some have also been deterred by what they feel is the academics use of too much “*educational jargon*”. Drake and Blake (2009:40) observe that there are two challenges for successful, sustainable HE at work; being responsive to employers’ needs and gaining the commitment of employees.

The claim against the providers has also been upheld to some extent by certain groups of PT students, accusing the University to which they belonged, in principle, of not encouraging students to visit or to take part in sessions on campus. (Greenwood et al., 2008:17 and 50) Whilst student experience is examined elsewhere, this particular reaction is perhaps worth noting here also.

#### **2.3.4.1. Establishing engagement**

A number of case studies are reported on, as examples of good practice in this area. In a number of instances providers carried out training needs analysis as a part of the process of designing the programme for specific employers (Greenwood et al., 2008:42-43).

Various researchers stress the onus on universities and colleges to market their courses more effectively in response to lack of awareness on the part of industry, (for example Elliott, 2008:35) an aspect of provision targeted by a number of articles in the Fdf Journal (for example Hearsun, 2005; Simons, 2005; Green, 2006:29; Powell, 2007; Pickford, 2009) Though not a prime concern of the current research it has some significance for continuing employer engagement. One danger here is that once the first cohort has successfully completed an employer-generated programme there may be insufficient demand to sustain continued provision. Apart from this being frustrating and de-motivating to academic staff, who may have put much effort into creating the programme, it is also a very costly process for the University or College concerned. (Greenwood et al., 2008:48). Examples are given where FDs were not necessarily created in response to any specific demand; where employer awareness was low and their relevance to the employers not really understood. The authors offer support for many of their findings from the work of others. (Greenwood et al., 2008:7-12).

#### **2.3.4.2. Maintaining engagement**

As one author observes,

*“The harsh reality is that however hard we try to make the involvement with employers genuine and meaningful, it is impossible to prevent them from retracting their support”.*  
(Stuart-Hoyle, 2007:89)

The devices employed for the maintenance of the relationship will, of course, depend upon its depth and nature. Commenting on ongoing involvement it is suggested (Greenwood et al., 2008:37) that certain programmes studied seem to have had some success in maintaining the interest of panel [liaison] groups, at least during the duration of

the first cohort, though less contact was maintained subsequently. Their positive accounts may arise from their having predominantly studied PT programmes, where there could be tangible value to continuing employer engagement.

With the proviso above, that some employers have felt actively excluded from participating as much as they might like, there seems to be a supposition that where employer engagement is proving difficult to maintain the cause would seem to lie with the employer. Though in a slightly different context (Hons Degree provision) large scale research amongst over 615 QS employers discovered that only 31% declared themselves “willing” or “very willing” to commit to collaborative activity with academia. The corresponding figure for academia was 76% (Perera and Pearson, 2011:27). This may be a function of the employer not having significant “hands on “ involvement in the course, as with Levels 2 or 3 engagement above, or it may be a function of employers genuinely being too busy, in today’s economic climate, to participate. This may be self-perpetuating to some extent, whereby once an employer misses one or more meetings of a liaison group they lose touch with the provider, become unaware of ongoing developments and are likely to loose contact altogether.

For guidance, Dear and Lonsdale (2006:12-13) offer two lists arising from their research. The first suggests mechanisms for the creation of successful engagement, covering both the initial development of programmes and keeping effective contact with employers. The second addresses aspects of actual course design, aimed at effective inclusivity, responding to employer and employee needs. Three more extensive lists are offered, addressing the same issues under the headings of Partnership Development, Programme Development and Sustaining Programmes and relationships. (Benyon et.al.,2009(2) :3-10). Still more lists are offered by Gittus and Hemsworth (2006) and Billet (2009:839). As elsewhere, the main focus for these is the PT mode of study, employers sending their staff on programmes designed as much as possible to meet their needs. The concluding table offered by Benyon et.al., on his page 11 “Common features of successful FDs “ offers some useful general “pointers “ which might also be applicable to the FT programme. Where framework specifications have in fact been produced -as for example that for Construction Operations Management (2010:81) and that produced by Canter (2006:44-47) these tend to re-state, with some amplification and formulation, the ideals of the QAA (2004 or 2010). They are in some cases very comprehensive, too comprehensive perhaps in the assumptions they make as to what is possible in given situations. In their depth of detail they may be better suited to the long-term and ongoing situation enjoyed by those attached to PT programmes.

Tollyfield (2006:10) suggests that the University or College should take the lead. One employer observed that *“training should come into my workplace; my workplace shouldn’t have to go to college.”* To maintain their status, Tollyfield suggests, Universities must *“continue to adapt to the relentless economic, social and international climate.”* (Tollyfield,2006:12)

### **Impact of FD in the workplace**

Some employers studied by Greenwood et.al. (2008) were involved through sending students/ employees to the FD whilst others just took students in for placements. Most of the former recognised that:

*“.... there had been an impact in the workplace in the employees’ broader understanding of the industry as a whole, in better performance in the job and in their personal attributes.”*

(a) *“Where the employee was a student. The Workforce benefited from FD students as employees – bringing in extra current and relevant knowledge to the company and sharing new techniques.”* (Greenwood et al.,2008:36)

Employers acting as mentors commented that this brought challenges to their ideas, increasing their own skills as managers, giving them cause to examine the ways they were doing things, which was beneficial.

Employers also noticed changes in those employees engaged on a FD - increased confidence / willingness to take on new challenges.

*“Where the Student just came in for / on a Placement – also brought benefit to the employer(s).”* (Greenwood,2008:36)

A placement can be seen as in a testing ground, creating a reservoir of potential employees who are well trained and knowledgeable about the industry sector.

Colleagues were said to get a “buzz” from working with the students who also provided a direct labour force as they worked on live briefs, said to be of particular financial benefit to the Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs.) The actual productivity or otherwise of such students is discussed elsewhere.

### **Costs of involvement in FD**

There are calls on staff time in the form of mentoring and supervising, and replacement costs for PT students when away at college. In addition, some employers pay tuition fees, travel expenses and so on. There may be additional costs for those actively involved in creating, delivering and assessing specific modules: time spent in preparation of



materials for delivery / assessment and so on. Employers were generally willing to meet these costs, though some were unsure as to measuring the returns they were getting as evidenced. The management and costs of providing placements for FT students are much less, although some senior staff time has to be devoted to mentoring and will thus be less productive perhaps. No sources used by Greenwood suggested that cost in itself was a factor which prevented employer engagement. (Greenwood et al., 2008:37) Harvey (2008:109) does discuss this issue, rather more cautious of the possibility of employer loss and disruption.

### **2.3.5. Workplace mentoring**

*“The role of the Mentor is crucial to the success of a work-based learning programme. It is an expectation that mentors will familiarise themselves with the programme of learning and agrees [sic] to facilitate learning in the workplace to the best of their ability” (Benefer, 2007:215)*

A key element of WPL is employer support for learning in the workplace. This is achieved most commonly, and in the best cases, by a workplace supervisor /tutor or mentor.

*“The role of the workplace mentor is to familiarise themselves with the programme of learning and facilitate learning in the work place. As such the mentor oversees the employer’s investment in the process and undertakes a key role in employee development by making the learning motivating and challenging.” ( Knight et al.,2006)*

The authors’ stress is placed on the importance of the relationship between the student/employee and the mentor. Effective relationships depend in part upon clarity as to the mentor role. A deficiency in this area can arise from lack of mentor training, lack of written material explaining the role, and so on. Some students cited mentor availability as an issue, as was their willingness to perform the duty. Students varied as to the quantity of support they required from their mentor. (Knight et al., 2006)

Mentors were usually positive about it all. This could be a result of how rewarding individuals felt the process to be (Taylor et.al. 2008:29).

Citing Wilson et.al. (2005:119), Benefer (2007) emphasises the importance of effective mentoring, as a crucial part of the FD;

*“ a mentor in the workplace helps the student to identify their individual learning needs, apply knowledge to practice and act as a resource for the student’s development.” (Benefer,2007:215)*

He recommends that mentors will familiarise themselves with the student’s study programme, presumably to better target the student’s instruction.

In the opinion of Stinton et al. (2007), work-based learning, manifesting itself through the workplace mentor, was in the main the responsibility of the course tutor, but only 29% of institutions said they provided any mentor training (2007:80).

Edmond et al. (2007:176) consider the effectiveness or otherwise of explicit learning contracts and agreements, suggesting that;

*“The difficulty here can be that in practice such contracts tend to be rhetorical and with little in the way of sanctions for transgressions, and it is difficult to enforce the agreements in the interests of the students and their learning when the employer does not abide by the agreement or the mentor is less than supportive”.*

Wareing, (2008:534) found great variation in the levels of students support from mentors, ranging from “5 minutes at the end of the day” to making sure that the activities undertaken complemented or suited the module being taken at the time. This supports my own previous findings in which employers and students both reported widely differing practices. Then as now, some 18 years ago, some employers pronounced themselves just too busy to find time for formal review. (Pearson, 1996:128-132 and 144-146)

The distinction is made between mentors as coaches and mentors as supportive and guiding colleagues, something more informal. A coach is usually associated with some form of performance change. Such a coach might be setting certain priorities and actions.

A Mentor may be mainly concerned with career self-management, so providing practical advice. Wareing, (2008: 537) recommends that mentors be more like coach-mentors.

It is suggested by Wareing that rivalry or inconsistency between mentors may lead to confused and unhelpful messages for the student. Certainly mentors may differ in their styles of operation and engagement with their teaching role. A similar reference to rivalry was made by Gherardi (2006). The issue may be less about the nature of knowledge than about the nature of organisations, relationships and the settings in which they interact; something that easily be regularised.

### **2.3.6. Possible barriers to effective engagement**

Both Stinton et.al.(2007:122) and Gittus and Hemsworth,(2006:35) neatly summarise common factors which may affect the level and /or quality of Employers' engagement with providers. Some of these, such as changing employer contacts, emerge in my own data. The following are more specific issues, less easy to address perhaps.

### **2.3.6.1. Employers' workload issues;**

There are references in the literature to shortcomings in workload, whether of type or volume, which may hinder effective employer engagement. In terms of the type of work offered, an enterprise may be too specialist to offer sufficient breadth of experience to students. In terms of the volume of work available, this problem may be short- or long-term. In the longer term it may be that a particular company may be just too small or specialist to survive in the marketplace and / or to offer sufficient scope to the student. A further consequence of the size of the enterprise is that it may not be possible to spare employees for supervisory roles, even where they are judged quite capable.

### **2.3.6.2. Employers' capacity to assess**

One of the drivers cited by QAA, (2004 and 2010) and referred to in almost every study addressing engagement within FDs, is the importance of the dual requirement for both provision and assessment within the workplace, suggesting that the latter should be carried out by the employer or his/her representatives. Generally, the Literature reports more positively on the chance of provision than it does of the incidence of effective assessment. Employers themselves tend to be more confident of the former than of the latter. Benyon and McKee (2009(1):4) found that whilst 20% of employers were engaged with programmes only 6% were involved with assessment, a figure borne out by QAA (2005) as quoted in Price and Edmond (2006). Elsewhere, Hillier and Rownsey (2006:113) suggest that;

*".... [we]should not assume automatically that employers can fully participate in the design, delivery or assessment [of WBL]."*

Their research suggests that employers were often unsure of what is being expected of them. Others suggest that employers might be *"prepared to pitch in and support training"* but that they would like guidance, training even, to enable them to do this.(Dear and Lonsdale (2006:11).

One approach to the preparation of employers for involvement in assessment is to tell them, prescriptively, what is required. Percival et al (1994:141) suggest content for a training course for assessors;

1. *Enhance the understanding of competencies, processes and issues related to their implementation.*
2. *Become sensitised to competency-based assessment in the workplace.*
3. *Develop skills in the use of competencies.*
4. *Identify cues for the demonstration of competencies in a variety of practice settings.*

This may be a positive step towards achieving uniformity of standards across different employer bodies and individuals, but may leave the reader unsure about which and whose competencies are being enhanced; staff competence in effectively assessing students in the workplace, or the students' competencies?

Watson and Robbins (2008:312) suggest assembling a panel of experts from various educational / quasi educational fields through a Delphi (defined here as a method for "systematically gathering input from relevant experts"). The expert group puts together a list of core assessment constructs. However, we are not told what these might be....

All of the above would be best developed in the setting of longer-term, ongoing relationships between provider and employer, and difficult to introduce into a shorter and possibly one-off FT placement.

Employer assessment of WPL raises issues. On the one hand the employer may be keen to help but their staff may lack the necessary ability or confidence. The staff themselves may feel competent but the provider may regard them as not able to perform effectively. Some providers, whether over-protective of their own status or possessing a certain sense of duty towards their students perhaps, appear genuinely to feel that nobody in industry is the right person to assess students. This is illustrated via a "*schematisation of assessor capability in respect of different kinds of student achievement*" (Woolf and Yorke,2010:28), anticipating that academics will be far better than employers at assessing academic work, whilst employers will be better than academics at assessing WPL, although the suggested Gap here is not so great. This last may be a concern shared by those who feel strongly that there needs to be a clear pedagogy for work based learning and, thus, its assessment. Drake and Blake (2009) .This may be tempered by the view that work based learning is a special field which cannot be ringed by traditional educationalist principles alone (Havnes and McDowell,(2008:9-11). This is explored further in examining the pedagogy of WPL - see section 2.5. The measurement of the skills, or otherwise, of workplace supervisors or mentors is considered important, as discussed above.

In practice, there appears to be very little comment in the literature about employer assessment of FD Workplace Learning besides that which reports its absence from most programmes (Painter, 2009:24). Perhaps this is itself a symptom of its rarity. This observation is made, specifically, by Thurgate and McGreggor (2008), cited by Painter (2009:6) and is evident from the literature on students' reports on their experience.

There is research evidence in support of a lack of employer responsibility for assessment within a report produced for Fdf (Woolf and Yorke,2010) from which the following table is taken.

**Table 2:1 Assessment responsibility – split between Providers and Employers – from Woolf and Yorke (2010:14)**

<i>Type of achievement</i>	<i>Assessed by Provider</i>	<i>Assessed by Employer</i>
Performance on the Job	28	19
Project carried out in the workplace	45	14
Assignment based on learning gained from work experience	48	4
Portfolio of work Based on workplace experience	47	4
Work-related assignment (for example an essay)	47	2
Work performance not on an employers premises	21	1

Concerns raised by academics regarding the reliability of employer assessment are highlighted in various reports; (for example, Woolf, 2010, writing on the above report) relating to differences in grading between employers, differences in marking, the danger of employers making subjective rather than objective judgements, and so on. Costley and Armsby, (2007:29) address aspects of this issue also, suggesting that workplace assessors may be “*more focussed on outcomes and less focussed on analysis*”. This issue arose in my own previous research, where there was discussion of the validity or otherwise of intuitive knowledge, involving the “construct referenced” judgements of the employer, untrained as an assessor. (Pearson,1996:67-68). As noted elsewhere it may be necessary for guidance on assessment to be given by providers or others (QAA 2010,para.48). Guidelines for the creation of a FT programme include clear proposals that training be given to the employers in this area (Burch and Greenwood,2008:76)

The above authors, Burch and Greenwood suggest a comprehensive list of ten possible assessment techniques associated with the FD, made interesting in that it actually suggests both the assessment of a practical task and assessment by observation. It is disappointing perhaps that the case study which is reported indicates that the only assessment tool actually employed is “The reflective report” (Burch and Greenwood, 2008:78). In the authors’ defence they do state (page 11 of the same report) that one defining element of WBL will be “the assessment of reflective practice and the designation of appropriate learning outcomes”. No direct mention is made at this point of employer involvement, although this is referred to elsewhere in the same document.

Challis, (2005)(1):28) appears to confirm the above

*“Although Foundation degrees should give the opportunity for a range of different assessment methods, there is still significant reliance on written assignments.”*

Writing later, the same author strongly supports employer participation;

*“We have to remember that assessment is just as much an art as a science. Employers have first hand knowledge about what makes for good performance amongst their employees. Education providers should allow their voice to be heard”.* Challis, M. (2005)(2):10).

Brodie and Irving (2007) write quite fully on assessment of WBL. They report student perceptions of a distinct bias towards academic assessment rather than professional components. The authors suggest that;

*“This can serve to devalue capability, to distort the validity of professional/vocational programmes and, in many instances, lead over assessment of students”.* Brodie and Irving, (2007:17)

### **2.3.7. Employer Relationships with other stakeholders**

This matter will be addressed when considering the roles of the other stakeholders, below.

### **2.3.8. Examples from practice**

Numerous case studies cited by Fdf illustrate programmes incorporating periods of WPL. There are descriptions of placements on Hons. Degrees, and others relating to FDs. All may tell us something of the relationship between employer and provider and / or employer and student and help explore the realities of WPL, its delivery and its assessment. However, as seen already, the vast majority of these studies involve students who are, essentially, full time employees, studying on a PT basis. Only a very small number have been found addressing the situation of the FT FD student. This reinforces the underlying proposition that FDs were created and continue to be promoted and used as a device for up-skilling those already in employment. Even the organisation “Foundation Degree Forward”, (fdf) whilst publishing figures which suggest that nationally 50% of the 100,000 students were studying on a FT basis in 2010 (Longhurst. 2010:5 and 6) concentrated most of its efforts on portraying activity within the PT sector. Various reports from fdf have been referred to elsewhere. A list of selected case studies and articles relating to specific programmes appears after the References section, (pp. 231–235) together with brief accounts of the key points they raise... the following summary refers to these;

The 19 case studies reviewed are split roughly evenly between PT, FT and mixed or multi-mode attendance. The key feature of the PT degrees are the close relationships sought between provider and employer together with (as might be expected of PT) the offer, where possible, of flexible learning opportunities. The FT and multi-mode case studies display a mix of preferences, some for flexibility over placement periods but with the majority stressing the value of blocks of WPL.

### **2.3.9. Employers' perspective on the future**

60% (22/37) of Greenwood's (2008) employer respondents were extremely positive about the FD and were planning to send their staff on programmes seeing benefits to the employees and gains in their own understanding and appreciation of the training opportunity these offered. Such employers viewed the FD as academically valid, but, more importantly, as a thing of commercial value to them, and so highly suitable for their businesses. One employer, recruiting non-cognate staff, valued the FD as a training mechanism.

The other 40% were less convinced: they would not, they said, be sending their staff in future, although currently they were doing so. Their concerns included: recognition of the qualification within the sector; appropriateness for the employee; Confusion as to the place of the qualification in the greater education and training context.

Some also felt it might be seen as second in status to the Hons. Degree. Some interviewed and recruited Hons. students and saw no relevance in the FD. These last tended to be those who had not themselves helped to develop one.

Employers generally were not carrying their support for the FD through to recognition in the form of offering specific posts to holders of the FD. Possession of an FD was rarely a criteria for employment.

Detailed research amongst 615 employers, themselves members of the RICS, discovered that whereas 45% understood "perfectly well" the Hons route into membership, the same figure for FD was 20%. (Perera and Pearson, 2011:42). The same research reports that only 17% of recruits were being supported through the FD route. (Perera and Pearson, 2011:43).

### 2.3.10. Other work-based training

As Greenwood et al. note, (2008:38) most employers were also involved with other types of training; apprenticeships, NVQs, student training schemes and the like. Some included FD in their staff training strategy, their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or as a part of a formal company training plan. Opinions differed as to the worth of the FD in the face of other routes. Some employers welcomed them whilst others were sceptical as to their value relative to what they already provided.

## 2.4 Other Key Stakeholders perceptions of their own roles

### 2.4.1. Providers

So far this Chapter has put only the employers under the microscope, perhaps fuelling the suggestion that they alone might be responsible for any perceived lack of engagement. It should be remembered that, as noted above, engagement is not just an adjective to be attached to employers, but also a verb, encompassing all parties.

The QAA assert quite clearly in their Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, ( QAA 2007) that the duty of establishing, monitoring and assessing placement learning should lie with the provider. For the QAA, workplace learning is intended as an integral part of any programme. Quality and coherence are important and the primary responsibility lies with the provider of that programme.

A number of extracts from the above point to this responsibility;

*“Agreeing the intended learning outcomes for a module ... is an integral part of programme design and is normally the responsibility of the awarding institution.” (p.9)*

*“All types of learning, including placement learning, must be appropriately and formally assessed if they are to be formally recognised.” (p.11)*

*“The academic standards of a higher education award and assuring the quality of Student learning are the sole responsibility of the awarding institution.” (p.12)*

*“Awarding institutions [must] ensure that placement learning partners are provided with timely information prior to, throughout and following the student’s placement learning.” (p.18)*

Other matters are also referred to, such as the training of both tutors and workplace mentors, both of whom, it is suggested, are the ultimate responsibility of the provider.



The close relationship between employers and providers foreseen by the developers of FD (QAA,2004) was not generally evidenced by Greenwood's interviews, except where the employer had instigated the FD in the first place.

In a limited number of cases there were regular meetings with tutors and the training manager was in constant communication with the provider. In some cases employers had been invited to liaison meetings. Some employers, however, felt themselves not to have been included enough, stating that had they been invited they would have become more involved. Such employers felt themselves to have expertise to offer. Some were disappointed with the feedback they obtained and would have liked more information about their employees' progress (Greenwood et al.,2008:37).

Many expressed interest in expanding their FD involvement but some were worried by the time commitment that this represented. However, as seen earlier, a few appeared to have no interest whatsoever in the programmes in which their staff were engaged.

Again QAA guidance (QAA 2007:21) is quite clear regarding maintenance of contacts between employers and providers, including forums for collecting employer feedback. This last supports the establishment and maintenance of Employer Liaison Committees and the like.

Given the absolute duty of providers, implicit in the above, to manage and control all aspects of workplace learning it is instructive to witness what is happening in practice. Greenwood (2008) conducted a study of 20 programmes.

The following are the headings given by Greenwood et.al. to the areas of their research and a representative of each provider was asked to report on each;

1. *Issues re the development of the FD.*
2. *Working with employers and addressing their needs.*
3. *Appropriateness of content.*
4. *Relevance for students.*
5. *Changes made since its original development.*
6. *Issues needing to be addressed in the future.*

#### 1.Developing the FD programme

Some programmes had been developed in response to specific employer demand, others being created as part of the provider's strategic plan and of general curriculum development. Some referred to the fact that they were responding to HEFCE suggestions that they expand participation in this way (being part- funded to do so).

## 2. Working with employers and addressing their needs;

As might be hoped for, and expected perhaps, a close working relationship was discovered where courses were bespoke (designed for particular employers). A number of examples are given in the form of mini-case studies. (Paras. 6.18-6.26 of the report). Some programmes had been formed as a result of Employer Focus Groups, specific employers expressing an interest in and helping to develop the award. Elsewhere, liaison panels were formed at points during the development process, enabling the university to address new areas in response to industry demand. In one, regular meetings were held with the employer for the duration of the first cohort, although less contact was maintained as subsequent cohorts passed through. Some courses were developed as a result of close links with a Professional Body.

## 3. Appropriateness of Content

There had been changes in accordance with employer need. A series of quotations are given in support of this.

## 4. Benefits to Students

Of benefits identified in a number of areas, quotations are given against each. The first three link most closely into workplace learning, namely: attaining some industry experience will aid them in subsequent applications for employment, time spent in the workplace gives them increased confidence and they are incentivised by contact with real briefs and clients.

## 5. Changes since the original development of the FD

Such changes are perhaps a healthy symptom of their relationship to the real world, which is changing too. Academics have responded to changed demands from industry, but doing this has perhaps put strain on resources.

## 6. Issues needing to be addressed in the future.

Delivery; Examples are given of changes in delivery; more than one had moved to introduce elements of distance learning. One had changed considerably so as to match industry practice.

Engaging employers effectively and persuading them to take part in future development. Engagement is of course less of a problem in a bespoke programme than in others. Where the programme is not generated by the employer it proves more difficult to engage mentors etc.

There is the problem of employers finding time to meet with providers and to mentor and support their trainees.

*“There is felt to be a belief amongst some employers that the task is a particularly onerous one.”* (Greenwood,2008:48)

Providers have taken pains to explain the role and offer support. But as numbers grow it is increasingly difficult to support students in the workplace also. One provider found that asking the employer to visit the college was futile.

Responding to demand led provision. Observations in Greenwood et al's (2008) report principally concern PT provision, but reference is made to accommodation of WPL within the academic year. This last may include, for example, a move of WPL periods into quieter parts of the industrial year (though this surely risks the students missing some of the “flavour” of the workplace?).

It is noted by others that accommodation of WPL may cause issues relating to provider's resources and structures. (Williams and Thurairajah. 2009:7; Garnett,. 2007:31 ; Costley.and Armsley.,2008:9))

Location and availability of placement opportunities. Some providers find that students on FT programmes are less willing to move away any distance to find placements. This can be a problem where there are few appropriate employment opportunities in a given area.

Explicit expectations of all involved in partnerships. There are challenges of working in the complex networks involved in FD / industry collaboration. These relate to the need to develop a balance between the more theoretically oriented curriculum content with direct relationship to professional workplace practice.

Degree level thinking (versus) vocational relevance to the workplace. Conflict emerges between industry readiness and the capacity for reflective thinking. Providers do feel responsibility for producing students who will be of practical use to the industry.

Suitability of Students for the FD and for progression. A number of providers have recognised that either the students are ill equipped to cope with aspects of the course or their employment requires skills that were not originally conceived as an element of the

course. Providers were now interviewing and screening applicants in a more systematic way and often requiring them to complete an initial literacy and numeracy diagnostic test.

#### **2.4.2. Students**

Student opinion cannot be ignored in the modern age;

*“The emphasis on student views, the growth of the notion of the student as consumer and recent government policy in the UK, place new emphasis both on the role of Foundation Degrees and the importance of understanding student’s perceptions of these.. “ (Ooms et al 2011:419).*

Reference has already been made to NSS returns, and the way in which they appear to reflect student’s appreciation of WPL.

Various studies have examined the experiences of students FDs. (Ooms et al.,2011, Greenwood et al. ,2008, Yorke and Longden , 2010, Higgins et al., 2010, and Yorke, 2010). However, the majority of these published studies concentrate on PT students rather than those undertaking WPL as part of a FT degree.

Ooms et al (2011) conducted a mixed-methods evaluation process across seven different FD programmes, collecting data through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The students in the study are PT, though a potentially misleading statement is made, perhaps a misuse or misunderstanding of terminology, where it is stated:

*“All students are considered as full-time even though they are employed in industry whilst undertaking the FD.” (Ooms et al. 2011:408).*

The students in this case are not situated in the position of the true FT student (enrolled on a full time FD but undertaking a short period in the workplace). However, their views regarding their workplace studies, the inter-relationship between these and their academic counterpart, and their perceptions as to their employer’s and the wider world’s recognition of FDs are all of value.

Overall, students’ perceptions appear to be positive. In a number of studies, reference is made to the character-building qualities of this form of programme.

Students’ perceptions of the meaningfulness of assessments varied. However, the majority (89%) rated these as having either some meaning or strong meaning with regard to their work. (Ooms et al.,2011:411) The PT student may see most relevance where assignments are work- related. This all connects with students’ willingness to participate, cooperate and learn where they can see a relevance to what they are doing. It is notable

here, however, that no actual definition of WPL was presented to respondents, and that there may be confusion as to what exactly is meant by the concept in any particular research. (Burke et al., 2009:17).

There was a perception amongst students that employers do not value FDs. Only 24.6% of those in the study responded positively regarding the recognition of the FD. Some responded that their employers were either unaware of the purpose of the FD or felt that the qualification had little value. (Ooms et.al., 2011:411)

There is some discussion of the importance of the qualification in the greater scheme of things, relating to the accreditation or otherwise of various programmes. Some FDs in the study went hand-in-hand with a Licence to Practice, in which case employers were more attentive - with a principal interest in the Licence to Practice aspect.

For all 10 elements explored in this study student findings were dependent on the individual programme in question and even on the site of delivery. This could indicate that each FD varied in specific ways that met the needs of the individual sector or workplace. Alternatively, it may also suggest some inequality across different FDs and across the same FD at different locations, reflecting some of my own early concerns. .

Greenwood et al. (2008) sampled both PT and FT cohorts. FT students in the study particularly valued work placements in relevant settings. Generally they had to find such placements for themselves, though sometimes with some assistance from the provider. There were concerns amongst the respondents regarding the availability and/or suitability of such placements. They mostly gave favourable feedback on the support they received from employers, though some had been given a poor induction then left to their own devices. Most welcomed the opportunity afforded by the FD to gain, amongst other things:

*“Real business and industry experience.. working on live briefs to meet clients’ requirements. ... gaining support from work colleagues. ”*. (Greenwood,2008:19)

The majority also claimed to have gained confidence in what they did, and would recommend a similar study route to others. Kumar (2007:14) cites the progress of personal and professional development in relation to wider generic skills such as presentation and communication skills as a benefit of employer involvement.

Asked by Greenwood et al. (2008:21-25) about their perceptions of employer engagement, all students in certain subject areas felt that *“active employer involvement”* with providers (in FD design and delivery) would be beneficial, but such engagement was

in evidence in only a minority of cases. “*Passive employer involvement*” tended to be more common. They suggested that employers might “*set live briefs, provide relevant work placements and specific one-off contributions to programme delivery*” but that beyond this the employers’ roles were uncertain. Some student groups suggested that employers had not been asked to contribute in the ways detailed above for fear lest this might impose too rigid and specific a stamp on what might otherwise be seen as a generic programme.

From students’ responses regarding their perceptions of the nature of any interaction between the FD and the workplace in terms of delivery and assessment, a spread of practices was evident, ranging from a two-way interchange to none at all. The most commonly reported experience was of a one-sided relationship, predominantly one where the provider fed on experience in the workplace but the workplace would take little in return. One set of students reported the opinion that there was no relationship at all between studies in the classroom and those in the workplace.

Only two short studies carried out on behalf of the organisation fdf research the specific responses case of FT students (as opposed to the fuller but more general guidance offered by Burch and Greenwood (2008), referred to elsewhere), but which contains no survey of stakeholder response). They are indeed unusual in their choice of subject, as observed by one of the authors Higgins et al. (2010:6). However, they are both somewhat less than full in their exploration of the FT student situation.

Higgins et.al. (2010) looked at students’ experiences purely in relation to their choice of Programme, their experience (sampled at a somewhat superficial level) whilst engaged on this and, finally, at their reflections on the programme and its subsequent value to them. Given the emphasis placed on WPL in most other literature, it seems surprising that no reference whatsoever is made to this element of the programmes in question. Hence, although twelve questions concerned their time in FT study, no questions sought to shed light on the level, balance or value of this integral part of any FD programme. The general level of the report which, not surprisingly perhaps as it was commissioned by fdf, comes out on the side of FDs, is illustrated by a particular statement in the “*Key findings*”; that students had found their degree studies generally to be “*fun but hard work*”. It concludes that the students’ experiences have been positive and have made them “*more employable*”, but avoids any analysis whatsoever of employer engagement during the programmes.

The only other fdf study dedicated specifically to FT students does indeed address my own area. *“The placement experience of students on full-time Foundation degrees”* (Yorke,2010). Although as above the participants were not engaged in construction-related programmes, the findings do give another rare glimpse into the world of the FT student, and a number of key elements are explored. Just the responses to those questions which relate in some way to employer engagement are reported below. A total of 43 students were questioned, from eight institutions (seven colleges and one university).

Roughly half of the respondents had found their placements for themselves, 25% had been found in conjunction with the provider and the remaining 25% arranged wholly by the provider. Half claimed there had been consultation between provider and employer beforehand. Most students felt that the placement fitted well with their academic studies. In terms of transfer between academia and workplace and vice versa, the majority of the students indicated that they had been *“quite”* or *“very”* able to achieve this successfully. However, eight students reported being unable to transfer classroom learning into the workplace. Likewise eight, perhaps the same individuals, had been unable to effect a transfer in the opposite direction, one entirely so.

There was considerable variance between reported levels of support by providers, with over half rating the latter as *“a lot”* or *“moderate”*, 13 students reporting *“little”* and 5 claiming *“none at all”*. One student reports that they were visited twice in nine weeks. Respondents were more positive in respect of employer-support. Over half reported *“moderate”* or *“a lot”* eight claimed *“little”* but only two said *“none”*.

Of particular significance to my own study were the perceived levels of liaison between provider and employer. Responses here were less positive, over half assessing liaison as *“little”* or *“non-existent”*, with 12 suggesting a moderate amount of liaison and only three suggesting *“a lot”*. Again, in terms of specific demonstrations of employer engagement, just over half reported that their employer had assigned them to a specific workplace mentor, the remainder having no such facility. A similar split was demonstrated in respect of employer feedback to the students during the course of their work placement, with just over half reporting *“moderate”* or *“a lot”* of feedback, whilst 13 reported *“little”* and 3 stated *“none”*. Questioned further, a number of respondents supplied information which made a clear association between level and quality of feedback and the provision, or otherwise, of a workplace mentor. *“The support from my workplace mentor was exceptional”*.

One omission, unfortunate from my own perspective, was any enquiry into, or reflection on, the length of placement in each case, given that differences emerged between these. Whilst not essential to gathering feedback on the placement experience of any particular student, the facility to explore any differences between responses in relation to placement lengths would have been useful. Only two students state the length of their placement in the quoted feedback. One refers to a period of three weeks whilst another refers to nine. The student experiencing the shorter placement, though not criticising its length as such, does observe how the conduct of the first day, together with any associated induction, were particularly important. The mentoring of this particular student appears weak and lacking in focus. Consequently time was wasted.

Yorke (2010:7) reports findings by Lucas and Leng Tan (2007:74) discovered that most of their student interviewees perceived themselves to be “ *employees, set a task* “ which they were to undertake. They might require assistance but must avoid being a nuisance to colleagues. Notwithstanding this, some students judged certain employers or mentors as providing a constant source of support.

Asked what they had gained from the placement, over half of Yorke’s respondents highlighted the training it gave, actual workplace experience (including client contact), team working and shadowing of existing professionals. 12 stressed the friendliness and supportiveness of the work environment. Specific comments spoke of the positive nature of individuals’ experience.

Students responses regarding assessment, whether conducted by the provider or employer, varied greatly. Some considered themselves not to have been assessed at all. Assessments had varied between formative and summative, one saw both. Where conducted by the employer it could be thorough and all-encompassing. The most commonly cited assessment was a classroom-based portfolio, reflective in nature and assessed by Tutors. At least one student felt that the academic workload associated with their placement was excessive, suggesting later that this also got in the way of experiential learning. Yorke (2010:5). This last mirrors employee (PT student) feedback reported elsewhere (Williams and Thrairaja 2009:45)

Overall, positive feedback far outweighed the negative, most recommending their placement experience to others, either “ *fairly strongly* ” or “ *very strongly* ”. At least two students were offered full employment as a consequence of their placement, suggesting employer satisfaction.



Yorke (2011:11) suggests that his study is “*too small to justify much in the way of generalisation*”. However placements have offered positive experiences to most. Generally there appears to have been effective and valuable transfer of learning between classroom and workplace, and vice versa. There is some criticism of the relationship between providers and employers and certain key questions present themselves relating to assessment: What form should this take, should it be graded and who should be doing the assessing ? .

The closing commentary speaks particularly to my objective of creating a set of Critical Success factors and the setting of these within a framework.

*“A key question, relevant to all interested parties is ‘What’s the deal ?’ as regards the placement. The deal encompasses who is responsible for what, .....*

*There may be scope for developing agreement between institution, student and employer regarding what is to be sought by way of achievement on the placement.*

*Part of “the deal” is the level of support the student can expect from the employer. A small minority of employers were perceived to have been less than ideally supportive: there may be a need for clarification regarding what is expected of the employer in this regard “. (Yorke, 2010:11)*

This last point is put succinctly by one of the students;

*“I think it would be a good idea to set out a vague timetable of tasks, as often I didn’t know what I should be doing and neither did anyone else.” (Yorke, 2010:7).*

In a separate study, Gallagher and Ingram (2009:45) find students to be “*a little unsure about the role taken by workplace staff* “. On one particular course surveyed they are clear “*that there is no assessor from the workplace, and that the college is the primary assessor.*” They identify their tutor as having the leading role in the placement. Other studies by and for the fdf suggest this is not an uncommon perception. In one case the students express the feeling that they are serving as intermediaries between the classroom and the workplace. (Green, 2004:28). They are holding everything together where this should be the role either of their tutor or of the workplace supervisor or mentor.

### **2.4.3. Professional Bodies**

Canter (2006:49) shares the beliefs of the QAA (2004) as to the importance of the involvement of Professional Bodies to the survival of FDs.

In research carried out for Fdf, Williams and Hanson (2010) examined the relationship between professional bodies and FDs. 238 professional bodies were approached of whom 44 (18%) responded. Respondents were asked for their experiences with and position on

FDs. As the authors observe, because the position of none-participating bodies is not known, the responses of the 43 cannot be taken as representative, but

*“it might be argued that the bodies which have taken the time to respond are more likely to have a stake of some kind in Foundation Degrees than the ‘average’ professional body.”* (Williams and Hanson, 2010:7)

Although the sample does not identify professional bodies within the construction sector, it suggests the response to FDs from an important stakeholder group in the wider society in which they operate. The data relating to awareness and, distinctly from that, engagement with FDs is instructive. Of the sample 36% of respondents claimed “low” or “none” awareness, 27% “medium” awareness and only 32% “high”. Turning to engagement, 59% claimed low engagement, 27% claimed “medium” whilst only 14% claimed “high”. Their analysis suggested a statistically significant association between awareness and engagement levels.

Mismatches between the positive response regarding the perceived relevance of the FD (75%) and its value as a source of work-based experience (66%) , set against the levels of awareness (25%) and the regard in which FDs are held (18%) suggest to the authors of the original report the need for more effective marketing by and communication from providers, a point referred to elsewhere in this study. In terms of qualification requirements for full membership, most respondents (70%) require an Hons. Degree or above. The last was given as a reason for lack of interest or support by a number of respondents.

Canter (2006) reports on research carried out by the FDNTG aimed specifically at 15 Professional Bodies associated with the construction sector. He suggests that

*“ the views / position of the respondents does convey a message that is worrying given that the support of professional institutions is a vital ingredient of success for FDs.”* (Canter,2006:30)

Results suggest that very few of the Professional Bodies had made specific provision for or gave specific recognition to the value of the FD, given that, for example, these had a credit value of 240 whilst the older HND/HNC have a value of 120.

As recently as 2008 (eight years after their creation) it was being suggested that FDs were still being considered too new for progression to a professional qualification. (Construction Skills, 2008:6) though in this last case only 2 Professional Bodies were consulted.

As noted in **2.3.9.** above, professionals in practice are not well versed in the FD route into membership.

## **2.5. Work Place Learning – What Learning ? -**

### **2.5.1. The value of WPL in the curriculum**

One theme important to most researchers into WPL is the precise nature of the Learning component. On the one hand are those who demand strict accountability and as much uniformity as possible across cohorts of students in terms of the management, delivery and relationship of WPL to the curriculum, seen in somewhat formal academic terms. (Burke et al.,2009; Williams, A. and Thurairaja,N. ,2009:Tynjala et al.,2003) On the other are those who see prescribed content of perhaps less importance than the experiential potential of the workplace (Gheradi,2006; Eraut, 2008; Havnes and McDowell, 2008)

So, academics may disagree as to the type and quality of learning experience(s) to be gained from the workplace – both in terms of the nature of that which we should and ought reasonably to expected, insisted upon even, and that which actually takes place.

How does WPL differ from that which takes place in the classroom; what is its importance / relevance to the overall programme of study being undertaken by students, whether they engage in part time studies or, as full time students, they engage in periods of work place training and experience?

The prime distinction, it is argued, between classroom and workplace learning is that the first is formal whilst the second is informal, (Tynjälä, 2008:139) perhaps presenting difficulty with formal curriculum and assessment (Tynjälä, 2008:132;. Lester, S. and Costley, 2010:569) Some would claim classroom learning to be the more valuable, or at least adequate to instil employability skills – (Butcher,. et.al., 2011: 28 and 37) whilst others would particularly champion WPL, within the context of a vocational programme. (Tynjälä, 2008:146; Burke et al., 2009) This group argue for a blend of the two, suggesting that both must be present and complement one another if learning is to be complete and successful and professional expertise is to be achieved. Consequently, much has been written about “expertise”. (for example, Collin, K. and Tynjälä, P.,2003)

To those who essentially rate WPL above classroom learning, (Gherardi, 2006.; Eraut, .2008) the context in which learning takes place is the prime factor. They speak in terms of “situated learning”, suggesting that the student learns best and most about workplace activity whilst located in it (Burke et al.,2009:19). Some of this learning is achieved not just through the personal efforts of the student (as might be the case in classroom situations) but through the fact of their working and interacting with others within a team, or “Community of Practice”. (Tynjälä, 2008:135).

HOW people learn at work can be summarised as follows;

1. *By doing the job itself*
2. *Through cooperating and interacting with colleagues*
3. *Through working with clients*
4. *By tackling challenging and new tasks*
5. *By reflecting on and evaluating one's own work experiences Through formal education and*
6. *Through extra work contexts*

Based upon Tynjälä (2008:134)

The first 3 above are certainly key work-based elements. The remaining four exercise skills which could be imparted to some extent through classroom exercises and simulations.

Listing WHAT they learn, Tynjälä cites eight skills and here the distinctive nature of WPL is even less clear-cut perhaps. Only one suggests a certain "reality" which it will be difficult to effectively simulate within a classroom setting.

*"Awareness and understanding, including understanding of colleagues, contexts and situations, personal organisation (time management etc.) – and of problems and risks."Tynjälä (2007:134)*

And the distinction is narrowing further. Even education conducted primarily within academic institutions has shifted towards project work within team or group formats, recognising the desirability, stated above, of operating and learning as a part of a team – so as to be best equipped for the modern workplace scenario. Group work can be seen both as a tool for learning and an object of learning.

*"Project-based learning is a pedagogical innovation which applies the idea of integrating theory and practice by problem solving and by bringing working life problems closer to students. Here students work collaboratively on an actual (or simulated) real-life problem..."*

[Thus] *"they apply theories in practice and learn group work as well as communication and co-operation skills in an authentic learning environment. Project-based learning could be said to overcome disadvantages of both formal training and unstructured everyday life whilst capitalising on their strengths."* (Tynjälä et al., 2003:157)

One aspect of WPL much less easy to replicate in the classroom, its most powerful characteristic some would say is the interaction between novice and expert within the workplace. (Gherardi, 2006)

Tynyala et al (2003:143) talk of novices progressing through increasingly critical work situations, gaining responsibility as they do so, a process not unlike the old style apprenticeship (or, in professional terms, "Articles" ) which preceded most of today's

academic vocational career paths. The novice works under the guidance of more competent workers, observing ways of doing the job and participating in the community of practice. People teach one another across the traditional workplace boundaries of age, experience and status. This learning (and helping) can also be a two-way thing.

A wider “Society of Learning”, might be analogous to the Professional Body which, through its setting of Core Competencies (and its monitoring of their attainment or otherwise) seeks to create a common body of knowledge across the whole profession.

Some argue that the informal learning of the workplace, described above, is not enough, concerned at such informality in a “learning” situation. Tynjälä, (2008:140) suggests three reasons for this, quoting other work in which she was involved, (Slotte et al.,2004). Some criticism might be made of each however

- a. *“Because informal learning often takes place without conscious effort and yields mainly tacit knowledge it may result in outcomes that are not desirable –.”*

The above appears over- censorious, suggesting that traditional classroom learning may be preferable.. Later in her article the author reports on the findings of her earlier research with another (Tynjälä et. al.,2005) where “*Students reported ... that they had learned some negative things such as bad practices.*” (Tynjälä, 2007:134).

- b. *“Because In modern life new knowledge is being produced so fast that informal learning alone cannot ensure that knowledge and skills of organisations and people will keep up with.”*

In practice it may be that the basics are changing so fast that even the college itself cannot keep pace with this. Limits on academic funding suggest that industry may have the more modern technologies

- c. *“Because formal education and planned learning situations make it possible to exploit informal learning effectively, turning tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge and integrate conceptual knowledge and practical experience, which is the foundation for the development of expertise.”*

This appears to comment on the complementary nature of formal classroom studies, rather than workplace learning.

As noted, one driver behind much conceptualising theorising on learning in the workplace is the achievement of professional expertise.

Professional expertise can be said to be made up of three elements, closely integrated Tynjälä (2007:144) Theoretical Knowledge; said to be easily transferable through books;

and lectures. Practical knowledge; Case specific, not universally available, and Self-regulatable knowledge; the combination between the theoretical and the practical. Billet, (2009:831-832) offers much the same analysis, though his terminology is different; domain-specific conceptual knowledge, domain-specific procedural knowledge and dispositional knowledge.

All workplace activities that enable students to make tacit knowledge explicit or analyse theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge are potential mediating tools. It is through problem solving that formal knowledge acquired in education is transformed into an expert's flexible informal knowledge.

Would the Professional Bodies equate professional expertise with the Core Competencies against which they measure those seeking professional status (at whatever level)? In a major study, looking at the expectations of QS employers, Perera and Pearson (2011:34) found that members of this profession perceived a clear mismatch between the professional skills required of students and the academic content of their programmes of study, with 60% expressing dissatisfaction with the curriculum of Hons Degrees .

The following, taken from Tynjälä (2008), are said to be the implications of a model for learning in authentic life situations.

*“The development of vocational and professional expertise must be seen as a holistic process in which theory cannot be separated from practice – or practice cannot be separated from theory.”*

*“ Second, when students are solving real life problems either in authentic working life or in simulated contexts, they need to be provided with conceptual and pedagogical tools which make it possible for them to integrate theoretical knowledge with their practical experiences.”*

*“Participating in real life situations is a necessary but not a significant condition for the development of high level expertise . Only deep integration of theoretical, practical and self-regulative knowledge creates expertise.”*

(Tynjälä, 2008:145)

Such transfer of knowledge between education and workplace settings can be problematic. Eraut (2007:404) suggests that the theory you need in any particular situation is mainly learnt through participation in and receiving feedback on your actions.

Theoretical knowledge remains dormant until triggered by specific situations. Integrative pedagogy suggests that when theory is learnt it is necessary to apply it immediately to practical, problem-solving situations – either to authentic or hypothetical cases, so as to develop integrated expert-like knowledge. Equally, when students have workplace experiences it is important that they reflect on these in the light of theory. This last

requires prescribed learning tasks, more achievable perhaps in Teacher Training or NHS settings, where procedures are standard and more commonplace than in the construction industry.

One comparator between work-place learning and its classroom-based counterpart is the capacity of the former to add value. When so much educational strategy (at both macro and micro levels) is guided by attempts at measuring added value it is surprising that this was not addressed, directly, by any of the authors consulted.

Reported responses of employees and students differ as to their perception of the importance of classroom-derived learning to their work-based learning. Generally, employees will be more dismissive of the value of their classroom studies the longer they have been in practice (Collin and Tynjälä, 2003:341). This is understandable in a way, as they are coping with everyday situations using, with increasing age and distance from their classroom studies, ever-increasing quantities of practical experience – manifested in the **self-regulative knowledge** seen above, a mix of **theoretical knowledge**; Universal, formal and explicit in nature, easily derived from books and lectures, and **practical knowledge**; - that gained through practical experience is case-specific and not universal in the way that theoretical knowledge is. Intuitive implicit or tacit in nature – not easily explicated (Collin and Tynjälä, 2003:342).

Some (Tynjälä, 2008:146; Burke et al., 2009) see the relationship between academic and work based learning as a continuum, whereby theoretical knowledge (basic skills in maths, for example) is seen as the foundation and ongoing underpinning tools for job-related skills. It is in the workplace that one learns to use the tools. Some suggest that Theoretical knowledge acquired in education is considered to be replaced (and gradually displaced altogether) by new practical knowledge required at work. (Gherardi, 2006.; Eraut,.2008)

Such authors suggest that theory and practice should be seen as totally complementary and often closely integrated elements of competence.

There is some meeting on common ground, for nearly all accept the need for assessment, identifying WPL as a part of a formal programme of study. As will be seen in Chapter 4, all courses incorporating WPL this formal status through the award of a certain number of credits within the curriculum. Where there are credits one presumes assessment of some sort, and the award of a mark or grade, even where the latter may be no more scientific than “Pass” or “Fail”.

Williams and Thurairaja (2009:33-45), writing on delivery and assessment seem rather reluctant champions of WPL, more conscious perhaps of the inherent problems in its assessment than its benefits. Their model for work based learning is split between design and delivery.

Discussing design they support the suggestion, seen elsewhere, that involvement of the employer may prove critical to the effectiveness of the learning experience.

Discussing delivery the authors value learning created in and by the workplace over that in the classroom, where there is a choice. They observe that teaching within the educational establishment risks being anything but work-based (unless driven extensively by materials acquired from the employer in question). However, in terms of the effectiveness of delivery, the general tone of this publication seems to suggest that the authors feel the University or College staff to be the persons best placed to teach and to assess the required materials. Little is said of the role or capacity of the workplace supervisor in this.

This imposition of the tutor onto the workplace suggests a very academic tone, perhaps to the exclusion, or some devaluing at least, of the practical side.

The above authors examine quality issues chiefly from the an academic perspective, and the need to operate procedures which fit within established university structures. They seem concerned that WPL and any assessment cannot be made to fit these structures, which seem, for them, to be a key measure of the quality of the programmes; this despite the nature of workplace experience being vastly different from some traditional classroom-based activity. They do suggest ways in which university processes might be adapted (additional approval meetings, some changed paperwork and so on) to accommodate WPL and its assessment within the curriculum. But they seem to allow little flexibility otherwise. The message seems to suggest a philosophy of fitting the University and its practices into the workplace, rather than of fitting the workplace, and all that it can offer, into the University.

Williams and Thurairaja (2009) suggest that the key factor is the attainment of learning outcomes. Harris,.(2004:5) also support their value. This is reasonable where a professional qualification will depend upon these, but it sometimes appears that learning outcomes are striven for despite the actual workplace experience rather than through it. Hence, sometimes, materials which will not contribute directly to the desired learning outcome risk being supplanted by college-generated simulations. This tidy approach may be understandable from the academic's perspective, but seems to risk devaluing the



student's actual learning experience. Done presumably in the name of consistency of quality it risks imposing a "traditional" academic regime on what should be primarily a time of experiential learning for the students.

Costley, and Armsby, (2008:14) would appear to support the idea that there is risk assessment of WBL by academics who " *sometimes find it hard to break out of a particular paradigm to assess learning from work ...*" This is supported by some experience of the assessment of project / simulated work as reported at p.75 below.

Williams and Thurairaja (2009) conclude with a series of eight "*practicalities of real work*" – issues through which they explore possible pitfalls which might be associated with work-based learning, and its assessment, as they perceive it. These are reproduced, with commentary, in **Appendix B**.

Their critique is realistic and a valuable discussion document, but it is perhaps too cautious and prescriptive, and could serve as a deterrent rather than an encouragement to pursuing this form of learning.

However one may wish to out-source and thus, hopefully, enhance students' learning we are reminded that WBL is still encountered and absorbed in the context of academic study. It is observed by Burke (2009:27), with apparent disappointment, that students and staff interviewed as part of their own study seem to appreciate the work-based element of their *experience* but do not discuss it in terms of **learning**. This may be because they did not spell this issue out in the questionnaire which they used.

The above interpretation by students can be accounted for perhaps. Eraut (2007:404). suggests that Implicit learning plays a significant role because (a) students are often unaware they are learning through the work they are doing and (b) the word "learning "

*" ..... weakens awareness of informal learning modes through its association in respondent's minds with formal class-based teaching."* (Eraut,2007:404)

Perhaps students (and staff even) are so caught up in the excitement of reality that they forget its significance (real or imagined) as a part of their learning process.

Garnett,. (2007:32) suggests that " *One major issue that often interferes with the interaction between universities and employers is that of language* "

Elsewhere it is suggested that;

*"Employers and institutions need to develop a common language for speaking together about skills and learning, in order to get a better understanding of each others' needs and offerings"* Connor, (2005:26) .

### 2.5.2. The “Learning” in WPL – Workplace perspectives

Advocates enthuse about the special qualities, as they perceive them, of hands-on experience. Whilst not denying the importance of some certainty of structured delivery and assessment, they suggest that we should primarily seek meaningful work experience, after which concerns of its relationship to the formal curriculum and assessment of the same may be considered.

Brubaker (2011:5) whilst describing a world far removed from the UK construction site, adds weight to the case for situated learning. As she states;

*“ Students with opportunities to apply theoretical concepts in real-world activities,.. not only learn through internalisation but also through external participation. More so than what they read about, students have the opportunity to integrate the material into their own authentic experiences ..... the concept of situational learning is grounded in the idea that true learning and understanding occur through activity within a context, ..the situation in which knowledge is learned is inseparable from the material itself. ... placing students within a context allows them to learn the materials as well as situational cues . “*

There is some suggestion here that work-based learning cannot and should not be expected to fit neatly into pre-conceived assessment frameworks, thus immediately setting it apart from the ordered world sought by most university hierarchies.

Frank (2005:23) sought to identify what students valued in built environment education. Abstracting data from a series of students’ essays she established the following 5 key pointers:

- *Hands-on experience.*
- *Seeing things with your own eyes.*
- *Teacher enthusiasm and experience* (the latter bringing their own into the classroom setting).
- *Team working* – it is suggested that few if any building operations are carried out in isolation from others.
- *Tactile, emotional experiences.*

Another author suggests that a properly crafted learning outcome is important where there may otherwise be a “*rather unstructured learning experience* “ (Harris,2004:5). However, he has some concerns lest too much emphasis is put on the learning of specific skills, which he feels may be the province of the employer and professional bodies, as against [just] enhancing the quality of learning at undergraduate level. Often, learning opportunities will be unique to a work-place setting, although still demonstrating some of the basic principles associated with learning in the classroom.

Two pieces of research address in particular the nature of the workplace and the nature of the learning which might be sought and accomplished there. The first (Gherardi, 2006 ) looks at a student placed, as it happens, in the construction industry, and analyses in detail the learning processes of an individual within a community of learning . The second (Eraut, 2007) takes as its subject the early workplace learning of three groups of trainee professionals, Nurses, Engineers and Accountants and studies their gradual acclimatisation to the work place through situated learning.

Gherardi conducts a detailed study of the Community of Practice referred to above by Burke and others. The author analyses WPL through the medium of a case study. She follows a “novice” undergoing a placement in the construction industry. Her study is an analysis of knowledge and its transfer.

Learning was once seen as knowledge delivery – all the discoveries of previous generations to each new one – treating knowledge like food or money, something that has to be consumed/ accumulated. Gherardi (2006:1) She suggests here that this is wrong. The model above suggests that learning confined to the classroom is a distinct and separate activity, whereas most “expert” knowledge is acquired on a daily basis through acting and reflecting. Learning is not an isolated activity comprising finding and acquiring items of institutionalised knowledge. People find knowledge in practice by negotiating the meaning of words. Cognitive and practical activity can only be pursued in this world. This “*knowing in practice*” is the main thrust of Gherardi’s work, (Gherardi,2006:xii) one which supports and provides certain understanding upon which I base my own case for WPL.

The author suggests there is no unified field of practices or a social theory of practice. Consequently she presents certain traditions born of past research. The link recognised across these is the focus on situated practice, universally connecting “*knowing*” with some form of doing. A common thread can be perceived, it is suggested, “*of materiality, of fabrication, of the craftsman’s skill* “. This suggests that what follows, a detailed study of WPL, must be of relevance to my own enquiry.

The philosophical and sociological roots of the concept of practice are each considered. The former, by means of the example of the skills of riding a bicycle, suggests that, in tacit knowledge, “*we know more than we know we know*”. The latter suggests that you must immerse yourself in the world of your chosen profession to understand it. Both statements speak appropriately to the subjects of my own study – truths that will be tested against my primary evidence.

Turning to practice itself, Gherardi defines this as;

*“A mode, relatively stable in time and socially recognised, of ordering heterogeneous items into a coherent set.” (Gherardi, 2006:34)*

The author scrutinises four chief elements:

Firstly ***its qualitative and holistic aspect(s)***; actions gain meaning from their setting. Thus, certain classroom-learnt numerical exercises (which the QS student sees as little more than abstract number crunching) once on site, can be converted to make-or-break financial decisions.

Secondly, ***its relationship with temporality***; actions, when repeated, become standard practice. Thus, a particular classroom-learnt technique (addressed once only perhaps) , becomes second nature upon daily or weekly repetition on site – as part of the standard (tacit) repertoire of the professional - an enduring core skill.

Thirdly, ***its being socially recognised***; practices which survive attain common approval and recognition. Operations conducted on site (or in a professional office) become the accepted way of doing things.

Finally, ***its being a mode of ordering the world***; practices, through performance, draw in and connect personnel and technologies by either constraining or liberating those involved, depending upon their engagement. (Gherardi, 2006: 34-35).

For Gherardi, the term, and thus the importance of “Practice” can be diminished by two tendencies: that of romanticising it thereby giving it a mystique or incomprehensibility which it need not have; or, on the other hand , by diminishing it, as a vague and indefinable something. (Gherardi, 2006:37)

Having analysed the elements of practice and thus WPL Gherardi examines the role of the “novice” and the process of their learning. Her specific area of study was that of site safety, an important area for all trainees.

In writing on “*Knowing in a community of practitioners*” Gherardi speaks directly to the nature and value of work place learning. Certain aspects of the training of her subject, the trainee Site Supervisor, have resonance for the student engaged on WPL.

*“The chief feature of learning in communities of practice is that it is conceived as participation in situated activities and as involving the acquisition of new identity, rather than merely the acquisition of cognitive contents. “ (Gherardi,2006:67)*

The idea of identity also arises in Eraut’s work.

An individual's learning, whether site safety (as was Gherardi's particular focus) or some specific technical or professional skill, will be framed in terms of learning to become a competent member a community of practice within a workplace.

In a section headed "*being on site*" the author describes how the novice takes on board the practices of members of their new and temporary community. Lave and Wenger (1991) are cited. Wenger, describing how the learner's involvement in activities or their outcomes learning may be peripheral but how by this "*legitimate peripheral participation*" they acquire "*community membership*" (Lave and Wenger,1991).

The following piece quoted by Gherardi, although lengthy, encapsulates well and acts as a testimony to much of what WPL is all about;

*"Absorbing and being absorbed in[to the] "culture of practice " might include (knowing) who is involved, what they do, what everyday life is like, how masters talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives, how people who are not part of the community of practice interact with it, what other learners are doing and what learners need to learn to become full practitioners. It includes an increasing understanding of how, when and about what old-timers collaborate, collude, and collide, and what they enjoy, dislike respect and admire. In particular it offers exemplars ( which are grounds and motivation for learning activity) , including masters, finished products, and more advanced apprentices in the process of becoming full practitioners ." (Gherardi, 2006:69-70)*

Thus, any presence on site can, in itself, be demonstrated as instructional, and a formative experience for the student, a point picked up on by Shobrook (2004:30) . The student begins to feel a part of things, taking on the "atmosphere". In the gradual move towards becoming an insider, it is suggested, it is not safety that was learnt as a single topic, but safe work practices, a climate, or way of being as I would describe it.

Next, Gherardi explores the importance of Site Manager (the employer, for our purposes) as instructor or mentor.

The point of reference for the learner is the person doing the job for which they are preparing. It is said by one of the foremen in the study to be "*important that the workers, especially if young, should be stably placed alongside suitable persons*".

(Gherardi,2006:89) Here, the learning of specific trade skills from one skilled operative is contrasted it seems, with more generic matters which can best be picked up from amongst the community of practice. The community recognises the importance of the individual learner having a mentor in order to become an expert. However, guidance could still be given by various individuals in various situations, regardless of rank.

Quoting Rogoff, B. (1995) Gherardi suggests that

*“One of the main features that distinguishes the transmission of practice in the workplace and the methods used in traditional educational settings (classrooms) is that in the former case the ‘context’ - that is the lived situation – is used as a constructive resource.” ( Gherardi, 2006:93)*

This is put more succinctly by Becker, (1972) as the title of an article referred to by Gherardi , namely

*“A school is a lousy place to learn anything.” (Gherardi, 2006:93)*

Subsequent discussion of a measurement exercise performed by the “novice” (according to strict text-book principles, learnt in the classroom) compares this with the way in which experienced site operatives might have performed it (Gherardi, 2006:93-97). WPL affords the opportunity for the learning and practice of short cuts approved by both the mentor and the wider community. By including them practitioners support the novice in the latter’s effort to acquire a new shared identity. This revealing of the “tricks of the trade” is unlikely to occur during a short work placement, but may be possible to a limited degree. It suggests acceptance into the new community. It is interesting to reflect upon this in the light of Tynjälä’s fears concerning the acquisition of “bad practices” (p.59, above)

Finally, Gherardi contrasts the classroom curriculum with that to be followed on site (or, in our case, the office perhaps). The author suggests that the classroom-related curriculum (or “teaching curriculum”) tends to follow an order similar to that of standard professional practice. On site, (following the “situated curriculum”) the placement student will initially be set straightforward tasks deemed to be within their capability, irrespective of their normal place in the hierarchy of things. (Gherardi, 2006:111) .Tasks may be out of sequence simply because they need doing that day. Such disparity between expectations of a work placement and the actuality could be a particular feature of placements in recessionary times. Through this the student may become immersed in work of a nature quite new (and perhaps exciting). Alternatively, they may be faced with tasks which fail to stretch their prior learning at all. Student respondents to other research have already illustrated this.

An additional aspect of working on site could be that the learner is required to run errands, make the coffee and so on, not a classroom-taught skill but all part of the background experience of the community of practitioners. These apparently trivial tasks are, I suggest, all part of belonging.

All this takes time of course, and is dependent upon the availability of appropriate tasks. The average QS or construction management student on placement will be unlikely to

have the time to follow such a programme and become effective members of their own respective community of practice? They may have time to begin to absorb a flavour of it.

The small scale and fragmented make-up of the construction industry in the UK might suggest an effective seedbed for potential all-rounders, offering training in everything. The downside, however may be a shortage of work of a particular specialism on a particular site, another problem highlighted elsewhere in my own study.

It is suggested by Gherardi that novices set the pace and depth of their learning themselves through their receptiveness and take-up of ideas, techniques and the like, and that the mentor or supervisor will not take them where they are not willing or able to go. The novice or student drives their learning by picking up on things and demanding to know more. Where a novice or student does not seem willing, or able, to move onto more difficult and taxing tasks the mentor is unlikely to push them. The difference between a good and a bad novice is the ‘ .... *effort applied to stealing workmanship with their eyes.*” The students’ own role in their workplace learning is addressed in **section 2.4.2.** above. (Gherardi, 2006:122). Another author discusses the idea of learning as a desire-based function.(Illeris, 2003:8)

Gherardi suggests that rivalry between mentors may lead to confused messages for the novice / student. Certainly mentors may differ in their styles of operation and engagement with their teaching role. This is less about the nature of knowledge than the nature of organisations, relationships and the settings in which they interact. It is difficult to regularise.

The novice progresses from direct one-to-one learning to a practice of learning from the interactions between others, as for example when on the boundary of a discussion of the best way to solve a problem or avoid past mistakes. Reflective practice thus becomes a part of the ordinary.

Edmund Nuttall (contractors) were amongst those to take the lead in the introduction of FD to the construction sector. They speak of communities of practice thus;

*“When FD students are involved in a community of practice the learning takes on a whole new meaning so that everyone in the practice is informed by developing the students. This avoids the complaint that students take up valuable time. Which is not the case if students are properly engaged in the practice of doing useful; work at different levels, so they build up confidence in how things are done ... “ (Nuttall, 2004)*

Eraut (2007) in an article entitled “*Learning from people at work*” furthers his previous support for experiential learning. In a study across the first three years of the working lives

of three groups of professionals – nurses, engineers and accountants– he looks at what is being learnt, how is it being learnt and what factors affect the level and direction of learning efforts.

Erauts' study, focussing on recent students beginning their full time professional lives, differs from my own, but it does examine learning within a professional workplace setting.

Implicit learning plays a significant role. Much professional work involves addressing/ solving complex problems, work which cannot be represented effectively in a classroom setting.

Respondents in Eraut's study were asked about their use and extension of knowledge brought from higher education or other life experience. Education and practice settings each have both theories and practices but very different cultures and very different discourses. I myself shall explore with each of the key stakeholder groups the relationship between classroom and workplace learning.

Garraway et al.(2011) review a number of writings on the transfer of knowledge between university and work.They suggest (p.530) that students "*do not learn so much about work, for example at university, but rather learn from being at work*" referring to participation in communities of practice

Eraut's respondents found the measurement of tacit knowledge difficult.

He suggests, as do Garraway et al.(2011:531) that universities deal predominantly in codified knowledge (taken from reviewed journals and the like ) as in Gherardi's "*passage of accumulated knowledge down the ages* ", above, whereas cultural knowledge (un-codified) plays a part in work-based practices. Eraut doubts the suggestion that this last can be codified (as did Havnes and McDowell, above). Much un-coded cultural knowledge is acquired informally through participation in social activities and as such is taken so much for granted that people are unaware of it.

Individual perspective is captured by Eraut's definition of personal knowledge as

*".... what individual persons bring to situations that enables them to think, interact and perform it incorporates both peoples' capabilities – what they can do- and the understandings that inform them". (Eraut,2007:406)*

It is the use of these rather than their truth that is the focus of my own study. It can be witnessed without the need for it to be measured or codified.



In one table Eraut addresses the four “*distinct but interconnected*” stages, visible in most forms of practice, namely:

*“(a) Assessing clients and/or situations, (b) Deciding what( if any ) action to take,(c) pursuing an agreed course of action, with associated modification, consultation and re-assessment as necessary, and (d) Metacognitive Monitoring of oneself, people needing attention and the general progress of the case, problem or situation.”*  
(Eraut, 2007:407)

These are presented in their different forms depending upon the time available to the professional to perform the necessary cognitive operations, which will vary from case to case.

His team discovered that new learners were not so much helped by structured introductions and training in workplace techniques but rather by advice and informal feedback from those around them. This seems in line with Gherardi’s findings, the novice learning from those not necessarily appointed as mentor.

Eraut’s Typology of Early Career Learning, reproduced in full as Table 2.2., overleaf, suggests the learning opportunities available within the workplace. Freed of any discipline-specific technical content it may suggest a template of mainly generic skills. It suggests a framework to which I shall return in my final chapter, considering its elements in more detail in the light of my own findings when seeking to create draft success factors and a framework for the same.

**Table 2.2 A Typology of early career learning. Eraut (2007;409 )**

<b>Work Processes</b> with learning as a by-product	<b>Learning Activities</b> located within work or learning processes	<b>Learning Processes</b> at or near the workplace
Participation in group processes	Asking questions	Being supervised
Working alongside others	Getting information	Being coached
Consultation	Locating resource people	Being mentored
Tackling challenging tasks and roles	Listening and observing	Shadowing
Problem solving	Reflecting	Visiting other sites
Trying things out	Learning from mistakes	Conferences
Consolidating, extending and refining skills	Giving and receiving feedback	Short courses
Working with clients		Working for a qualification
		Independent study

I shall present an alternative table in Chapter 5, its content formed by the evidence gathered from my own sample.

### **The Factors affecting workplace learning.**

The above research suggests the importance of confidence

*"much learning at work involves doing things and being proactive in seeking learning opportunities."* (Eraut,2007:417)

Confidence arose from meeting challenges, a confidence born of support. This speaks again of the community of learning. Eraut envisages a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence. A factor relevant to the forming such confidence, is the setting of an appropriate level of challenge. Therein lies the skill of the mentor. (Eraut;2007:418)

Eraut's own subjects experienced varying degrees of pressure in meeting the tasks required of them. Workload had to be at a level which allowed subjects to respond to new

challenges reflectively, rather than by just adopting coping mechanisms. So, managers had to balance the immediate demands of the job against the needs of the trainees to broaden their experience. This was usually achieved in accountancy, but less so in engineering, due to the variety of the companies and their specialities. The greatest variety was in nursing, demonstrating some of the best and some of the worst learning environments. There are direct parallels here with the diversity of opportunities for those in the construction sector.

### **Suggestions for enhancing workplace learning**

Eraut clearly supports workplace learning as a supplement to the classroom;

*“Formal learning contributes most when it is both relevant and well timed , but still needs further workplace learning before it can be used to best effect. “*  
(Eraut,2007:419)

He concludes (p.420) by suggesting four key factors which contribute to the effectiveness of workplace learning. These are considered below in light of work done by others.

**Support and feedback;** Vital to learning, the most effective feedback is immediate, from those who work closely with the student. Such feedback might be informal and unstructured as when from fellow workers (of another trade or discipline even, as in Gherardi's examples) not necessarily those in charge of the student. The most important aspect is that the feedback be formative in nature, building the student's confidence and sense of belonging. The best learning is that built alongside growing self confidence and the feeling of belonging to the learning community. With these last should come the growing sense of professional identity referred to elsewhere. (for example, see Illeris,.2003:12)

**Enhancing workplace learning;** Students will learn most from being involved in real tasks, preferably in teams, affording the opportunity to consult with mentors and/or co-workers about methods to be engaged, and so on. Managers should be conscious of the student's need to progress to new areas but at a realistic pace. The nature and volume of the tasks set is important.

**The manager's role:** the need to foster a working environment and a culture which will both challenge and support the student. Appropriate line managers and mentors must be chosen, with clear roles in the student's development.

***The knowledge required***; Eraut (2008) suggests the need for involvement and awareness on the part of manager, mentor and novice. I would include the provider in the formula. The extent to which the latter should and does become actively involved was explored above (and also features in my own research). One element of understanding is an appreciation of learning needs “*in the context of a record of progress in relevant aspects of performance*”. In the case of those involved in Eraut’s sample formal exams and grades will generally be behind them, but in my own case this might usefully be translated into assessment requirements, providing a link back to the concerns expressed by Williams and Thurairaja (2009) (See pp.62-63 and pp.237 -239 herein)

## **2.6. The Simulation Option**

The many variances seen between the type, quality and volume of available WPL may encourage those who seek uniformity to look again to the classroom. Simulated exercises offer the promise of equal exposure to and tests of the same basic professional skills for all. But there may be problems in practice, as discussed below.

### **2.6.1. Problems with Realism ?**

Nowadays, simulation need not just consist of realistic-looking paperwork and number-crunching computer exercises. Harnessing the best in IT and games technology one Australian academic, Prof. Sid Newton, has created a whole construction scenario in Virtual Reality. In his world, imaginary construction progresses on simulated sites, all in 3D. In simulated wet weather on site, the simulated 4X4 vehicle, on arrival, has to struggle through simulated mud! (Newton, 2010). However, closer examinations of Newton’s excellent visual simulations, shows them to be no more than advanced teaching aids which focus on imparting standard construction technology knowledge. They undoubtedly make learning more exciting, apparently locating the student on site, but they remain a series of exercises which do not need, essentially, to pretend that they are taking place on site for them to have value. Enabling students to see things against the backdrop of a building site (quite literally) merely sweetens the pill.

So, simulation risks being not just a mechanised but perhaps also a mechanistic representation of the real world. Would students, QS or others, brought up and educated entirely on a diet of simulations of real life have learnt what it is like to be a QS, working with those of other disciplines, one of the driving goals of the FD? The authors themselves appear to accept the limitations of their creation;

*“Virtual reality technology is impressive, but it is patently not “reality”. The “experience “ of a construction site and the practice and demonstration of construction technology competencies in a virtual environment does not equate in every respect to the same experiences and demonstrations on an actual construction site. “ (Newton, 2010:194)*

Additionally, a diet consisting entirely of simulation perhaps overlooks the fact that the PT student will still be very much involved in the world of work. For such students, a simulation-based approach to teaching and assessment this would constitute a stark divide between the 80% of their time spent at work and the 20% spent in the University setting.

A more down-to earth approach is taken by one group at UNN, reported on by its creators. The authors see their 3D models as simply that, an aid to teaching or design tool (Horne and Thompson, 2008:9). They are not claiming these as substitutes for on-site experience.

### **2.6.2. Problems with Role Play ?**

In another simulated development exercise, each member of a student group was commissioned to design new software over a set period for one of a group of “Clients”—these last being staff members from another School in the same university. Although clients’ briefings were effective, as was the students’ design work, problems arose when the quasi clients began to treat the exercise as a formal academic assessment. Inevitably, it is suggested, the teacher in them took over; one explained his lapse out of character in the role play thus:

*“I’m sure they saw me as the client they were developing the project for. It’s just that I perhaps was less critical than I might have been had I been a real client. Because I was aware that they had to get this thing done eight weeks.” (Diamond, 2011: 32)*

Thus, what might have been an effective simulation throughout, with the desired product handed over the “client”, was marred by staff members’ lack of capacity for role play.

The authors do comment on dangers such as these.

*“It is important that an educational simulation is believable to the students.” (Diamond, 2011: 33)*

At one point it is observed that :

*“Both academic clients and students were mindful that the latter needed to meet the external requirements of the assignment submission as well as the client requirements within the simulation.” (Diamond, 2011: 32)*

It is noted that this was the first run of this project. For the re-runs, it was said that

*“ the academic clients [ have been] provided with detailed briefings, describing the requirements of their role, to strengthen the authenticity of the client presence.” (Diamond, 2011: 32)*

It appears to be rare that this is done in assessment of the FD, particularly so in connection with the outcome(s) of a student's workplace learning. In my own experience some professionals included within assessment panels have had difficulty assessing the student presentations in accordance with the set criteria, their marks sometimes varying wildly from those of academics on the panel with them.

### **2.6.3. “Live Project Office” Model**

Many years ago the School of Surveying and Construction at UNN maintained a “Live Project Office”. This was an adapted classroom, acting as a professional office. The tutor in charge, a qualified surveyor, took in real work from the outside world, performing professional services in return for commercial fees paid to the School. Final Year FT students encouraged to help him, were thus working on real work for real clients. The Office, alongside providing some hands-on experience was a source of teaching materials, the tutor in question sharing details of current projects with colleagues. Unfortunately, the Office made insufficient fee income to remain self- supporting and had to close.

A more successful exercise, conducted in recent times by Wood and Oxley (2007), involved a genuine private client who commissioned architectural students to design a display stand using a competitive approach such as they would one day meet with in industry. The winning student team was involved *“at all levels of the design development, fabrication and realisation”*. The finished product was used at “Interbuild 2004”. The primary aim sought interaction between students and a real client on a genuine scheme. By contrast with the exercise reported on by Diamond (2011), above, here students were working for a client rather than for their own tutors or other tutors in disguise. This was much appreciated with one student reporting;

*“A lot of project briefs can feel like an accommodation schedule: a list of objectives you need to tick. Because the project was for a real client the brief felt a lot less constrained, more open to what we wanted to do. Throughout the project we were*

*always focussed on producing something that would appeal to [the client], there was never a debate as to what our tutors wanted.” (Wood and Oxley, 2007:81)*

In this last case, one has travelled full circle one might say, arriving at a situation (premises aside) of WPL, real client, real project.

#### **2.6.4. A footnote to Simulations**

One review conducted in 2008 by the Department for Employment and Learning addressed the possibility of there being a lack of WPL, asking how this might be compensated for. Respondents generally favoured WPL over simulation, one at least seeing simulation as a poor substitute, subversive even;

*“Simulation is not a real alternative to work based experience and there is an inherent risk that any model which allows for [it] will result in reduced efforts to secure meaningful work placements.” (Employment and Learning, 2008:50).*

A number of writers, in singing the praises of situated learning, specifically suggest that *“true learning and understanding occur through activity within a context”* Brubaker, (2011:5)

Beaney, (2005:8), whilst supporting some use of simulation within FD delivery, warns that;

*“It is important ....that the latter engages students as closely as possible with the experience of work in order to ensure both a meaningful learning experience and comparability of understanding”.*

#### **2.7. Working Together – Draft Critical Success factors suggested by the literature**

I have found no evidence of an existing unified template for establishing and maintaining effective relationships between all key stakeholders to FD in the specific context of FT programmes. Various general guidelines and draft strategic frameworks have been produced (as those referred to in section 2.3.4.2, above) but once again they do not seem informed by the practicalities of the FT student's situation. Only Burch and Greenwood (2008) address the matter specifically (see section 2.3. above). The QAA (2007) document addresses good practice for WPL which includes reference to FT placements, but its recommendations are generic, allowing a lot of flexibility, and it is not binding on the parties.

Eraut (2007) and Gheradi (2006) above, appear particularly alive to the practicalities of the workplace situation and of workplace learning, both chiefly focussing on generic rather than career-specific competencies. This may be particularly appropriate to the shorter

placement, not pre-supposing any serious volume of technical learning or assessment. A framework could be designed to address the stages of partnership between provider and employer, including the mechanics of establishing and maintaining ongoing relationships. Templates could be introduced for specific and purposeful interactions between the parties, addressing such issues as mentoring, assessment and the like.

It has been suggested already, the longest lasting, closest and most effective working relationships between provider and employer may stem from the foundations of an early common approach to the design of programmes. There is also some evidence that FT students when placed with employers accustomed to employing PT students will benefit from long term established practices and understandings. (Greenwood,2008)

Literature relating to the importance of assessment is quite plentiful (as discussed in sub-sections 2.3.6.2. and 2.5.1.above). However, the main emphasis seems to be on provider-led, provider-assessed exercises. Consequently, a framework of / for assessment within the workplace, conducted by the employer is hard to discern in all except the teaching, science or health-related sectors, the last arising from a need to meet nationally agreed standards of practice.

Assessment is recognised as an essential measure of in-house classroom-based education. WPL, whilst assessment is a part, seems to be essentially about experiential learning. With the variety of disciplines and specific work situations being so great this is perhaps where transferable skills come into their own.

Factors highlighted in the overview of the effects of the recession on workplace activity must significantly influence the practical experience which providers may hope for, to supplement classroom-based studies comprising the rest of their programmes. This begs the question: what is a reasonable expectation of WPL? How reasonable is it to expect delivery within the workplace of specific “Core Skills”, such as those set out by Professional Bodies , for example the **RICS** (2009). Should we, instead, be looking to WPL only for soft, generic skills which may be universally available but would fail the test set by QAA and others, anticipating as they were training in specific professional skills? Research indicates that providers are indeed being forced by circumstances in the market place, to accept more of the former and less of the latter.

Of what importance are the possible problems addressed above? Whilst various academics continue to express support for experiential WPL, resources in industry are under serious pressure. Might it be possible to establish a template incorporating some



agreed critical success factors, **targets** which, if met, could be used to accredit or validate a particular programme – employer situation ? **Figure 2.2** below brings together factors which at this stage it is hoped may one day constitute the elements of agreed CSF.

The CSF, displayed in the centre panel are based on factors raised by the literature covered by this chapter. They are a first attempt at representing the concerns expressed by the four key stakeholders. The 7 factors above may grow in number and/or be modified by the addition of further detail (recommended times, percentages, topics and so on) born of analysis and discussion of my data.

## **2.8. Conclusion to this chapter**

### **2.8.1. Conclusions Generally;**

Previous research conducted amongst stakeholders and that reflecting upon the broader pedagogical issues both suggest support for WPL. This chapter began by a justification of WPL as a feature of the FD. In line with the title of this thesis the nature of the employers' engagement with the process has been reviewed, from their own perspective and that of other stakeholders. Existing research findings suggest possible complications, as not all stakeholders share either a common vision or matching procedures, complicating any suggestion that a standard pedagogy of WPL might be possible. From this it appears that critical success factors, if any are to be established, may need to be set within a rather loose framework of experiential learning rather than a formal curriculum-related structure.

To date, the majority of published research and case studies have concentrated on the delivery and assessment of WPL to students engaged on PT programmes. In recognition of there being a gap in the literature, my own chief concern has been the provision of WPL to FT students, over half of all those enrolled on current construction-related programmes. Whilst drawing on the existing findings referred to above, I have directed my own research to look principally at provision for this cohort of students.

### **2.8.2. Research questions suggested by the literature**

In order to situate my own work within the body of literature reviewed above, and in order that a practical set of guidelines might be produced by the end of this work, as befits the conclusions of a Professional Doctorate, my own research will explore the following practical questions, within the context of the delivery of a FD in the construction sector.

The driver for the questions, taken from the literature, is stated beneath each ;

1. What importance does each of the stakeholders attach to Work Place Learning (WPL) within the curriculum?

The literature suggests almost universal support for some WPL within every programme of study (Reddy and Moores, 2011; QAA, 2010; Benefer, 2006 and 2007; Williams, 2004; Burch and Greenwood, 2008; Gherardi, 2006; Greenwood et al., 2008; Eraut, 2008; Haynes and McDowell, 2008; Tynjälä, 2008; Burke et al., 2009; Harris, 2004; Brubaker, 2011; Frank, 2005; Garraway et al., 2011; Illeris, 2003; Diamond, 2011; Wood and Oxley, 2007; Brubaker, 2011). For this to be a success it is important that those actually involved in its delivery and assessment share this general enthusiasm. The above area of questioning seeks to assess the truth of the proposition that all are in support. Hopefully, responses will also suggest respondents' motivation for such enthusiasm, which may be further exposed and explored by question area (2) below.

2. How would the stakeholders define a successful/effective WPL experience for the student?

The literature demonstrates varying levels of satisfaction with the processes, content and outcomes of WBL, depending upon the subjects being researched (Price and Edmond, 2006; Stinton et al., 2007; Perera and Pearson, 2011; Costley and Armsby, 2007 and 2008 ; Brodie and Irving, 2007; Ooms, 2011; Higgins et al., 2010; Yorke, 2010). The above area of questioning seeks to establish the expectations of the parties, as some match across these will be important to the acceptance of a common structure.

3. How do they perceive their own role within this, both as players in their own right and in relation to the other stakeholders involved?

In line with data forming the basis of question 2, above, literature suggests differing perceptions from those within the various stakeholder groups as to the roles and responsibilities which might reasonably be expected of them ( Powell. 2006; Perera and Pearson, 2011; Greenwood et al., 2008; Drake and Blake, 2009; Benefer, 2007; Knight et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2008; Stinton et al., 2007; Edmond et al., 2007; Pearson, 1996; Hillier and Rownsey, 2006; Haynes and McDowell, 2008; Woolf and Yorke, 2010; Williams and Thurairajah, 2009; Burke et al., 2009; Gallagher and Ingram, 2009; Green, 2004). The above area

of questioning explores this issue and paves the way for serious examination, below, of

4. How successful do stakeholders feel that they and others have been in performing their roles expected of them?

Literature offers examples illustrating varying levels of satisfaction with the process and success of (contentment with) exercises in WPL (Greenwood et al., 2008; Brennan et al., 2006; Kumar, 2007; Burch and Greenwood, 2008; Price and Edmonds, 2006; Stuart-Hoyle, 2007; Wareing, 2008; Benyon and McKee, 2009). Where it has been suggested that there has been breakdown or failure there is usually a suggested culprit, usually though not always the “other” party. The above area of questioning seeks an honest appraisal on the part of interviewees which may on occasion uncover weaknesses in their own operation. Understanding of these last will help in the design of a Framework Document.

5. What barriers to the above, both internal and external, have presented themselves?

This area of questioning is a subsidiary to (4) above, requiring the parties to explore all aspects of the operation of WPL. It should uncover not just the issues personal to stakeholders themselves (matters of relationships and communication with others for example) but also constraints imposed by circumstances outwith their personal control. Recognition and, wherever possible, accommodation of these last will again, be important to the creation of an effective Framework Document

6. What value would stakeholders place on there being a common Framework Document in respect of WPL, whose provisions are to be observed by all stakeholders, and what form should these take?

The literature suggests that very little programme-specific guidance, or regulation, exists at present (Benyon et al., 2009; Gittus and Hemsworth, 2006; Billet, 2009; Canter, 2006; Tollyfield, 2006; Stinton et al., 2007; Dear and Lonsdale, 2006; Percival et al., 1994; Wilson and Robbins, 2008). The above line of questioning seeks to establish the level of support which might exist within each stakeholder group for documents of this nature. It seeks to establish what, if any constraints the stakeholders would wish to see, examining any reasons given for the same. Responses here may well arise out of and be linked in with those given to question areas (3), (4) and (5) above.

The above areas of enquiry are pursued with each stakeholder group as appropriate and demonstrated in the key elements of each interview: Employers (p.131), Providers (p.148) Graduates /Past Students (p.156) and Professional Bodies (p.166)

**Figure 2.2**

**Initial identification of Critical Success Factors  
from Literature**

<b>Educational Provider</b>		<b>Workplace</b>
	Involvement in planning Ongoing liaison Type of skills Level of skill Credit Value in Award Assessment Vehicle Assessment Responsibility	
<b>Student</b>		<b>Professional Body</b>

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction to this chapter**

In this chapter I shall discuss my work, that of the Hybrid Practitioner Researcher (Reed and Proctor, 1995:10), explaining my approach to and the stages of my research and analysis, together with the practical problems encountered therewith. My methodology was predominantly qualitative, obtaining data via questionnaires to a general population and interviews with a specific group of subjects selected from these.

A qualitative study best suits my aim and those objectives involving examining and understanding the management and assessment of workplace learning, key in turn to an understanding of the employer's role in each case. My own work demonstrates a number, though not all, of the ten characteristics identified by Fox et al (2007:14-15). That is, the research examines a current state of affairs which I wished to understand better, a network of which I myself am a part. I set out to understand the ways in which the various stakeholders involved within this network interpret and operate its procedures. Subjects have been specifically targeted to best create an effective sample, and data illustrative of the above. I have adopted an inductive approach.

#### **3.2. A practitioner's approach.**

In both parts of my professional life, whether as a Surveyor working in industry, or as an academic delivering programmes of study, I always saw myself as a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1987). So, when undertaking this study it was as someone reviewing actual practice with a view to being informed by my findings, open to the possibility of changing my own practices as well as those of others. This was "*not [to be] research simply for its own sake, but with some specific and practice-oriented application in mind*" (Drake and Heath, 2011:7). As with most authors referred to, their main focus is on research into the researcher's own workplace rather than something that extends beyond this. However, I have gone beyond the reflective practitioner turned-researcher (Murray and Lawrence, 2000:2) as my study extends to the practices of others rather than focussing on my own. This outward looking stance echoes the nature of Professional Doctorates (Scott et al 2004:21):

*"A student-practitioner devises a set of procedures developed from some acquaintance with the outside world of work. That allows the practitioner to either make better sense of their workplace practices and/or develop new, original and more productive ways of working."*

As a practitioner myself, with personal experience and some understanding of the two worlds, industry and academia, the best approach to discovering the situation in which stakeholders found themselves was for me to research issues from their perspective, in each case going onto their territory. This is akin to Empirical Interpretivism (Pickard, 2006:6-23) with its emphasis on investigation of social phenomena in natural settings.

In the case of Sandwich Degrees, requirements and processes tend to be standardised across all programmes. Relationships between employers and providers and the consequent student experience all occur within a fairly tightly prescribed and consistent setting. However, in the case of the FD there are quite complex individual realities for the various stakeholders in the FD, affecting ways in which they interact and suggesting the need to explore procedures from the inside.

There are a variety of types of practitioner researcher. These have been described as “*Outsider*”, “*Hybrid*” or “*Insider*” (Reed,1995) characterised as Table 3:1. Below;

**Table 3:1 Research Positions – based on Reed (1995:10)**

Outsider	Hybrid	Insider
A researcher undertaking research into practice with no professional experience	A <u>practitioner</u> undertaking research into the <b>practice</b> of other practitioners	A <u>practitioner</u> undertaking research into their own and their colleagues’ <b>practice</b>

In practitioner research, practice is the focus of research. Fox et al (2007:78) offer five definitions (taken from Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). That which relates best to my own subject is “*Practice as social action or tradition*”.

A number of authors have explored the particular characteristics of Hybrid or Insider Research, most commonly in the fields of health or education, for example Reed and Procter (1995), Burton and Bartlett (2005) Campbell and Groundwater Smith (2007). It is noticeable that most educational research investigates school, university or classroom situations. No studies appear to look outside these institutions, focussing on delivering a syllabus in partnership with bodies outside of the education system.

Reed and Procter (1995) examine a variety of issues in respect of Practitioner Research generally, though their chief focus is on Insider research, as is that of Fox et.al. (2007) and Drake and Heath (2011). All Practitioner Research raises certain issues, which I shall discuss, but some of the deepest and most serious are those attached to insider research,

where one is exploring issues with and amongst colleagues. Drake and Heath (2011:20) for example, talk of loyalty to one's own Institution, to colleagues and so on, as well as the need to shield oneself from repercussions. These matters are also discussed by Gorman (2007:15), Norton (2007:162) and Cochran Smith and Lytle (2007:28): in Campbell and Groundwater Smith (2007) and also by Murray and Lawrence (2000:54) and Menter (2011:139) I have largely avoided the above by taking a hybrid position, researching programmes other than my own. Thus, my results would not be influenced by or have a direct bearing upon my own status or relationships within the organisations studied.

One of the chief consequences of my status as practitioner researcher concerns my own prior knowledge and the impact this might have on data collection and analysis. Reed and Proctor (1995:4) observe that personal experience gained over time was not historically regarded as "*scientific*" enough and that it should not be allowed to frame or inform new work in any way. However, practitioner knowledge and experience can be seen as a resource, to guide rather than to bias the researcher. Indeed, no researcher, whether qualitative or quantitative, can be totally uninfluenced by their own circumstances. The researcher must avoid "*telling it how [they] see it rather than telling it how it is*". (Reed and Proctor, 1995:7). The danger for the practitioner researcher is of "*going native*" (an expression borrowed by the above authors from Silverman (1985:105) whereby the researcher identifies too closely with particular respondents, risking becoming partisan, thus threatening the validity of analysis. This advice is reinforced by Drake and Heath (2011:19) advising practitioners undertaking research, "*despite starting from a position of knowledge and insight into what is important*" to remain "*sufficiently distant and therefore critical*".

Reed and Proctor (1995:48) also advise regarding lines of investigation and questioning. They suggest a danger that the practitioner being, or having been, so close themselves to operations which they investigate may take these for granted, failing to examine them further and perhaps missing vital evidence. The practitioner should use their own prior knowledge of situations to prompt questions of a certain kind, rather than assuming that they, as the researcher, already know the answer. As Brinkmann (2012:21) observes "*it can be very difficult to understand the obvious*". Reed in Reed and Proctor (1995:48) warns against the researcher taking for granted - and thus failing to highlight - data which others may find "*mysterious*" and "*fascinating*" if new to them. This last point is made, in part, by Silverman (2013(2):147) in his conclusions chapter, when he advises researchers to "*stand outside the taken –for- granted assumptions that inform our daily life.*"



Reed in Reed and Proctor (1995:53) discusses roles and relationships, the response of the interviewee to the interviewer. She suggests that the researcher is more likely to be seen by respondents as *“a practitioner who is doing research than a researcher who is a practitioner”* for most will have a clearer concept of a practitioner than they might of a researcher. I suggest they might treat the latter as an *“outsider”* and thus be less forthcoming with them. Hopefully, by having established my credentials with each of the interviewees before commencing the interview they felt me to be a fellow practitioner, very much helping our understanding of one another. In terms of both parties’ understanding of the language used, being a practitioner researcher (coming from the same background as one’s subjects) is a great advantage when alluding to matters of a technical nature.

For the application of the above specific to my own case see section 3:12 below

### **3.3. Model, Methodology and Method**

Silverman (2013:446) distinguishes between Models, Methodology and Methods thus:

*“Models: Provide an overall framework for how we look at reality , (e.g. positivism, naturalism and constructionism).”*

*“Methodology: Choices we make about appropriate models, cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis etc. in planning and executing a research study.”*

*Methods: Specific research techniques [including] .. observation, interviewing and audio recording .“*

#### **The Model**

My **model** is essentially a constructionist one, seeking to demonstrate how the relationships within the workplace experience partnership develop and operate, through study of the interactions involved, and subsequently affect the conduct of those involved. It is suggested that *“research does not exist in a vacuum but is intimately tied in to the workings of modern society”* (Silverman, 2013 (2): 125). The Importance of such interactions was not clear to me when I began my study but my appreciation of their significance has grown as a consequence of my data analysis.

Through my reading of the literature on FDs it seemed to me that the experience-related expectations of stakeholders may be one key to the type and level of their own personal engagement. Such expectations will have been born, in part, from their understanding of the situation in which they have found themselves. This suggested the need for an examination and appreciation on my part of the meanings (and thus the values) attached to the word “engagement” and, in turn, some of the terms associated with it.

The paradigm of symbolic interactionism, originated by Mead in 1938, seems to facilitate understanding of the above situation, and has been mentioned as a possible framework for practitioner research (Reed and Proctor, 1995:8).

Symbolic interactionism makes three assumptions;

- a *“Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them*
- a. *That the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.*
- b. *These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters “. (Blumer, 1969:2)*

In the context of the current study I myself have re-interpreted these assumptions as:

- a. Each stakeholder acts to “engage” with the others on the basis of the meaning they attach to “engagement”.
- b. The meaning which each stakeholder attaches to “engagement” will be born of the interactions that each experiences or has experienced in the past.
- c. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by each stakeholder in playing out their role.

Blumer’s main theme is that society consists of individuals interacting with one another and that:

*“ the activities of the members occur predominantly in response to one another or in relation to one another.... The life of any society consists of an ongoing process of fitting together of the activities of its members. This complex of ongoing activity establishes and portrays structures and organisations.” (Blumer, 1969:7)*

The placement situation, involving relationships between at least three key stakeholders, is driven by and relies, to be effective, on the understandings which each party has of their own roles and those of others. This is what my study set out to examine.

Denzin, writing twenty years later than Blumer, supports him, proclaiming that human interaction is the basic source of data. Therefore we should be studying and reflecting on such interaction. He suggests also that:

*“Humans learn their basic symbols, their conceptions of self, and the definitions they attach to social objects through interaction with others.” (Denzin, 1989:5)*

Writing later still, this time specifically about Interpretive interactionism, a later term for Blumer’s “symbolic interactionism “, (Denzin, 2001:1-33) explains that his own research is based on minimal theory, but is seeking, rather, to show what is actually happening in the understandings held by the parties.

According to Denzin (2001:2) the outcome of an interpretive approach is that it can help the researcher identify and “*through the use of personal experience, stories and thick*

*descriptions of lived experience* “ ultimately compare and contrast the perspectives of the different players, stakeholders in my own case. Similarly, it can identify the different assumptions held by the parties involved. This, in turn, means that the researcher can identify “*strategic points of intervention* “. He or she can suggest ways in which the parties might more usefully and effectively manage the inter-relationship and/or some of its processes, in particular the placement situation.

Blumer (1969) suggests that to be effective the researcher must try as much as possible to understand and to put him/herself in the position of the subject, to fully appreciate their perspective. Denzin (1989:8) supports this view. As noted elsewhere I have experience and some understanding of the position of each stakeholder. Denzin suggests that the more the researcher can identify with the position of “*the acting other*”, the more they might avoid being governed by their own preconceptions.

Guided very much by the above paradigm, I chose in-depth interviews, discussed below, as the best route to obtaining qualitative data which would enable me to construct a picture of the motivation of each of the parties and of their relationships with others. This was to enable me to explore and, if possible, find cause for the stakeholders’ often different-seeming understandings and, indeed, their motivations in the settings within which they found themselves . This seems essential if, in turn, a common framework is to be created, one reconciling and addressing the concerns of all of the parties , thus “*fitting together the activities of members* “ and closing as much as possible any gaps.

### **The Methodology**

My overall approach, that of a Practitioner Researcher, is not a methodology in its own right, but positions me amongst those intent on research stemming from their own involvement in situations, and “*meeting with those in the field*” Silverman (2013)(1). I am using a qualitative approach as this allows me to seek to understand processes and those involved with them. Empirical interpretivism, the approach which I aim to pursue, avoids the assumption one single reality and suggests the following; investigation in (of) natural settings; the reality of the individual is of importance, embedded in context, not universal; all descriptions are time and context bound and it is impossible to separate Cause from effect. In conducting research from this perspective individual contexts are everything, both micro and macro. Understanding will depend upon both the tacit and explicit knowledge of the researcher. Such exploration of as many individual realities as possible is necessary if acceptable common ground is to be arrived at.

A number of possible methodological approaches were open to me. As an outsider, I could have sought purely quantitative evidence of interactions between the various stakeholder groups, as some sort of guide to good practice. As an observer, I could myself have followed the workings of representatives of each of the stakeholder groups, forming my own conclusions as to the effectiveness of their relationships. Guided by my chosen model, above, I could collect evidence from each group on their own outlooks and interactions with others; Finally, I could collect evidence from one group on the workings of each of the others.

It is difficult to see what, if any, quantitative data would enable a researcher to explain the realities behind the figures. My second option would have been an enormous task, beyond the scope of a study of this size, to personally follow the lives of sufficient persons to form representative pictures of stakeholder groups. This last would have involved collection and analysis of a large volume of diary data, interview data etc. It may still have failed to clarify the motivation of the parties or their individual realities. Again I might be left just with the group message of each set of stakeholders. In the end as the best means to obtain answers to the six questions set at the end of Chapter 2, I chose what seemed to be a practicable combination of the last two options above. My interviews with selected subjects from associated stakeholder groups examined both their own motivations, roles, drivers and barriers as well as exploring their perceptions of those of other stakeholders involved. The data obtained from such an exercise enabled me to identify Critical Success Factors and formulate the guidelines I hoped to create; namely the Draft Strategic Framework.

I hope to demonstrate effectively and explain my own choice of process within this chapter.

### **The Method**

In my introduction to this chapter I referred to qualitative research. Current authors are increasingly suggesting that we should be wary of restricting methodology and the methods used to single streams of activity associated with traditional definitions. Cohen et al (2011:21) refer to the “*polarities of Qualitative and Quantitative*”, whilst Brinkmann (2012:1) warns against “*Methodolatry*”. Rather, it is suggested that researchers might usefully call on a mixture of techniques, to varying extents, to effectively capture and subsequently analyse the data which will address their research question, aim and objectives (Cohen et al.,20011: 21-26). Both Sandelowski (2000) and Sale et.al.(2002), less supportive of this approach, review the practice of “mixed method” research, where

qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined. The important message which both authors give seems to be that methods should not be combined carelessly or for effect, but can both be used where the data so collected is complementary and adds to the findings. Sale et al.(2002:49) suggest that the most common mix of methods is a qualitative pilot study followed by quantitative research. In my own case I have reversed this, using the quantitative fact finding mission to identify subjects for qualitative research. This last exercise, could be described as *Qualitizing* (Sandelowski,.2000:253) whereby quantitative data is transformed into qualitative, used in my case to suggest a qualitative measure of programmes ...

My principal **method** or research technique is that of interviews with representatives of the key stakeholders involved. These occur in the contexts of and display some characteristics of both Action Research and the use of Case Studies. My use of these two terminologies needs further explanation relating to my own situation as my own processes/applications have not conformed to classical definitions. .

Action Research is defined by Verma and Mallik (1999) cited by Burton and Bartlett (2011:4) as “*research into specific practical situations to solve clearly identified problems in order to improve them* “. Such research should be “*ongoing and cyclical*” and involve development and the testing of solutions. Although I myself have stopped short of testing a solution, my intention is still to study a social situation “*with a view to improving the quality of action within it*” (Elliot ,1991, cited by Burton and Bartlett, 2011:37). Hence, the conclusion to this thesis includes practical proposals with a view to their being tested in the field.

In practice, my 6 chosen Provider Institutions and the employers and students associated with each could be regarded as cases under investigation . Most often a Case Study approach is seen as an in-depth study of a single subject or set of subjects, as in a single school or even a single classroom, utilising a number of data sources to build up a very comprehensive picture. (Burton and Bartlett, 2009 :64). Others suggest that more than one case study can be conducted (Cohen et al, 2011:292). To distinguish my own approach from case study research I have chosen to use the term “instances” (Silverman, 2013 (1):156) since it has been less in-depth than suggested above, but has enabled me to identify and examine the characteristics of distinct examples of the operation of workplace experience, these distinctions being one of my prime concerns. Cohen et al (2011:291) cite Campbell, (1975) as favouring a multiple case design, suggesting that

*“having two case studies, for comparative purposes, is more than worth having double the amount of data on a single case-study.”*

I therefore suggest that the term “Case Study”, referring to my own work, is an appropriate one.

One criticism of the use of a classical case study approach, relevant particularly to a single case perhaps, is that this fails to produce conclusions appropriate for generalisation.

Alasuutari, (1995:157) in his discussion of **relating** the analysis to things **beyond** the material at hand, suggests that;

*“As far as generalisation to a population is concerned, **extrapolation** better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research”.*

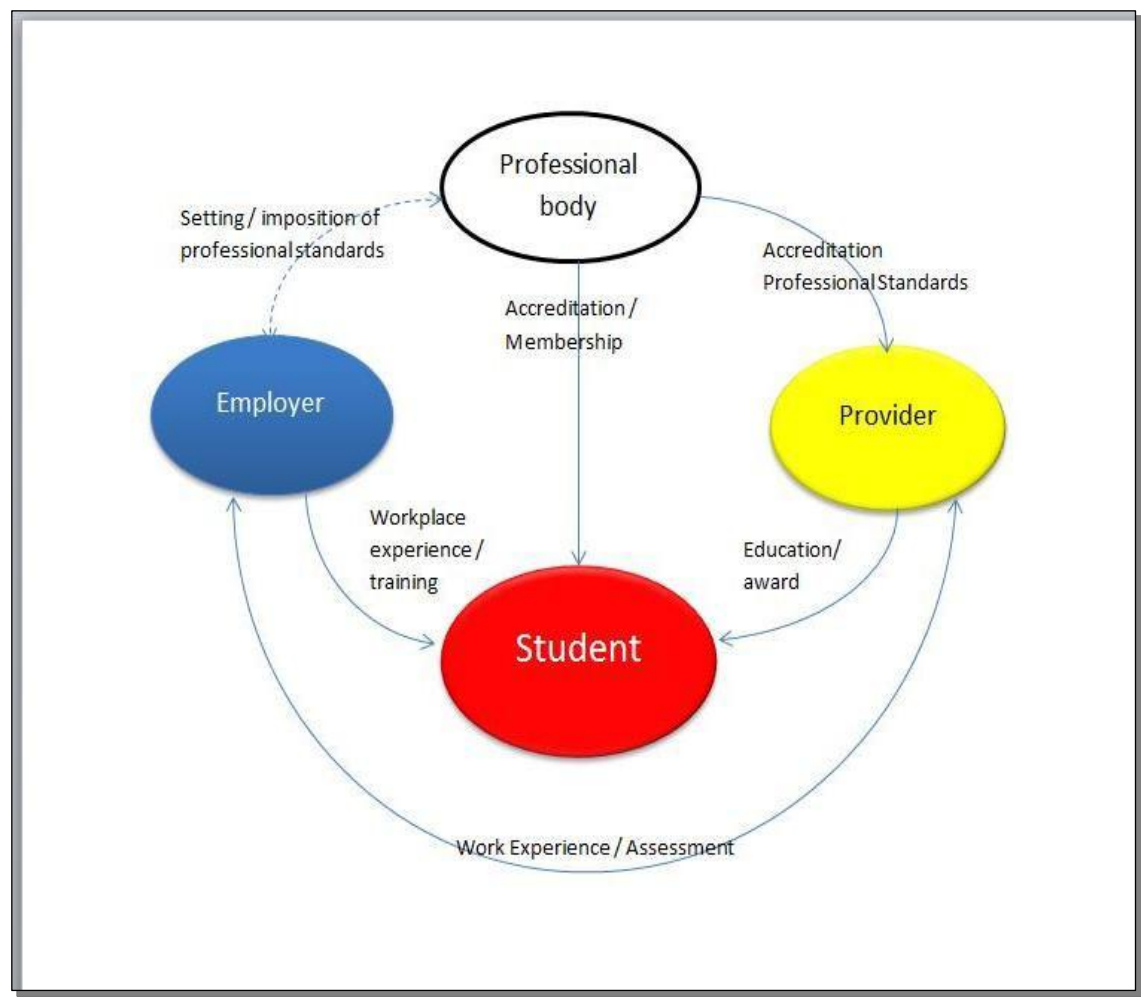
### **3.4. The form of the study**

Figure 3:1 illustrates the inter-relationships expected between the stakeholders under study. It demonstrates the incentive and/or driver involved in each case. These all require some link, or engagement, between the various parties.

The original trigger for my research, as set out in Chapter One, was to seek evidence to support or refute my intuitive observation, born of awareness of the management of FD of which I had experience, that all was not well, or was not equal, with current employer engagement within construction-related FDs. Any variance from the as-yet undetermined norm which I presumed existed seems at best regrettable and at worst, if reacted to in a certain way, might seriously undermine the value of the award as a whole. This last in a world where the FD already suffers from some misunderstanding and/or under-appreciation in the eyes of the industry for which it was created.

Through an examination of evidence within the literature I came to identify differing expected levels of experience and attainment achievable by those who undertook WPL. Thus the “norm” suggested above might be questioned, identifying reasonable expectations of any student’s workplace learning within the sector in question. These last could only be achieved as a result of all the stakeholders recognising and exercising an appropriate role in respect of certain critical success factors developed as a consequence of the first part of my research.

**Figure 3:1 Suggested inter-relationships between the Stakeholders**



Through an examination of evidence within the literature I came to identify differing expected levels of experience and attainment achievable by those who undertook work place learning. Thus the “norm” suggested above might be questioned, identifying reasonable expectations of any student’s workplace learning within the sector in question. These last could only be achieved as a result of all the stakeholders recognising and exercising an appropriate role in respect of certain critical success factors developed as a consequence of the first part of my research.

The above suggested a number of distinct stages for the remainder of my own research, born of items 4 – 8 of my original objectives:

- 4 To conduct empirical research amongst key stakeholders into their part in the conduct of workplace learning within FDs, examining the level of engagement of each, particularly that of the employer .

- 5 To review the perceptions of each stakeholder group regarding others.
- 6 To critically review the role of the Professional Bodies.
- 7 To identify factors instrumental to the effectiveness of work based learning within the FD – referred to herein as “Critical Success Factors” (CSF).
- 8 To develop a draft framework for the effective collaboration and engagement of all stakeholders, informed by the CSF developed above.

**Objectives 4 - 6** were achieved via questionnaires and interviews amongst subjects from each stakeholder group, to determine how each identified themselves and others with the process of which, nominally at least, they were all a part. Content analysis was applied to interview data, both to extract common themes across stakeholder groups and for purposes of triangulation (considering the responses of each associated set of academics, employers and students). Common expectations were sought through analysis across the data.

**Objectives 7 and 8** were achieved through synthesis of results from work addressing objectives 4 – 6 above, thus identifying CSF and constructing a model re-presenting these findings as a template or guide.

As to the method to be employed in data collection, a number of qualitative approaches are available to the researcher. I considered certain of these inappropriate to my ends, namely: Participant Observation; Projective Techniques and Diaries.

Interviewing emerged as the most appropriate route to take.

I decided to conduct One-to-one Interviews. My intention was to explore the individual's own relationship to WPL, and to the issues surrounding it. I wished to address the understandings and possible motivations referred to above. I wished to build, if I could, a model of the operation of workplace learning. The mechanics of interviewing and possible effects of certain contacts which I made are discussed in more depth in **Section 3:6** below.

I also considered Group Interviews. Faced with the prospect of trying to collect as much data as possible relating to each programme, a gathering of employers or past students associated with that Programme (in the form of focus groups) might seem an efficient approach. However, this presents two possible risks (Cohen et al., 2011:432). Firstly, some participants may not wish to tell the researcher certain things as this might seem to be a breach of confidentiality in front of colleagues. Secondly, certain participants may just



be shy generally, whereupon a strong character may come to dominate the group's responses, colouring these in a way and over matters with which the quieter individuals may not have agreed. Similar concerns regarding the possible reticence of participants are voiced by Menter et al (2011:151).

I considered Questionnaires. This is a possible data collecting device, though essentially a quantitative technique. I did employ questionnaires, but only as a device by which to sample the broader field. Responses give me a "snapshot" of the current situation and, in the broadest terms, indicate perceptions of engagement amongst the parties, and determine the sample I chose for detailed examination.

### **3.5. The Primary Research Process**

#### **3.5.1. Sample selection**

It is suggested by Reed in Reed and Proctor (1995:51) that the Practitioner Researcher is in a better position than many to make an effective choice of his /her sample population in the first place, born of a prior understanding of the situation.

I sought a sample which would demonstrate certain extremes suggested by the literature in terms of differing approaches to management of periods of workplace learning as well as the associated communication between the parties. My initial sample of providers was small in number but in fact encompassed the majority of the providers of QS or Construction Management related FD Programmes. I issued my original questionnaire to all 30, receiving completed response from 10, relating to a total of 17 programmes , despite a number of personal follow-up calls, a return rate of 33 %. The reason for non-return in a number of cases, however, was the closure or re-modelling of previously advertised programmes, some changing from mixed mode (FT or PT) to entirely PT.

My selection of 6 providers as "instances" (see discussion above) was designed to provide examples of the extremes of provision. Oppenheimer (1992:68) stresses the importance of,

*"a good spread of respondent characteristics so that we can reasonably hope to have tapped probable respondents of every kind and background."*

This was a "Purposive" sample, *"hand-picked ... and satisfactory to [my] needs."* (Cohen et al., 2011:156)

The sample of employers and students to whom questionnaires could be sent was, necessarily, pre-determined by the limited number associated with each of my 6 chosen providers. This last could be likened to a “*chain referral*” technique, being born specifically of the above. (Cohen et al., 2011:158)

My population of Professional Bodies was automatic, since they were those responsible for the governance of QS, Construction Management and Civil Engineering programmes, the three professions forming the contracting or private practice organisations in which I had an interest.

### **3.5.2. Choice of data types and Data Collection Sequence**

Further to my decision that the most appropriate data to inform my conceptual framework would be gained through a combination of questionnaires and interviews I identified the key issues/ areas I must address and sought to determine in each case whether Questionnaire (Q) or Interview (I) , would be the best vehicle for obtaining this. The data sourcing check- list which I devised is shown in **Table 3.2**.

The following interviews were undertaken, transcribed and analysed.

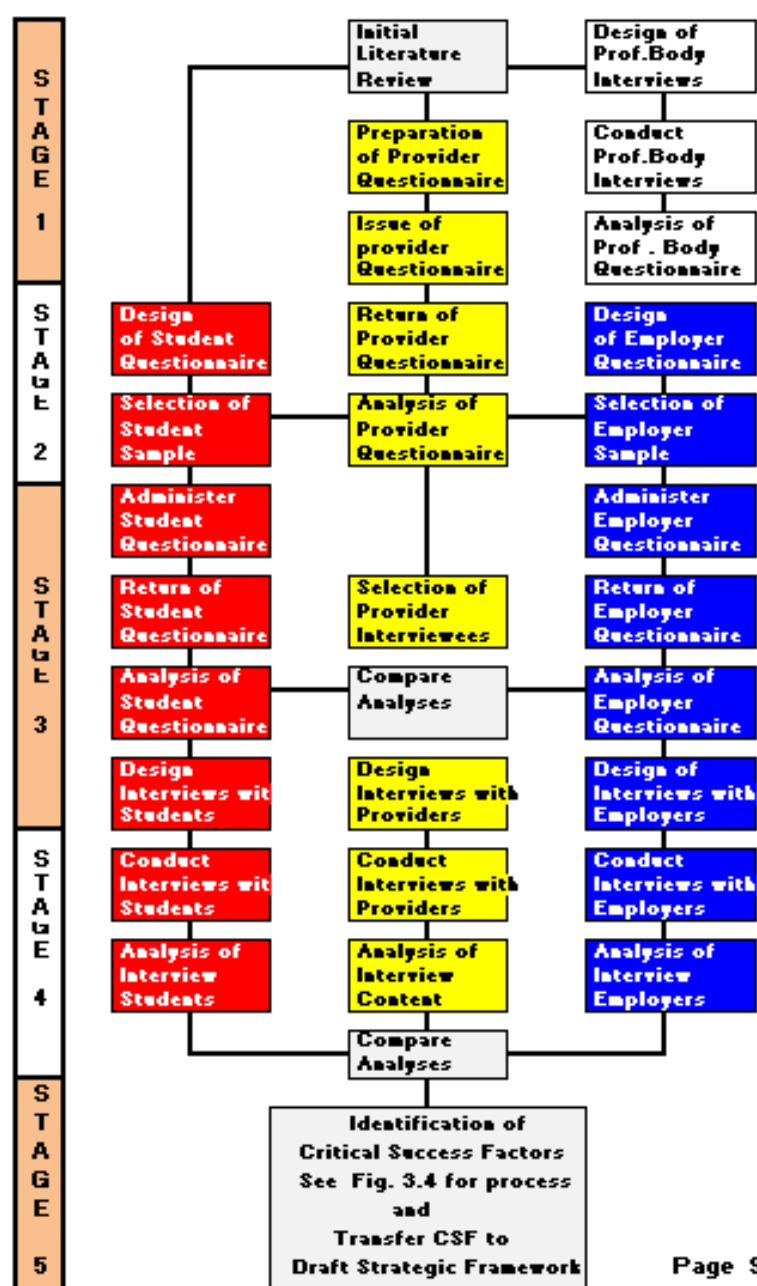
- With the three “mainstream” Professional Bodies associated with entry to the construction professions: those principally responsible for accrediting vocational education in the construction sector.
- With a sample of 6 providers out of all those concerned with delivery of FD in one or more Disciplines allied to the construction sector.
- With a sample of employers, one from each of the 6 providers above, being responsible for offering periods of workplace experience to Students from the above 6 providers
- With a sample of students, one from each of the 6 providers above .

The collection of data and its subsequent analysis followed the order shown in **Figure 3.2**. The Interviews with the Professional Bodies, whilst having a general relationship to, but no specific need for these to fit in sequence with the other stakeholder groups, were carried out independently of these.

Table 3.2 THEME GUIDE linked themes across Questionnaires (Q.) and Interviews (I.)

Key Themes	Int. with Prof Bodies	Quest/ Int to Providers	Quest/ Int to Employers	Quest/ Int to Students
1	Prof Bodies view of FD Philosophy - ( incl WBL )	I.	Q.I.	Student view of FD Philosophy - ( incl WBL )
2	Prof Bodies view of FD Current Provision	I.	I.	Students' view of FD Current Provision
3	Prof Bodies view of FD Future	I.	I.	
4	Engagemt wi Prov	I.		
5	Engagement wi Empl	I.	Engagemt wi Prof Bod	
6	Engagemt wi students	I.		Engagemt wi Prof Bod
7	Perceived engagemt between Prov/Empl	I.	Q.I.	
8	Accreditation	I.	I.	Accreditation
9	Promotion of FD routes	I.	I.	
10			Engagemt wi students	Engagemt wi Empl
11				Engagement wi. Prov
12			Management of WBL	Management of WBL

**Fig. 3.2. Data; Sequence of Collection and Analysis**



**Stage 1** . The collection of data began with a questionnaire survey seeking descriptive quantitative data from all Academic Institutions understood to be providers of FD programmes in either QS or Construction Management-related areas. This was done to obtain a “snapshot” showing the characteristics of current provision, with particular attention to the overall volume and depth of employer engagement.

**Stage 2** Arising out of the responses above and an initial analysis of the data, a smaller number of providers (6) was selected for more detailed study, seeking data of a qualitative nature. Factors influencing this selection included student numbers together with the length and type of employer engagement as referred to in Stage 1, above. The range of institutions identified for interview appeared representative of everything from minimal to full ongoing employer engagement.

**Stage 3** For each selected provider, a questionnaire was sent to a random sample of employer bodies offering placements to FT students, Similarly, at around the same time, questionnaires were sent to a sample of students of FD at the institutions selected above. As with stage 1, above, this was to gather quantitative data, indicative of their suitability or otherwise as subjects for more detailed, qualitative research. .

**Stage 4** Depending again upon the questionnaire responses given by employer and student groups, interviews were held with selected representatives of each. This process, it was felt, would prove an effective tool for triangulation.

The above process owes something at least to grounded theory, whereby data collection and analysis are consciously combined, and initial data analysis (the “data” in my own case being an appraisal of the questionnaire data) shapes the data subsequently collected from providers, just as theirs shapes that sought from employers and students. (Cohen et.al.,2011:598-603) (Silvermann,2013(1):108 and 445).

**Stage 5.** The process of further analysing the above data and ultimately identifying CSF is illustrated in **Figure 3.3...**

**Fig. 3.3.**

**Continuing analytical process  
The development of Critical Success Factors**

Page 99

Chapter 4	Presentation and analysis of Primary data Lists created of issues of importance to each Stakeholder Employer issues labelled <b>E.1 - E.18</b> Pp. 118 - 120 Provider issues labelled <b>P.1 - P.19</b> Pp. 136 - 137 Graduate issues labelled <b>G.1 - G.10</b> P. 144 Prof Bodies issues labelled <b>PB.1- PB.15</b> Pp. 153 - 154  Creation of tables 4.8 and 4.9, collating the above issues into new groupings depending upon degree of agreement between parties New groupings labelled <b>(Ka) - (Ko)</b>	
Chapter 5	Discussion of significance of the above Creation of table 5.1 - a Map of Generic Learning Opportunities to satisfy item <b>(Kd)</b> within the above	
Chapter 6	Statement of CSF referenced back to items <b>(ka) - (ko)</b> above Fig. 6.1. demonstrating CSF attributed to each Stakeholder and factors contributing to effective implementation.	

### **3.6. Questionnaires**

#### **3.6.1. Design**

The first stage of my primary data collection was the creation and issue of a questionnaire to all “Providers” identified as those academic institutions (whether universities or colleges) offering a Construction / Quantity Surveying- related FD. My objective was to obtain an overall picture of the nature and extent of provision and an initial picture of the perspective of representatives of each these programmes on the processes in which they were involved, vis. a vis. the mechanics of their WPL components and working relationships between the parties. Both here and in my subsequent interviews I respond to and explore possible shortcomings identified by the literature. These include the failure to establish contact prior to placement, failure of providers and employers to maintain contact during the placement and failure of effective follow-up through subsequent contact between the parties. (Greenwood et al., 2006; Ooms ,2011; Higgins et al., 2010; Yorke, 2010). These matters are addressed in sections 2.3.3. – 2.3.6.

It was my intention to choose a sample from all respondents, depending upon the data which they provided. The factors determining selection of such a sample would relate to size of its FT cohort, the number of employers associated with the programmes and an initial rating (given by the respondents) of their contact with Employers at various stages. This sample group would be interviewed to obtain a more detailed picture. Also, through this sample set of providers it was my intention to obtain both a sample of employers and a sample of former students (both past and present). Questionnaires to each of the latter groups would mean that I could identify appropriate interviewees from within these groups.

Firstly, I created a series of draft questionnaires to providers, each of which I discussed with my supervisors. Acting upon certain of their suggestions I modified each draft (repositioning and in some cases clarifying questions) to perfect its eventual presentation. It was primarily a request for factual data and statistics (titles of programmes, numbers of students, numbers of employer bodies associated with each programme, and the like). There were also some questions requiring an assessment of the degree of “engagement” of employers in the programme(s), both at their inception and subsequently on an ongoing basis. These latter questions were developed based on criteria suggested by the literature which I had amassed on employer engagement.

That is, the types and measures of “engagement” used in my questionnaire were those suggested by Greenwood et

al.,(2008), including such matters as involvement of the employer in development of programme materials, support of the programmes through supply of teaching materials and employer involvement in assessment. A number of my questions here and within the interview schedules resembled those used by Yorke, (2010).

Through the questionnaire I sought the opinion of each provider as to the value they would put on their engagement with employers and the value they would put on placement experience as a component of their programme(s). Although I accepted my supervisors’ suggestion that these last areas (key aspects, to me, of my intended study)

would be best explored through one-to-one interviews I wanted to establish some initial measure of relationships in each case through this general enquiry. I believed that this (together with responses to the “engagement” questions, above) might help me determine which providers I might most usefully select to follow up through the more selective interview stage (six or eight institutions only). And so, the latter were left in.

Before issuing this first questionnaire to providers I asked a colleague at UNN, herself involved in the management of FD programmes, to consider this together with its accompanying documentation (Introductory letter and consent form). Whilst my colleague had no problem with the letter or consent form, she did query what exactly I aimed to discover through the questionnaire. After discussion and some explanation on my part, she agreed with my approach, in broad terms, regarding matters which I wished to explore. She made certain suggestions as to the possible re-arrangement of questions under my various headings. This concerned both the factual data questions and those seeking initial opinion. I moved some of the factual/ course-specific data questions into a single group as a result. I chose to leave the opinion-seeking questions (clearly highlighted as such) as a section on their own, at the end of the questionnaire. I thought it important to clearly separate my request for facts from my request for opinions, thus distinguishing between data which was, essentially, descriptive or quantitative and that which was qualitative.

The questionnaire began life as a somewhat “dry” looking document with spaces (underlined) for responses. Early versions of these appear in **APPENDIX F.5** On reflection I redesigned the questionnaire on Excel as a coloured sheet with plain white boxes for responses. I hoped that this format would be more eye-catching and



appealing to recipients, as well as simpler to complete. The clearly boxed answers also made my own collation and analysis of the data easier. As with the provider questionnaires I subsequently designed those intended for employers and former students. Again these had gone through a series of versions before finalisation. These latter questionnaires were easier and quicker to perfect, as much of the questioning deliberately followed the pattern and content of that issued to providers, exploring the same key issues although from the differing perspectives. Again a distinctive coloured sheet was used for each. Examples of each can be seen **APPENDIX D**.

### **3.6.2. Administration and return**

A mix of routes was employed for the distribution and return of questionnaires.

In the case of providers, the programme leader or placement tutor of each programme was identified and, where possible, contacted personally. Those agreeing to participate in this stage of the research were sent the questionnaire electronically together with an accompanying letter explaining the research and a form seeking consent. (**APPENDIX C**). Of the 30 programmes identified only 17 eventually submitted completed questionnaires. In the case of some advertised as being current just the FT mode had been abandoned. In others, programmes had been abandoned altogether, sometimes in favour of a return to HND/HNC. In most cases where questionnaires were returned these were completed electronically and submitted as Email attachments, although a small number were completed manually and a hard copy returned.

In the case of students or ex students, questionnaires were issued as email attachments together with a letter and consent form, as above, usually via programme teams on my behalf (see para 3.11.2.2.2. below for reflection on this issue). Questionnaires were usually completed and returned electronically and returned as email attachments although in one case a small number were returned as paper copies.

The process of distribution and return of employer questionnaires was much as that for students or ex students, above. Important issues regarding access and confidentiality arose. These are addressed in discussion of ethical issues, below (3.11.2.2.2. herein)

### **3.7. Interviews**

#### **3.7.1. Design**

##### **3.7.1.1. Interviews with Professional Bodies**

The questions used when interviewing the Professional Bodies were deliberately open-ended, for whilst I had some idea of the workings of the RICS, I had little regarding those of the others. Consequently, I formulated a fairly loose set of issues of which I notified each Institute/Institution prior to our meeting. The interviews followed very much the course dictated by these issues.

I sought to explore the following Key issues with each Prof. Body:

1. Their attitude towards FD provision generally, past and present.
2. Their understanding of the concept of “Accreditation” .
3. The nature of their engagement with FD providers.
4. The nature of their engagement with employers.
5. The nature of their engagement with students.
6. Their perceptions concerning the engagement of providers with employers.
7. Their perceptions concerning the engagement of employers with providers.
8. Their general philosophy regarding WPL and its importance within the FD.
9. Their own policies concerning the future of FD provision over the next ten years.

The above set of interviews gave rise to certain ethical issues regarding both confidentiality of the participants and my relationship with them as researcher. These are both addressed under the section below, entitled ethical issues.

##### **3.7.1.2. Interviews with Providers, Employers and Students**

As a key part of my study was to compare and contrast the input and perceptions of linked parties, I specifically sought to explore the same key issues with each. The design of the interview schedules went through a number of draft stages, as had the questionnaire. Initially the questions resembled those used in the questionnaire and in places were quite “closed” in nature. In the final design I avoided seeking set answers, as this would not accord with the spirit of a qualitative approach, whereby I was setting

out to discover what was actually going on. My initial 26 questions, relating to my research objectives, became 9 key areas. These last were used, in the case of the employer and student interviews, to produce sub-questions, hopefully openings to discussion of wider points.

I deliberately chose providers as my first set of interviewees. I decided that, given their position, they would give the most informative picture of the mechanics of the workplace element of typical programmes. Also, theirs was an overview of the whole process, which neither an employer nor a student could hold in quite the same way.

The general format of my interviews was semi-structured. Notwithstanding this, certain questions were closed, formulated so as to capture the providers' level of engagement, data which might be tested directly against specific categories suggested by the literature (Greenwood et al., 2008), and influenced also by those identified by Gallagher and Ingram

(2009) and suggested by the questionnaire developed by Yorke, (2010;15) and Ooms et al.(2012: 406-407), the same question being addressed in an identical form to all 6 respondents. Other questions were more open however, asking quite clearly for "opinion" on the effectiveness of the placement experience in the context of the students' overall learning. Through all of the above, I sought to expose and examine the "*complex of ongoing activity*" between the various parties, key to Blumer's interactionism as discussed at p.87, above, and thus my own understanding of the mechanics of WPL.

The final interview schedules used with Employers, Providers and students are each reproduced in **Appendix E3**. An earlier example, still under development at the time and wrongly leaning more towards the quantitative than the qualitative, is given in **Appendix 5.5**.

### **3.7.2. Conduct of the Interviews**

My interviews were semi-structured, as I began my research already having "*a sketch map of the territory*" (Menter et al., 2011:131). The nature of my enquiry, through the interviews, was therefore "exploratory" (Oppenheim, 1992:65). Many authors, for example, Menter et. al (2011: 133-143), Wengraf (2001), Silverman (2011: 161-203) and Brinkmann (2012:83-108) offer guidance, and advice for interviewers,

encompassing both practical and ethical issues. There is a consensus in this kind of the above literature on the qualities of a good interview.

Writing on the interview process Wengraf (2001:202-203) helpfully presents a specific lesson for the new or less experienced researcher, citing a list of “Obstacles to Listening” (building on one first suggested by McKay, 1983 ). Rapley (2004:26) offers similar cautionary guidance. Reflecting on these I am aware of a number of traps into which I can fall if not careful, despite previous experience referred to above. These have included: “*Comparing, dreaming, identifying, advising and placating.*” (Rapley)

Writing on interview style, Brinkmann (2012: 88-91) contrasts “Receptive” with “Assertive” styles, adding in the factors “Doxastic” or “Epistemic” ambitions. This is demonstrated in diagrammatical form as “*Different conceptions of interviewing.*” (Brinkmann, 2012:90)

I consider my own style to have been Doxastic (seeking opinions and attitudes) and tending towards the assertive. This last is possibly due in part to my failure to observe some of the guidelines referred to above, partly over-confidence in my subject area and partly the wish to “tick the boxes” as regards having my respondents address set areas, not good qualitative practice perhaps.

Whilst ensuring that all who responded were required to address the same areas of questioning I did allow conversation to range more widely. On occasion an interviewee chose to expand on matters through illustrations not drawn specifically from their experience of the FD. Indeed, in the case of the RICS, added latitude proved important, essential even, as at the time of my interview they did not directly accredit FDs, though they did allow some recognition of them for entry to Hons. Degrees.

As was the case with the Professional Bodies, all interviews with providers were conducted face to face. Due to their greater number, geographical distribution and variable availability, those with employers and students were either conducted face to face or via telephone.

The interview process was fluid to the extent that certain issues arose through development of themes with one provider but not with another. Exceptionally, where a totally new issue arose thought to be of particular relevance to the research this was subsequently tested out (through Email correspondence) with others for whom it had not formed a part of their original interview. The need for this proved to be minimal.

I am in little doubt that the face-to face interviews were more satisfactory, both as interpersonal experiences for those involved and as a device for my obtaining and exploring data. Such interviews generally took the form of two sided discussions, an approach explored and recommended by Rapley (2004:19-26) , though they did not extend to the degree of informality in which he himself engages.

### **3.8. The interviewer: interviewee relationship**

#### **3.8.1. Interviews with Professional Bodies**

Of the two interviews conducted with the RICS and CIOB, the full transcripts reveal differences in terms of the quantity of data resulting from each. Whilst the duration of each interview was much the same, that with the C.I.O.B. produced a lesser volume of responses than did the others. Two factors may account for this. Firstly, I appear to have talked and / or interrupted more in the first interview than in the second. This may be a case of my inappropriately interspersing my own views during the first interview, which thus became more of a conversation than it should have been. Alternatively perhaps, the respondents in the first case were less spontaneously forthcoming than in the second, needing more prompting. Another factor may come into play: in the case of the CIOB I was interviewing persons new to me who had no cause for association with me outside the bounds of my research. Conversely, at the RICS, the interviewee and I were already well acquainted, having had previous contact regarding other research which I had conducted both with and for that Institution. (Perera, and Pearson, 2011 and 2013). Whilst the CIOB representatives expressed a willingness to be interviewed and were very welcoming when we met, they were perhaps more wary of giving information than their RICS counterpart.

Personally, whilst I regard both the RICS and CIOB representative(s) as appropriate interview subjects, some bias may have been introduced through my previous acquaintance with the former, this interview producing a richer, more fluent set of responses than the other. Perhaps as a member myself of the RICS but not of the CIOB I may have displayed more empathy with the RICS respondent than those from the CIOB.

As an alternative strategy, these interviews could have been conducted by a third party, not a member of either RICS or CIOB, familiar with neither set of respondents and thus neutral to both. But would the outcome have been different? The data obtained from RICS would have been less rich perhaps and, I fear, that from the CIOB no better.

I subsequently conducted a third interview of a similar nature, this time with a senior representative of a third Prof.Body, the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE). This third person, previously unknown to me could not have seemed more open, at ease and forthcoming. So, perhaps this is a personality thing.

### **3.8.2. Interviews with Providers, Employers and Students**

Amongst the providers, employers and students one of each was known to me through previous contacts. These persons were unknown to one another however, each being from a different university and/or programme. Notwithstanding my prior association with them, it was not in fact these persons who produced the richest data during their

interviews. This perhaps supports my experience above, whereby prior association does not necessarily in itself produce anything better than a first meeting.

## **3.9. Analysis of Data**

### **3.9.1. Questionnaire Data**

Raw questionnaire data, from providers, employers or students was collated in spreadsheet form, allowing visual analysis. As the total number of respondents was limited in each case, (between 7 and 17) a sophisticated statistical analysis, including a significance test, was not deemed appropriate. Instead the data were summarised and descriptive statistics were used to identify general trends. Spreadsheets of the data collected enabled tables to be produced, providing an overall picture of the situation, (see example, that for providers, in **Appendix F.1**) and allowing comparisons to be made between members of different provider, employer and student groups. The original spreadsheet of provider data was used as a tool for identifying appropriate institutions for in-depth study, the “**case studies**” as I have termed them. My first selection criteria was that programmes should be running a Full Time cohort in one or other of the appropriate subject areas. Further to this I next selected providers offering

a variety of short, medium and long-term work placements for FT students (those serving 6-10 days, 20 or 25 days and 40 days respectively) as this emerged as a core difference between providers which the questionnaires demonstrated. I also chose, where possible, providers who declared ongoing links with more than one Employer. From all of the above, six provider institutions were chosen for further follow-up.

### **3.9.2. Interview Data**

As reported above, I made a full transcript of all of my interviews.

See **Appendix F2** for excerpts from two contrasting student interviews.

I coded the interviewee responses of providers, employers and students in each case and fed this into the NVivo9 computer programme. I coded each response principally in accordance with “a priori” issues suggested by the literature discussed earlier (Greenwood et al.,2008), but allowing for further nodes arising out of the data itself, the “empirical” issues referred to by Harding, (2013:82). For each stakeholder group the computer produced groups of coded statements.

See **Appendix F.3** for an example of the grouped output via NVivo9, in this case data from employers ...

I further collated the responses generated by NVivo9 under six principal headings corresponding to issues and concerns identified previously as relevant to effective operation of workplace learning, with particular reference to effective employer engagement. In the case of providers, for example, I had created 34 nodes from a total of 561 quotations or part quotations.

See **Appendix F.4** for an example of my initial analysis of data with each node allocated to one of the principal headings, in this case data from providers, illustrating also the codes used..

Both the coding of the data and its subsequent grouping and re-grouping above follow guidelines given both by Harding, above, and Corbin and Strauss, (2008:)

My final two stages of analysis sought out potential Critical Success Factors, issues which the three main groupings, (providers, employers and students, as represented by past students) had in common, or over which they disagreed.

From examination of comments gathered together under each of the principal headings A –F, I identified “Key issues” for each stakeholder group, summarised as follows;

Source of issues	I.D. of issues	Location within Thesis
Employer	E.1. – E.18	131 - 132
Provider	P.1. – P.19	148 - 149
Student	S.1. – S.100	156
Professional Bodies	PB.1. – PB.15	166 - 167

I next combined all of the above on a single table, (Table 4.8) one column per stakeholder group, in the same order of main headings in which they were addressed in interviews, and in the listing in Chapter 4. In a further stage of analysis, this data was marked up in green to indicate where there was some agreement between various stakeholder groups in a particular issue.

continued my analysis via Table 4.9. Here, the above were re-grouped in a manner which distinguished the levels of agreement, or otherwise, between the various respondents over certain key issues. Some discussion and analysis of the importance of these is presented in columns 4 and 5 of this table and provides a basis for subsequent discussion within Chapter 5.

These last two exercises, above, constitute Stage 5 on **figure 3.2**, above and are illustrated in **Fig.3.3 on page 91**. along with their relationship to the subsequent creation of CSF. The actual creation of CSF, for inclusion within the Draft Framework, is detailed within Chapter 6.

### **3.10. Presentation: the use of Vignettes**

As in my past research into this area (Pearson, 1996:104-106), I represent certain key findings in the form of three vignettes, early in Chapter 5. Each “life” is built up from interviews with the employer, provider and student associated with a particular period of WPL, and is presented from the student’s perspective. This approach allows data to be presented in an accessible form which the reader should be able to relate to, whilst the identity of those who supplied it is effectively concealed. Such a presentation should be factual and non-judgemental. My own representations could be classified as “real” or “true to life” stories (Campbell and McNamara, 2007:100). This approach encourages



the reader to conduct their own analysis of the situations portrayed. Another advocate of this form of writing sees it as a “*thought provoking*” technique (Crotty, 2001:117), though warns against there being a danger of “*escapism*” on the part of the author. In my own case I have presented only data within each vignette which is born of my transcripts.

### **3.11. Ethical Issues.**

#### **3.11.1. Generally**

My study was approved by the School Ethics Committee, on behalf of the University. As the nature of my research was neither medical nor involved respondents of 18 or under, no additional requirements seemed appropriate. Some general issues confronting Practitioner researchers are addressed above. The following relate to my own specific situation vis. a vis. my sample.

#### **3.11.2. On specific issues**

The majority of authors on Research Method offer instruction and guidance relating to appropriate ethical procedures for data collection, for example Cohen et al. ( 2011:75) in chapter five of their book. The four ethical principles most relevant to my own study would seem to be the following;

1. *Informed Consent.*
2. *Privacy , anonymity and ...*
3. *Confidentiality.*
4. *Issues concerning use and further use of data.*

##### **3.11.2.1. Informed consent**

Point (1) was addressed with all participants, both at the stage when they were initially invited to take part via completion of my initial questionnaire and, later and in more detail, if they were selected as subjects for interview. All potential participants were given details of my research, had their role explained and were offered the chance to take part, decline or withdraw as they wished. Samples of invitation letters explaining the research and sample consent forms appear in **Appendix C.**

##### **3.11.2.2. Privacy and anonymity**

Point (2) proved more problematic.

#### **3.11.2.2.1. Data from and regarding Professional Bodies**

The greatest issue as regards revealing my sources was that presented by investigating and representing the views of a particular set of stakeholders, namely the Professional Bodies. It was vital to the completeness of my study that I seek, and report, the standpoint of each as regards FD provision and the part they might play in it.

Whereas the source of the views of one or two radical providers, employers or students can be lost amongst those of the others – untraceable (Drake and Heath, 2011:56), in the case of the Professional Bodies I wished to specifically attribute views and opinions to each. I did raise this with them in introducing each interview. It was agreed that I would submit transcripts to each participant highlighting all/any statements which I intended to use, to ensure that they were happy for these to appear in the public domain. I hoped that they would be willing to stand by any more controversial opinions, as these may have a

bearing, I felt, on the picture that I might paint. I anticipated that some negotiation and/or a slight re-wording might be necessary in places. In practice, all three interviewees agreed that my transcripts were accurate records of our conversations. Two bodies offered comment and suggested amplifications to a number of responses, but in order to clarify details rather than dispute them. The third agreed to my selected quotations in their entirety without any amendment, (though they did give me details of a subsequent modification of their views and policy – made at a time after that of the interview). All agreed that I could publish my final version, specifically attributing their views, both to the Institution and individuals concerned.

#### **3.11.2.2.2. Data from and regarding Other interviewees**

The other key matter was with confidentiality between those in associated groups of provider, employer and/or student. Due to the provisions of the Data Protection Act, (1989), I was initially denied direct contact with groups of employers or with groups of students, as providers would not provide me with contact addresses. Instead, each provider issued survey materials on my behalf to members of each of the aforesaid groups. Therefore, instead of a truly random sample, independent of the provider, which I could have picked for myself had I been provided with employer or student lists, I have samples in each case selected in part by another party to the research, one on whom each of the other groups is to comment. I understand that, due to the Data Protection Act, this is not an uncommon occurrence. I sought and received assurances

that the providers understood and accepted this situation.

### **3.11.2.3. Confidentiality**

Notwithstanding the issues discussed above, I gave assurances that in reporting the findings of my study, whilst it must necessarily link the data from those in associated groups, I would ensure that neither any group nor any of its members would be identifiable to any reader.

### **3.11.2.4. Use and further use of interview data**

All respondents were sent full transcripts of their interview and invited to comment, adding clarification if they thought this appropriate and stating, in addition, if they did not wish a

particular passage used or referred to. The only cases where any changes were made, as noted above, was to clarify rather than to retract statements made.

In addition, in the case of respondents who were representatives of Professional Bodies , each participant was assured that material which was to be directly quoted would be “cleared” with them before use in this or any subsequent related publication due to the potential for their views to be repeated.

Certain of the providers interviewed expressed a wish see the finished Thesis and I shall be sending them an electronic copy in due course.

Notwithstanding the above, Silverman (2013(1),172-173) raises the case, given him by one of his students, of subjects who are genuinely upset that they were not to be named in the published research, regarding their interview as “*public testimony*”. In my own case more than one interviewee stated that they would be happy to be named. I denied them their wish, as to identify them could have identified others in the study.

### **3.12. Truth, Validity and Reliability of data.**

Whereas most authors concentrate chiefly if not solely on the Interviewer and the Interview process, Oppenheimer (1992:85) particularly raises the issue of the respondent’s role. He does not question their honesty but makes the point that every answer given to an interviewer may be carefully composed, for “publication”, notwithstanding our promise of confidentiality, and we have no way of getting inside the

respondent's mind to see how contrived any particular one might be. This discussion arose in the context of standardised interviews but could be even more appropriate where interviewees have had prior notice of the key questions they are to be asked to respond to, as they were in my case. This may be particularly relevant to the Professional Bodies, knowing as they do that their data might be quoted and identified in my finished Thesis.

In the wider case of the reliability of my data validity this has been supported by my attempt at triangulation, interviewing all stakeholders within each partnership.

### **3.13. My own relationship to the topic and to the interviewees – a practitioner's overview**

As noted previously I have myself filled the position of a student on placement, an employer, responsible for placement students and, for the past 26 years, an academic with varying degrees of responsibility for placements and the students who undertook them. I have also been a member of one of the Professional Bodies for most of this time.

It is suggested that;

*“As an insider you are in a unique position to study a particular issue in depth and with special knowledge about the issue. Not only do you have your own wider knowledge, but you have easy access to people and information that can further enhance that knowledge.” (Costley et al.,2010:3).*

As a consequence I felt able to relate to the individuals in question and they appeared able to relate to me. Indeed it seemed that generally speaking when interviewing employers or academics I was treated as a fellow traveller and respondents were perhaps more open and honest than they might have been to a younger and outside researcher. The students, for their part, appeared as confident in talking with me as they might to one of their own tutors, for I knew or could imagine something of their world. They may, in fact, have suspected me of taking the side of their tutors, although their data does not seem to show this.

The negative side of my involvement and responsibilities is that my most recent years, as an academic, may have coloured my views in advance of what I should allow the evidence to teach me. (Costley et.al.,2010:33) As suggested above, I tried to be open to feedback, both supporting and contradicting my initial prejudices, and took the views of a range of providers, employers and students in my search for the most reliable response to the questions with which I began.

### **3.14. Conclusion to this chapter**

The methodology which I have employed has been driven principally by my own standpoint as a Practitioner Researcher faced with the prospect of exploring an area in which I myself have played a variety of roles. This has been influenced and sanctioned to some extent, I feel, by a growing acceptance of employment within the wider research community of mixed-method approaches.

Access has presented both opportunity and challenge. Being within the system I was able to create an effective strategy, I feel, for targeting and exploring key areas with appropriate interviewees. Gaining access to such interviewees proved more difficult, largely due to matters outside my control and there must be some concern that the choice of these subjects was influenced and in part made by others, as detailed above.

I believe the techniques which I have chosen, principally conducting and analysis of interviews with representatives of associated stakeholder groups, has produced data which effectively addresses my research aim and objectives. A translation of a summary

of my findings into a set of three vignettes, presented at the beginning of Chapter 5, will prove an accessible and effective overview of my findings when read in conjunction with my fuller analysis, later in that chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **4.1. Introduction to this Chapter**

This chapter presents and examines primary data collected from a number of sources, exploring the current situation as perceived by sample players within each of the stakeholder groups. These last are, in order of presentation and analysis, employers, providers, students and the Professional Bodies most closely involved. Such examination should address my stated objectives 4, 5 and 6, namely;

4. To conduct empirical research amongst key stakeholders into their part in the conduct of workplace learning within FDs, examining the level of engagement of each, particularly that of the employer.
5. To review the perceptions of each stakeholder group regarding others.
6. To critically review the role of the Professional Bodies.

The data presented is made up of the following:

1. Data from employers;
  - a) Results from questionnaires received from 8 employers.
  - b) Transcripts of interviews with 6 employers associated with the case study providers.
2. Data from Providers:
  - a) Results from questionnaires received from 17 providers.
  - b) Transcripts of interviews with 6 case study providers.
  - c) Descriptive data detailing the make-up and requirements of the Workplace Module for each case study provider.
3. Data from Students:
  - a) Results from questionnaires received from 13 students.
  - b) Transcripts of interviews with 6 students associated with the case study providers.
4. Data from Professional Bodies:
  - a) Transcripts of interviews with each of 3 Professional Bodies.

Firstly results will be presented from the larger groups to whom questionnaires were sent. Following this, findings will be presented from the interviews representing each stakeholder group. The interviews sought to examine, through qualitative data and its analysis, the picture painted by the questionnaire responses.

As the Employer is the party central to this research I shall present my results and analysis relating to this group first of all. Following this, the responses of providers, students (past students) and Professional Bodies will be explored.

The employer-related section will establish certain markers for the analysis of the responses of the remaining three.

## **4.2. Employer-related data**

### **4.2.1. Questionnaire to Employers**

Due to the small survey sizes involved, the use of percentage responses has been avoided. Instead the actual number of respondents in each response category has been stated, or an average score given, but with warnings as to the low response rate / sample size.

Employers were asked firstly to rate their own initial and ongoing engagement by reference to six criteria. General Support; Programme Content; Programme Design; Programme Delivery, Programme Assessment and Provision of Learning Materials. With the exception of the first these are based on the ideals suggested by the QAA as indicative of effective employer engagement, expected at both initial and subsequent stages of the degree.

#### **Level of initial engagement**

It is immediately apparent that, although the sample is a small one, the responses suggest only minimal engagement.

**Table 4:1 Questionnaire results; initial employer engagement**

Type of involvement	General support	Programme Content	Prog. Design	Prog. Delivery	Programme Assessment	Provision of Materials
Number of Employers reporting such involvement	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Of this sample, none report early support of programmes. This might be understandable if all employers had been involved merely in hosting periods of work experience, where the length of contact might be short, but some respondents were also responsible for PT students, their own employees. Here the assumption of the QAA and others was that the employer would be keen to have input into course design, based on their own unique requirements. The two employers reported in the next section below are the same as those above.

#### **Level and nature of current/ongoing engagement:**

The average reported level of current engagement is 1.00/5, made up of scores from only two respondents in fact, the first of 5/5 and the second of 3/5.

**Table 4:2 Questionnaire results ; ongoing employer engagement**

Type of involvement	General support	Programme Content	Prog. Design	Prog. Delivery	Programme Assessment	Provision of Materials
Number of Employers reporting such involvement	2	0	0	0	0	0

Again, the ongoing support which most employers report having given appears weak. The responses appear surprisingly honest perhaps, given that they knew the purpose of the research, and might not wish to paint themselves in a worse light than they needed to.

#### **Availability of in-house formal training programmes:**

Employer engagement appears greater as their individual support and training mechanisms come under scrutiny. 4/8 provide structured training for long term employees (PT students) whilst, encouragingly, 3/8 still do this for full time students on short term placement with them.

#### **Mentoring and review of student progress:**

Five of the respondents provide a specific work place mentor for their own employees (PT students) and, interestingly, seven for those on short term placement. Four provide in-house training for such mentors though none provide external training. In no case is the mentor rewarded for his/her special duties, either through extra pay or a time allowance of any kind. All but two of the employers monitor the progress of their employees (PT



students) both in terms of the content of their work at university and the marks they are receiving, in roughly equal measure.

#### **Other support mechanisms:**

This issue concerns chiefly the employers of PT students. Response levels vary quite widely as to whether employees are allowed time and/or paid leave for private study and/or exam revision and/or for attendance at university.

The following three questions were of my own design, seeking a quantitative measure of the employers' respect for the value of WBL and the degree of tie-in between academic programmes and their own.

#### **Rating given to appropriateness of programme content :**

The overall rating for this area is 2.63/5, the most common score being 3.00.

#### **Rating given to quality of current engagement:**

An average score of 3.5 emerges, but individual scores range from 2 to 5. One wonders how they might account for this.

#### **Rating given to necessity of WPL:**

All but one employer gave a score of 4 or 5 against this, producing a noticeably higher score than any above. (average 4.38/5). Such support of WPL bears out the literature and the almost unreserved support expressed in interviews, below.

### **4.2.2. Interviews with Employers**

My findings and their analysis are grouped under a number of principal headings, A to F, below, created to capture essential elements of the placement experience. These are based in part upon parameters set in previous studies (addressed through areas A, B and C), the remainder on my own desire to gain a specific insight into the likely effect of practicalities not seemingly given sufficient recognition by the originators of the FD structure (addressed through areas D, E and F), an appreciation born in part of my own practical experience.

**A. Employer perceptions of and commitment to WPL, both generally and within the context of the FD in particular.**

**B. The mechanics of the delivery of the FD.**

- C. Employer perceptions of “effective” employer engagement with other stakeholder groups.**
- D. Possible boundaries and barriers to (A) to (C) above, from the employers’ perspectives.**
- E. The success of the placement; employer perspectives.**
- F. Support for a common framework.**

Further sub-grouping may be introduced within each of the above, as directed by the data.

#### **4.2.2.1. (A). Perceptions and Commitment:**

It appears that the employers’ commitment may have a bearing on their engagement with other parties.

In a fee-generating and /or income protecting environment, the immediate financial gain from providing short-term workplace experience to an unqualified and, usually, relatively inexperienced student will generally be next to nothing. Therefore, it could be (a) commitment to an ideal; (b) commitment to possible long-term return (as when a student joins the firm or company, eventually, as an employee); or (c) a sense of obligation to the future of the industry which motivates employers to engage with the process at all. A further factor may be in play in respect of (c): namely, some form of altruistic offering born of a personal attachment to the value of the placement experience on the part of employers who themselves undertook a work placement, some seeing this as one of the better aspects of their own education, something they are happy to attempt to replicate for subsequent generations.

These points relate specifically to employers offering short-term work placements to students who will then leave them, rather than employers who might send their existing employees as PT students, although in some cases there may be cross-over between the two.

So, what are the motivations of the employers approached in this study? There is some evidence of all of the above factors coming into play.

Without exception, the employers interviewed for this study perceive a work placement, bringing the student into varying degrees of contact with real life, as an invaluable preparation for eventual entry into the workplace. They tend to use the term work experience however, rather than work place *learning* .

All Interviewees talk of the value to the student of experiencing first hand evidence of situations and problems otherwise only encountered through textbooks, training videos or classroom-based simulation. They talk enthusiastically of the character-building potential of being faced, on site or in an office, with real problems requiring real solutions. Generally they see no substitute for this. In proclaiming the worth of workplace experience, employers either (a) cite examples of past students they have known or (b) draw on personal experiences taken from their own training period. In this last may be seen the personal attachment referred to above, which could be summarised as *"I valued it highly, so it must be good for them"*.

There is less agreement about the capacity of the work placement to enhance or even complement a student's specific academic studies. This is revisited in section (E), below, where the possibility of there being some form of measurement of success is contemplated. This success seems to rely upon factors (B) to (D), also examined below.

Some speak of the work placement as an investment in the firm's long-term future, a period when students are on trial for longer-term employment prospects. This emerged most strongly in the case of a company which did actually employ a number of students directly following the termination of their placement period (the said students converting from FT to PT for the completion of the remainder of their studies). In cases where there was a serious possibility of students remaining in contact with an employer during the final year of their studies (sometimes being given PT employment on an ad hoc basis during this period) then there was the suggestion that such students were being trained in the firm's ways and that some concrete return would indeed come of this in the long term.

A number of employers spoke of feeling a moral obligation to train successive generations of students, for the long-term survival of the professions to which they themselves belonged. This was particularly evident in the case of one Private Practice surveyor, who proudly boasted a 30 year connection with a particular provider and the ongoing commitment which his own firm felt, circumstances permitting, to providing training opportunities to students from that institution. A number of employers spoke of having taken a succession of students over recent years. In only one case was an employer speaking of his first ever student from an FD, and was due to take a further student in the coming year. So, a habit has been established here as in other firms, a special and ongoing relationship between employer and provider.

In response to a separate area of questioning relating to the value and future of the FD, the majority of respondents proclaimed support for the FD as a distinct route into the industry.

#### **4.2.2.2.( B). The Mechanics of Delivery:**

Whilst the type and volume of work experience on offer varied between different employers, there appeared to be a consistent approach to supervision and support. A student on placement would always be allocated an identifiable workplace supervisor, themselves a senior and experienced member of staff. This was the case whatever the length of the placement. In larger companies the person appointed to mentor the student would be an Associate or Director, a senior staff member with past experience, whereas in smaller ones this might be the employer or owner themselves. It should be noted that the term mentor was not used by employers, although they all broadly appreciated the nature of such a responsibility. Whilst two employers spoke of running some form of in-house training scheme for mentors or of having an in-house procedures manual for them, none spoke of any external training such as might be available through the provider and is suggested by one author at least (Percival, E. et al.,1994). In no cases were mentors rewarded for their enhanced responsibilities either through work remission or additional payment. It appears that mentoring duties were expected of senior staff almost as a matter of course, an extension of employers' sense of obligation in this area.

One might question what exactly the mentor was doing. It would seem from other evidence that generally speaking they were being shadowed by the student whilst they went about their ordinary work duties, rather than providing a structured pattern of instruction, monitoring of performance, and so on. How might the student's activity in this situation be classed as workplace **Learning** as opposed to workplace experience? Both the literature on student perceptions of their placement experience and interview data, reported later in this Chapter, suggest a range of levels of support and/or specific instruction.

Generally, employers reported little or no contact between providers and themselves over the subject matter of what the student would be required to do or learn whilst in their employment. In relation to mentoring there was wide variance between the reported levels of advice or support given to the mentor by the provider. In one case there was strong communication between the two, initiated by the provider, in the form of a pre-visit ahead of the placement. In another it was claimed, by the provider but not the employer, that a tutor would telephone the proposed mentor to discuss requirements. In all others, neither

prior nor ongoing contact of this nature was reported. Some employers reported having seen paperwork from the provider, setting out broad curricular requirements, but this was seldom discussed between the parties. This perhaps suggests a preference, on the employers' side at least, for an informal rather than formal relationship, one in which the employer is trusted to impart something of value, but not governed by a formal written framework.

Differences appear between providers in respect of their contact with employers during the course of work placements. In the case of the longest placement (8 weeks or more) the tutor visited the student at least once, sometimes twice, during their time with the firm. This was in addition to the pre-start visit referred to above. Employers involved with shorter placements generally reported at least one visit by the student's tutor, but in the case of both shortest placements (6 days) no visit was made and no direct contact reported by the employer. Whilst this may be understandable to some extent, both of the employers involved with these shorter placements remarked that they would have liked to have had more contact.

Where students were placed with larger, established, employers and where their placement period was longer (8 weeks or more) they might be included within the firm's training and appraisal scheme. Such students would have their work reviewed, and their progress and achievements would be reported on to the provider. In smaller firms, and particularly where the placement was short in duration (for example, 6 or 10 days) no official reports would be produced, any appraisal taking the form of an unofficial review by the supervisor, discussed only with the student. Similarly, only in the case of the more long-term placement was there a specific report given by the employer to the provider at the end of the placement period. There appears to be a direct correlation between the length of placement and the depth of detail required of any reporting by the Employer on the student's workplace activity and/or achievements.

*"In a ten day period I don't think we get to do it in an awful lot of detail. Obviously we can make an assessment of how they fitted into the office and how they understood the tasks we gave them, and have a dialogue with them when they've been to site."* (B)

In only two cases were employers invited to take part in the creation of materials for use in teaching and in only two (the same two) did any employer become involved in assessment of the work produced by students during the time they were with them (these last being review sessions at the university, at which students presented their work-related portfolios).

The different relationships between providers and employers suggested here are explored further in section (C), below.

#### **4.2.2.3. (C). Effective Employer Engagement**

Here, data was sought relating to the employers' relationships with each other stakeholder in turn: providers, students and Professional Bodies.

##### Employer engagement with Providers

This can be divided into key areas;

**The first:** matters relating to what could be termed the immediate mechanics" of the work placement's day to day delivery and its assessment, of which certain issues reported on above could be said to be a measure.

**The second:** the more long-term on-going relationship between employer and provider. This relates to more fundamental aspects of the potential for association between the worlds of industry and education, calling for commitment from both sides of the character and strength suggested by the literature on the origins of FDs generally.

In the first case, concerns held by employers regarding the day-to-day relationships between themselves and providers have already been referred to above, ranging in strength from mild disappointment to genuine dissatisfaction. More than one would welcome increased involvement, notwithstanding their own problems with workload or whatever, and profess that they could and would play more part (in assessment, for example) if invited.

Turning to the second and potentially deeper long-term relationship, literature on employer engagement all suggests certain desirable prerequisite patterns of behaviour from both parties. For example, providers for their part are to involve employers in consultations over programme materials, assessment of student output and programme review. Employers are to co-operate through the supply of materials from the workplace which can be used in the classroom, attend meetings for consultation or review, and where possible take an active part in the assessment of the workplace output of successive cohorts of students. There is a general presumption that documentation concerning the students' progress will pass regularly between the two parties, and that there will be ongoing liaison between provider and employer. In such ways the employer will become an integral part of the programme team.

In practice there were great differences between the levels of engagement of those employers who were interviewed.

When this matter was examined in detail with interviewees, some correlation emerged between the level of engagement of any given employer interviewed and the length of the placement with which they were associated. Hence, employers and providers brought together by a one week placement had fewer links beyond this than when the placement was for eight weeks or more. However, having said this, only one out of the six surveyed in detail claimed to have been involved in the content of the programmes, whereas all should have been, according to the QAA model.

Only two interviewees claimed membership of or representation on any ongoing targeted liaison committee, whereas all should have been .

*“There was an employer liaison committee once and I went to an early meeting at the university, and there was talk of further meetings but I heard nothing else .. but that was several years ago.” (F)*

As noted above, only two interviewees were suppliers of coursework or project material and only two were actively involved with provider-based assessment of students, whereas all should have been involved in both.

Finally, in no case did practical work carried out within the workplace form the basis for an assessment contributing to any student's academic award, whereas in all cases it should have done.

Employers appear very frank in exposing apparent deficiencies in their relationships with providers. Perhaps this arises from a genuine feeling, suggested by the data below, that the blame for this should be laid at the provider's doorstep and so they have a “clear conscience” over this. This response suggests an innocent response to a phenomenon over which they feel no control or, perhaps, no responsibility.

It is noticeable that, as reported above, almost all interviewees stated a wish for more communication from and with provider. Whilst some admitted to failing to keep up their side of the relationship for practical reasons discussed in section (D), below, the general tone of their responses suggested they placed the blame for any breakdown of relationships at the door of the provider. Two said specifically that they could and would have provided teaching materials but that none had been requested.

*“ If they said ‘ we want to put together a project where a Student has to design .... Have you got such a site ?’ then we’d be happy to help out with that.” (B)*

*"We are happy to link in with the university and meet various councillors, or whatever, who are looking after the student. I just feel that in the case of FD there needs to be some more thought about how its structured vis a vis student and employer ... I think it's all a bit haphazard .. this is purely from my experience." (D)*

Just one employer admitted having lost interest in attending meetings and stated that nobody from his organisation (that with longest-standing association, as it happens) had been in the University to give talks, or sought any other contact. Even so, this particular employer was the one who suggested that even with the shortest placements the provider should have made some contact each time.

*"I think an improvement for me would be that, when we've got these [students] coming, there's a phone call to say they're starting on so and so [date] and we'll come and see you in a month's time ... I think there should be more contact between the company and the university." (C)*

### **Employer relationships with students**

As noted at (B), above, the employers interviewed all reported that they appointed mentors for the students who worked for them. Beyond this, provision for students varied. As a general rule the students were not paid for their services. (They may be seen, in this case, to equate to Interns). However, in one case quite generous expenses were paid and in another there was an actual living allowance such that students gained financially from the placement. This last compares favourably with the treatment by employers of their employees when the latter are undergoing PT study.

In programmes requiring the shortest required placement period the lengths of all students' placements had been extended. The same was true, in fact, with placements intended to be eight weeks in duration, which in practice were extended to twelve or thirteen, to cover the whole summer. In all cases this is taken to be a sign of general employer satisfaction with the student and, in the former, recognition that such a short placement could be of benefit to neither student nor employer.

*"I think six days, personally, it's a joke ... I think that anybody who thinks that someone can get work experience in six days is - it just doesn't work. It takes a day to go through health and safety procedures." (F)*

Here, as one remarked, the employer would have to spend the first day or two familiarising the student with the setting, after which they had only four days left in which to pursue anything of consequence. This idea of settling-in, and only subsequently being of some worth to the employer also perhaps, was noted even by the employer who engaged with an eight week placement. For him, anything less than an eight week



placement meant that the firm would be training up somebody out of whom they then obtained no value.

This was the only direct reference made by an interviewee to the commercial viability of involving students in their work, and echoing the question at the commencement of this of chapter whether some financial gain might be expected by the employer.

*"We won't have anybody for less, because the effort we have to put in for them wouldn't be worth it for less."* (D)

This suggests that, in this case at least, the employer saw the student as a fee earning member of their team, or at least as someone with a positive contribution to make.

### **Employer relationships with Professional Bodies**

The professional bodies are, in their own eyes at least, stakeholders. However, questioning of employers revealed the latter to be far from consistent in the extent to which they felt governed by them.

Supervisors' and mentors' own attitudes towards, and relationships with, professional bodies varied. Their encouragement of the student to follow the route of obtaining professional qualification was to some extent influenced by this, although most did actively encourage students in their care to follow this route notwithstanding any lapse on their own part. In one case (that of the 8 week placement) a specific company policy encouraged all employees to seek professional membership, and attend appropriate seminars etc. outside the workplace.

*"... as part of our programme... all of our staff are encouraged to work towards Chartership. That's one of my key areas of responsibility in that I manage the CIOB training, the Civils and the RICS .. we give them what they need, as required by whichever professional body".*(D)

In this last case students on work placement were actively encouraged to take part. Where a placement was shorter there was less opportunity for student involvement with CPD in any meaningful way, and such as did take place would be in-house events where these happened to coincide with the placement period.

#### **4.2.2.4. (D). Boundaries and Barriers**

The most frequently referred-to influence on the volume and type of work available to the student, and thus the quality of the latter's experience, is that of the recession. Two apparently conflicting constraints were identified, both compatible with reduced company

workload. In the first case there is a lack of work of a specific type or stage of development. The student will be unable to experience, even as an observer, some of what would once have been commonplace procedures on site or in the office. In the second, staff levels may have been cut and remaining staff are too busy with their own workloads to mentor the student, who is in effect just a casual visitor. This echoes comments made in two cases questioning the value of investing staff time in training up a placement student only to have them leave within another few days' (or weeks') time.

A further potential barrier is the possibility that employers or their staff may not have the confidence or capability for the mentoring or assessment tasks that could be placed upon them. This is a view represented within some literature (Hillier and Rownsey, 2006) and (Percival et al 1994) and even expressed in direct terms by one or more providers. In fact, none of the employers in my study expressed any concerns in either area. The biggest barrier to effective assessment from the perspective of employers seemed to be that *"nobody ever asked us to."* This mirrors the response reported above in relation to involvement on liaison committees and the like.

A practical barrier suggested by employers to increased or improved liaison between themselves and providers are the challenges which some employers themselves are facing simply to keep afloat financially.

*"I don't think its that industry isn't interested necessarily, but times are very tough at the moment and giving up time [for liaison committees etc.] when you're under pressure isn't always easy ."(B)*

#### **4.2.2.5. (E). The Successful Placement – Added Value ?**

Interviewees from all stakeholder groups were asked to define a **"successful"** or **"satisfactory"** work placement, for comparison with those of other groups. Another related question called for respondents to assess and define the added value which the work placement gave to the student.

Aspects of such success or added value expressed by each of the stakeholders (particularly where any commonality was arrived at) might inform the creation of a framework document, in terms of duration, content and management generally. These could be grouped under the heading of expectations, a concept introduced at the end of this chapter and discussed more fully in the next.

The most common thread running through employer responses to both questions concerned the value to the student of contact with the workplace compared with the classroom.

*“ ... a real dose of atmosphere, it fires people up .. I think that [even in a short placement ] it's very important ... You can see it, you will see it [ piling] in your textbooks. You see sheet piles and you think 'oh yes' but you see pictures drawn of them in the ground, you don't actually see them driven in.”(C)*

Whilst some said that the student should actually learn something, this appeared to refer in this study chiefly to generic, transferable, skills within the broad context of the industry. Here they cited awareness of Health and Safety, personal time management, communication skills and the relationships between construction operations on site. Only two respondents referred to the attaining or furthering of specifically identifiable, subject specific, practical knowledge and skills. The former interpretation seems the more appropriate given the relatively short duration of most placements, and mirrors the experiential slant put on the work placement by more than one provider.

More than one employer mirrored the suggestion of an academic, reported on elsewhere, that students, if they were genuinely to profit from their time in the workplace, should be keen to work and keen to learn. They should not be afraid to ask questions. The employer, for their part, should be ready with answers.

*“ If we get people who are interactive when they come on placement we don't say ‘ we've not got time to answer ‘ ... and they can ask anything.”(B)*

Employers were also asked about their satisfaction with the level of skills that the student brought to the employment situation and, equally, what they thought they took away with them when returning to the classroom.

Interviewees reported average satisfaction in general terms with the capabilities of students on arrival, although one employer expressed concern:

*“Not that I've had any feedback from the site team, but there may be a certain lack of technical; skills ... . our fear is that the technical content of the courses is being overlooked in favour perhaps of management skills.” (D)*

One should ask, perhaps whether the general level of satisfaction expressed by employers is a comment affirmative of good quality on the students' part, or of not particularly high expectations on the part of the employers. Again, this will be addressed, eventually, under the umbrella of expectations.

Regarding the transfer back to the classroom of new knowledge acquired on placement, respondents were more enthusiastic. Whilst it was observed by one employer that what students learnt was in their own hands, cross referencing this to the need for the latter always to be asking questions, the suggestion generally was that students definitely benefited from the work placement, taking back into the university more than they brought

from it, as might be hoped. There was some concern expressed lest there was a gap between what went on in the workplace and classroom learning, and so workplace skills may not be developed further in the final year.

*"I like to hope it does – I would like to think it does – but I fear from my own experience that their classroom studies don't always marry into the real world outside of the classroom .. it would be nice to think that if we were teaching them Bill preparation and so on that that could be continued."*(F)

This aspect of the equation may be worthy of further exploration within consideration of the students' overall learning within a programme and will be explored later.

Interviewees appeared to show a genuine concern for the satisfaction levels of students who were placed with them, suggesting that, for the placement to be successful for all, students must be made to feel valued and be keen to begin each new day's work.

*"Even if he or she is only coming to the workplace for a few days a week they've still got to enjoy it .. they've got to get out of bed in the morning and feel they want to , they want to look forward to coming."*(F)

The employer who stressed this most strongly suggested they should be given tasks above the level of "comping" (that is, multiplying out and checking figures for use by others) or making coffee. Another gave an example of how students might be treated; given a small job of their own to run by the end of their time with the firm. This referred to a student towards the end of a year-long placement, but was indicative of the experiential teaching style of the employer, hopefully reproduced to some extent in his/her treatment of those with him/her for workplace experience only. Another employer did suggest that, even after ten days, they could usually have the student complete a simple task the outcome of which genuinely contributed to the project in question.

*"A successful one's where they're contributing a little bit and they're doing something off their own back, so rather than just waiting for things to come to them they take it on and they become a bit of use to the team, rather than a hindrance."*(C)

#### **4.2.2.6. (F). Support for a Common Framework**

All respondents were asked how receptive they would be towards a common framework – a document issued either by the provider with whom they were associated or some central body (as with a QAA document). Such a document might set out certain parameters by which the work placement could be measured and judged.

Generally the reception to this was favourable.

*Yes, [there should be something] I think so .. because it's hard for us to understand what the university wants out of us , and what the student needs from us. Some might just want to come for six weeks ... some might want to come and actually try to make an impression, and I think if you give them some guidelines as to what w e 'r e actually looking for it gives us a bit of force to say ' you're doing this and this and this ... It may be a good idea to have a little pack put together about what they're supposed to do ." (C)*

Two or more respondents, indicating that they would positively welcome such a document, feel unclear at present what the typical student's capabilities might be (and thus the sort of tasks on which they might reasonably engage them). In addition some employers were concerned to know what, if anything, the provider or the student might expect of the placement. This suggests a hoped-for learning partnership of some sort between the parties. Even the employer whose placement set-up appeared to be the most developed and sophisticated agreed that there may be some value in formalising the boundaries of the placement experience in this way.

*" I think it would be quite well worthwhile us going through it together [with the university] and [them]saying 'well, this is what [we] need from the Student ' . " (C)*

It was stressed by more than one employer, however, that such a list should not be too prescriptive. They did not want to see simply a check-list of compulsory and specific attainment targets and have students pushing to be given experience that simply was not available, possibly for reasons touched upon in Section (D) above. As one observed this might leave the student unnecessarily and inappropriately dissatisfied with their workplace experience, feeling that it had in some way failed them.

*"As long as it is purely a framework and not a means of dictating what must take place, because if you give that to a student they would be going "tick" . They may be on a particular work package for a period of time and when they go through the list and cannot see any progress [in areas identified on their list ] that could be counter-productive.... And that's exactly it ... whatever is going on ... that's life . And that's when a list becomes difficult because it really is the case that what they can do depends upon what is going on." (D)*

*"We can't be accepting someone and then having to make sure we have certain boxes that we have to tick. We are already helping out by taking the student on placement. If they then come and they've got this ... long check list that we've got to tick that they've done X, Y and Z its just going to be eating into our time really - but on the other hand, if the Student did come with a checklist and they wanted to learn about a certain thing, we wouldn't have any objection to that." (B)*

#### **4.2.3. A Summary of key Employer issues of relevance to critical success factors and a successful framework**

**E.1.** The majority suggest they are moved to offer work placements from altruistic motives, inspired by a moral duty they feel to train the next generation of professionals, often born of the experience of their own professional training.

**E.2.** There is generally no expectation amongst employers that the students placed with them will produce a financial return. It would be true, however, that the longer the placement and the greater the employer investment in terms of staff time and payment of any expenses and other costs, the greater the expectation of such a return.

**E.3.** There is generally no expectation that the student will perform any pre-identified and specific professional tasks. The greater the expectation of financial return from the student, the greater will be the incentive for the employer to provide skills training in specific professional areas.

**E.4.** The capacity to give hands-on experience to the student is valued above simulated or classroom experience they might otherwise receive.

**E.5.** Notwithstanding the employers' wish to offer workplace experience, most stress the negative effect of the recession on their ability to provide a realistic type and volume in all cases.

**E.6.** There is limited appreciation amongst those surveyed of the academic value of the placement. It is categorised by most as a period of **experience** rather than a period of **learning**.

**E.7.** There is limited formal assessment of practical tasks carried out by students whilst in the workplace, and the skills acquired are neither graded nor reported to the university.

**E.8.** A workplace Supervisor or "Mentor" will usually be allocated to each student, though there are seldom links between the Supervisor or Mentor and the provider beyond any visits that might be made. None of the staff referred to have undergone specific outside training for their role.

**E.9.** Communication from providers is generally limited or non-existent. Little stress is placed on any written materials provided by the university (the extent and quality of which varies between institutions). Employers generally seek more guidance rather than less. Most dealings between employers and universities centre on telephone or face to face conversations.

**E.10.** The Employers, in the main, expect the university to take the initiative as regards liaison and Employer representation, and so most have a clear conscience about their relative failure to participate at various stages. This suggests a need for improved, stronger, communication and sustained relationships.

**E.11.** Few respondents supply teaching materials. This is born out by the figures above. A number of employers state, however, that they would be happy to provide materials if asked.

**E.12.** Employers generally regarded short placements (ten working days or less) as of less value to the student than a longer placement (25 to 40 days, for example). In practice most intended short placements were extended.

**E.13.** Professional Bodies and their training requirements attract mixed levels of engagement.

**E.14.** There is a probability that due to the current recession, employers may have neither the scope nor volume of current work to enable them to provide effective work experience.

**E.15.** Employers generally seem to value genuine enthusiasm on the part of the student over and above the scope of their prior learning. Employers are keen to make the work placement a positive experience for the students.

**E.16.** A number of employers commented on the incompatibility between workload and the times of year stipulated for student placements.

**E.17.** Employers generally would welcome some kind of “manual” specifically addressing the university’s and /or the student’s expectations of the work placement. They all stressed, however, that such a document should not be too prescriptive.

**E.18.** Could be characterised by a vagueness of expectations and shared lack of control /authority over the situation as a whole.

**Please Note:** the above references are used in Tables 4.8 on page 156

#### **4.3. Provider-related data**

##### **4.3.1 Questionnaire to Providers**

It will be noted from the following that the design of questions asked of the providers follows essentially the same format as for the employers, these two being the closest partners within the relationship.

Providers are asked, firstly, to rate their own perceptions of employers' levels of engagement.

**Level and nature of engagement at programme inception stage:**

Questionnaire results suggest a pattern of initial liaison between providers and employers, followed by an apparent subsequent falling off of interest. The average perceived level of employer engagement at the inception or early days of programmes comes out at 2.47/5 but the actual figures show programmes reporting all levels of contact from 0 to 5. Note that in this sample there were 17 respondents.

**Table 4:3 Questionnaire results; Initial Provider engagement**

Type of involvement	General support	Programme Content	Prog. Design	Prog. Delivery	Programme Assessment	Provision of Materials
Number of Providers reporting such results	13	6	6	1	1	8

Engagement tended to be either fairly full or non-existent.

**Level and nature of current/ongoing engagement:**

The average reported level of employer engagement falls to 2.29/5. This time, all programmes report at least some engagement but comparison of the summary tables show significant falls in most areas. This is supported by the interview data below, where the majority of programmes report a fall-off in support over the currency of their programmes, some of which was weak to begin with. It will be noted that here over 50% of providers report that they receive learning materials from employers whilst of those interviewed very few do so.

**Table 4:4 Questionnaire results; Ongoing Provider Engagement**

Type of involvement	General support	Programme Content	Prog. Design	Prog. Delivery	Programme Assessment	Provision of Materials
Number of Providers reporting such results	11	1	2	2	2	10



### **Comparison between ratings for desired engagement levels and those for actual.**

Most programmes suggest a wish for a target level of engagement of 3 or 4 out of 5 (average 3.29/5), but report an actual perceived level of between 0 and 3. (average 2.12/5)

### **Rating given to the quality of current engagement:**

Perhaps surprisingly, given their low ratings for the individual components of engagement and the comparison reported above, most programmes rate this highly, at 4 or 5. (average 3.18/5) So perhaps there is a good quality of relationship but not enough of it? Interview results, below, do not support this.

### **Rating given to necessity of WPL.**

Again, the majority of providers agreed on the high necessity for WPL, most again scoring this 4 or above, with an average of 4.53/5.

## **4.3.2. Descriptive Data relating to Workplace Learning Modules**

In addition to conducting interviews with representatives of provider bodies, documentation relating to their Work Placement Module(s) was also requested. A summary of the outcome of this exercise is presented below.

### **Overview of Module Descriptors for WPL – selected providers**

Programme documentation was obtained from all six sample providers. In the case of Programmes C and F these ran at the same institution and, although in different disciplines and having distinct programme teams, shared a common Module Descriptor.

Table 4:5, below, summarises specific data and that deemed relevant to employer engagement. It is drawn from Workplace / WPL modules.

**Table 4:5 Summary of data from Workplace Learning Module Descriptors**

<b>Prog. Ref.</b>	<b>Credit points</b>	<b>Taught/Contact Hours</b>	<b>Work-place Hours</b>	<b>Summative Assessment Hours</b>	<b>Assessment A</b>	<b>Assessment B - if applicable</b>
<b>A (1)</b>	20	24	0	86 (a)	Report 3,000 words (80%)	Presentation (20%)
<b>A (2)</b>	20	24	200 (b)	See (b)	Portfolio 5,000 wds	
<b>B</b>	40	75	80 (c)	25	Report (70%)	Presentation (30%)
<b>C &amp; F</b>	10	10	80 (d)	10	Report xxxx words	
<b>D</b>	40	36	400 (e)	140	Portfolio 8,000 wds	
<b>E</b>	20	48	152	See (f)	Portfolio –design related	

**Commentary on the above**

- (a) This figure is assumed, based on others stated as class contact. There is no placement involved at this stage (Year One).
- (b) Here, a clear reference is made in interview to 200 hours of work experience (stated at 25 days). Presumably students are expected to work on their Portfolios in their own time, accumulating materials in the workplace.
- (c) In this case, the work placement period is clearly stated, in interview, as ten days, a figure supported by questionnaires. The ten days are taken by all students at the same time, during term time. As other periods are accounted for, the stated figure of 300 hours in the Module descriptor for “Self study” must include the 80 hours within the workplace.
- (d) There was confusion in this case both within the Module Descriptor and between this and actual practice. The stated number of Placement/Work Experience Hours is 80/100, (two weeks) whereas in the text it is stated that the student “will link to an employer for a three week period “ (which would exceed the total hours allocated to the Module), and in practice both staff and students believe the requirement to be 6 days.

- (e) There is some lack of clarity as to the make-up of the total hours which should be attributed to this Module. In the Module descriptor it states a figure of 152 hours (under four weeks). In interview it was stated that the students are expected to acquire up to 400 hours of work experience (ten weeks), a total which equals that for the whole module. In practice, the students are expected to obtain their work experience through placements situated in the summer holidays between years One and Two – thus utilising time outside, and not governed by, the teaching year.
- (f) The students are required to learn an exercise in Computer Aided Design (CAD) skills. These it is suggested can be acquired either in the workplace or in a simulated work environment.

The above presents a confusing picture. The first and most obvious feature in the context of this study is the variance between required periods of workplace experience and the proportion this should/ does take up of overall hours within a module. Only in the case of Programmes **C** and **F** do the total number of hours allocated add up to the recognised total for the stated number of credits, and in this case there is confusion over the actual length of placement required.

#### **4.3.3. Interviews with Providers**

As the provider works most closely with the employer it seems appropriate to group my findings and their analysis under similar principal headings, as follows:

- A. Provider perceptions of and commitment to WPL, both generally and within the context of the FD in particular.**
- B. The mechanics of the delivery of the FD.**
- C. Provider perceptions of “effective” employer engagement with other stakeholder groups.**
- D. Possible boundaries and barriers to (A) to (C) above, from the providers’ perspectives.**
- E. The success of the placement; Provider Perspectives.**
- F. Support for a common framework.**

##### **4.3.3.1. (A). Perceptions and commitment:**

Academics occupying posts at the Universities (providers) delivering and assessing FDs are tied into the system long term. Generally speaking, they are supportive of the FD

ideal: a route into or back into HE for those wanting a stepping stone onto higher academic and, ultimately, professional qualification.

*“There was [that] image from the Government and that’s why we wanted to fit in that mould.” (A).*

Some interviewees spoke specifically of pressures mounting against FD provision and of their regret at closures of programmes or their future diversion, in some cases, into the FE sector, both at their own institutions and more generally. They felt that a university intent on such a strategy was misguided, letting down many potential students still seeking such a route into the professions.

*“I think they’ve been very successful and here I am very disappointed , as many of my colleagues are, that certain people have sought to get rid of them.... some of the best students that finish from the [Honours] degree programmes have been FD students, and this year’s no different ...*

*So Foundation degrees, if that’s how you judge them, on those going through, have been very successful,... and its a real shame they’re disappearing.”(F)*

This opinion was shared to some extent by the Professional Bodies.

They speak with enthusiasm of the value of workplace experience, or at least of first hand experience of the workplace, achieved through the incorporation of site visits within the standard classroom-based curriculum. All those interviewed saw the provision of site visits as a desirable part of degrees within the built environment sector.

*” Like I say, we do try to take students around site .. they always put a big tick in the module evaluation questionnaire ... can we have more ... nobody ever said I don’t want to go out on site” (A) and “ and that’s one possible reason for keeping [them] going, despite [their] potential problems ... the students ENJOY [them] and their reports reflect that.”(C)*

A number find various practical obstacles to even this occasional exposure to the workplace impairs their ability to enrich their programmes as they would like.

*“ We are really limited here. We are a city but we are a very small city . We don’t have that many employers ... there’s virtually nothing going on ... we’ve had some sites on this campus, but the contractors involved are all from out of town, don’t have a relationship with us and we have to sort of beg them to get on their site.” (A)*

*“ we use employers, .. we use access to their sites .. but again they are very isolated and we very rarely follow up on either side. There’s a sort of standard invitation.. you must come back in March when its further on, and we don’t, or can’t.” (C)*

*“Often they are doing their placement in the summer [but] they are doing their modules [for which they want live data] throughout the year.” (E)*

*“things can feed in depending upon the module, which will obviously differ quite a lot, but we do use some of the materials which are given us.” (F)*

All those surveyed, whether by questionnaire or interview, profess WPL to be a positive feature of the FD. However, just as providers stipulate differing periods of workplace learning within their programmes, so too there appear to be differences between the engagement of staff attached to different programmes. There was no constant correlation between length of placement and staff engagement. One of the shorter placements saw one of the keenest Module Tutors, seeking maximum enhancement of the quality of the experience available to the student within their short period of time (10 days) in industry.

#### **4.3.3.2. (B). The Mechanics of Delivery**

Two distinct schools of thought can be identified from the data on both the establishment and subsequent management of the placement. Even amongst those making up this small interview group, clear evidence emerges. Both make their case strongly and can be seen to be sincere in their beliefs and in their approach.

Regarding setting up workplace opportunities, on the one hand some believe that finding and negotiating employment is character building and should be mainly or even wholly the student's responsibility.

*“Part of life skills .. I'm not just trying dodge the issue or say 'well its your job, and we'll not get involved' but its part of ... they'll have to get a job one day.” (A)*

*“ I think from our point of view its got to be the student actually . It sounds kind of harsh but.” (E)*

*“as far as I'm concerned its the student's responsibility to find a placement .. it should be a part of the module and what they have to do to complete that module.” (F)*

Other tutors see it as their responsibility, as teachers and providers, to seek and negotiate placements entirely themselves, on their students' behalf.

Once the placement is up and running there are, again, two approaches which the tutor can adopt. The first is to treat the students as employees, temporarily under the command of, and the total responsibility of, the employer they have chosen.

*“ .. because the employer doesn't want us knocking on his door every two minutes, wanting to molly coddle the student and asking if they're all right... so we never get involved in that really...we trust the employers really.” (A)*

The alternative sees the student as still very much a continuing member of the university's learning community, whose learning experience is the responsibility of the tutor, on behalf of the provider.

*"I think the mentoring needs to come initially and primarily from the University, given the proportion of time that is spent in the workplace by the student.... but I would like to think that there is also a lead [ person ] to whom the student was assigned by the employer... so that they're not just passed around like a rugby ball for five days or so." (C)*

In such cases the tutor is much more likely to have visited or at least communicated with the student's workplace, may well have issued prior instruction as to specific areas of work to be covered and may visit the student on more than one occasion during his or her placement.

In the two cases where the employer was in the habit of supplying materials for use in teaching and/or assessment this was acknowledged as part of a good working relationship. Elsewhere this was not referred to. So, given supporting data from other stakeholders we can perhaps draw the conclusion that such materials were rarely sought, if at all, by the providers concerned. There seems to have been a similar reluctance by providers to involve outsiders in either ongoing delivery or assessment. More than one tutor was quite scathing in their appraisal of the assessment skills of employers or their staff.

*" I think that employers from industry, in terms of marking, don't have a clue ... one employer could think " yes, excellent " so happy with a student that he gives him 99/100 and another one on the same criteria, could be at the totally opposite end of the spectrum." (F) .*

This speaks perhaps of a certain academic elitism which, in turn, is unlikely to foster or maintain a close and positive working relationship between provider and employer. There is some truth perhaps in the suggestion, made by another provider, that employers may be too easily pleased with basic interpersonal skills, missing the more academic learning potential of the placement.

*"... most of them [ the employer s ] concentrate on things like 'Well, he turned up ...he did what he was told ' , but they're not really focussing on what the student learnt." (A)*

The differences in length of placements operated by different case study providers appear somewhat arbitrary.

More detailed information from the six institutions taken as case studies suggests that the lengths, which vary also, are determined in accordance with the standard practices of each university in relation to its FDs. In some cases there is a correlation between the length of placement and the Credits awarded for the workplace experience Module, but here again this is not consistently so.

Unlike most Sandwich Degrees, where the standard placement requirement is one year, FDs do not conform to a norm. This variance in requirements drives or is driven by the positioning of the placement period within the academic year. It may also be a reflection of the value placed by the provider institution on the placement period as a feature of the curriculum as a whole.

In the first model, followed by 3 providers, the placement is seen quite literally as part of the academic year and, as such, must be fitted into teaching weeks. Aware, in consequence, of the teaching time that this is eating up, the placement is kept to a two week period, the same for all students, taken out of the start of the second semester of Year Two in place of teaching weeks. As one employer suggests, this is not the best time of year, for various reasons. For example, it may be a bad time of year weather-wise, so a site may be closed down or, due to supervisory staff just returning from Christmas, they may be catching up on work, and not necessarily free to work effectively with the student. At another institution the placement must again be taken during the main body of teaching weeks, and as this proves intrusive in respect of the students' studies they are encouraged to spread this over a period at the rate of one or two days per week. This again is not good practice, as another employer remarks (it is virtually impossible to integrate a student effectively into on-going projects if the Student attends the office or site for only two days a week).

In the second model, followed by the remaining providers, the placement is seen as a requirement of the programme as a whole. It is treated as complementing the mainstream teaching year, and students are encouraged /expected to undertake their placement during the summer holidays between years one and two, in their own time. This has the advantage of allowing a longer placement, as in the 8 weeks required by provider D, one of more substance and, presumably, of more value to the student. It also affords the opportunity for the placement to continue further into the summer, for periods up to 12 or 13 weeks, and the evidence is that in the particular case of provider D , the students were encouraged in this.

These above alternative approaches may originate from institutional processes which were described as inflexible by a number of interviewees from both employer and provider groups alike. In some cases, marks have to be awarded, recorded and reported to tie in with strict deadlines set by the university. Where this was so it was suggested that greater flexibility would produce a better framework in which academic and workplace learning could operate together within the calendar year as a whole.

*“We could be more flexible in the module, the running of the module, so that we could be saying instead of having to have it .. in a particular semester, we could be saying ‘Look, if you can get it over the summer, great !’ and they might even get more than 6 days .“ (F)*

The over-riding problem, for those attempting integration between workplace and classroom learning, is that activity on the construction site proceeds independently, irrespective of sections of classroom learning, and so any tie-in between workplace experience and the demands of the curriculum can never be guaranteed and would always be just happy coincidence.

This is a key driver in the formula. It reflects comments made by employers that, with the best will in the world, they cannot give experience of work which is not happening, whether due to timing or availability. It must be taken into account in formulating anything like a formal set of requirements.

#### **4.3.3.3. (C). Effective Provider Engagement**

##### Provider relationships with Employer

As above, responses have been categorised and analysed at two levels;

**The first:** matters relating to what could be termed the immediate mechanics of the work placement’s day to day delivery and its assessment.

**The second:** the long-term relationship between employer and provider.

In the first case, the mechanics of the establishment and management of individual placements have been examined in section (B) above. The degree of contact between provider and employer will vary accordingly. As reflected by employer responses, not all providers act in the same way. In some cases a lack of hands on monitoring or intervention within a placement is driven by the consciously taken stance that the student on placement is the employer’s full responsibility. One interviewee specifically states that they stand back from the placement, fearful of being seen to interfere in the relationship between employer and employee.

In another scenario, where the placement is short in duration (officially, though not in practice) the staff suggest that there was insufficient time to allow for workplace visits to be made. However, we have seen evidence above of a provider who, despite the short length of placement, manages to visit each student at least once.



In the case of long-term relationships, the majority of interviewees refer to there having been structures for employer liaison committees or similar, but usually they speak of these in the past tense. Most programmes started out with the intention of maintaining links and active consultation between themselves and their associated employers. In all but two cases, such ongoing links have become a thing of the past.

*“My experience is that employers were involved in the initial promotion of the FD, say in 2005, and my experience is that their own interest waned almost immediately.” (C)*

*“The initial programme design was very good. There was some ongoing programme review after .. until about two years after, after that it started to tail off ... The [panel] that was initially set up for the design of the programme, that ran for the months running up to the creation of the degree but after that it was just personal contacts really.” (A) ..*

*“ My experience of the FD is that employers were involved in the initial promotion of the FD, say in 2005, and my experience thereafter is that their own interest waned almost immediately.... I would have liked to have seen employers involved in the initial programme design, in review, in materials, yes.” (C)*

Again, in all but two cases the interviewees, whilst recognising the economic and other pressures on employers attributed failure, over time, to poor communication and feedback by the employers.

*“ The employers could do more ... the employers could come in “ and later “for me, they can’t just pontificate about the university and the students we’re churning out.. If they’re going to be involved they need to be actively involved by helping us mould the student... It’s the communications thing again. I’ve had nobody say to me ... I cannot remember them saying, “is there anything we can do for you ?”(F)*

In only two cases do interviewees suggest that they or their institution might have done more to maintain relationships.

*“ I’ll be fully up front with that, because WE need to work at it .. it’s like any relationship.. if you don’t talk to your wife she’ll leave you ... so, you need to work at it as well, and we probably don’t spend enough time trying to work with them.” (A)*

One does remark that the falling-off of links can be attributed directly to change in personnel, when the academic staff member who had managed placements had left and nobody had put the same amount of energy into maintaining the relationships that this person had established. This mirrors the observation made by one employer of their own personnel.

Interviewees suggest that effective liaison with employers is appropriate if workplace experience is to be an effective and valuable component of the operation of the FD.

However, they suggest that their actual relationships are inadequate and/or poor, for whatever reasons.

#### Provider relationships with students

From the provider's perspective, both questionnaire and interview data suggest that students are allotted a tutor who will liaise with and about them, and whom they can consult over placement-related issues. This is the ideal, but questionnaire results from students, reported below, and some reports from literature suggest that the system within certain institutions does not operate successfully, leaving students feeling poorly provided for.

#### Provider relationships with Professional Bodies

As has been seen elsewhere, not all FD programmes are accredited by a Professional Body. Consequently there is no universal requirement for programmes to maintain links with or be bound by the requirements of Professional Bodies. Data suggests some correlation between the interviewees' own level of membership and involvement and the degree to which they encourage their students to engage with the wider profession.

This appears to be true, irrespective of whether a programme is accredited or not. That is to say, where the tutor is an enthusiastic and active member of the Professional Body (serving, for example, on its local or national committees) this is likely to serve as an inspiration to students to follow suit.

Conversely, where the tutor is neither a member of nor committed to the Professional Body then the latter will may lack a strong presence even where the programme is Accredited. The best salesman for the professional message appears to be the academic staff member responsible for the FD and its workplace learning.

An involvement in local professional affairs by academic staff, and the networking opportunities this affords is seen in a number of cases to have facilitated site visits, visiting speakers, materials for use in project work and the like. It has also offered inroads to local Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events. Additionally, whilst not directly relevant to a Professional Body's official requirement, or otherwise, for a workplace learning module within a particular programme, the academics' own contacts may increase the ease in finding placements in recessionary times. It may also be true that tutors keen on maintaining personal links with industry will have an equal level of enthusiasm for visiting their students out on placement, thus preventing the apparent

neglect perceived by certain students and employers in the survey.

In summary, the degree of staff engagement with the appropriate professional body may have a direct effect upon their engagement with the industry as a whole and, specifically, with employer bodies in the region. Lack of such engagement can be detrimental to the effective delivery of the FD.

#### **4.3.3.4. (D). Boundaries and Barriers**

As was the case within section C above, the study and analysis of the data can be split between the short-term immediate requirements of the placement and the longer-term relationships between the parties.

Barriers to the short term success of individual placements, leading in turn perhaps to employer dissatisfaction, have been touched on already – such as timetables imposed from above, the production of marks and the like.

For example, at all but one institution examined, it appears that in compliance with university regulations a mark for the placement element of the programme must be submitted in June, alongside marks for class-based modules. Thus, any workplace experience has to be accomplished and assessed ahead of this, limiting flexibility in timing, (such as that achieved by provider D), where students can undertake work experience during the summer break between Years one and two.

Regarding long term-engagement, there has been something of a tradition amongst academics of blaming employers for any lapses in relationships between the two. This is evident some of my own data as well as in the literature. Some interviewees put themselves on a kind of moral high ground, citing their own keenness for liaison alongside the employers' failure to play an equal part. The general message coming from interviewees in this study has something of this quality about it. It has been seen how, in two cases, there are said to be good relationships between the academic and the employers. However, in the other cases, where these have been reported as failing, there is a definite suggestion that, overall, the employers have been to blame.

There did emerge from a number of respondents a recognition that in times of commercial uncertainty firms may be less willing or able to commit time to liaison committees and the like.

As seen above, there was also the admission, from two interviewees, that they felt that they or their organisations might have done more to foster or maintain links. One

suggested concrete reason for a lessening of ties, from one provider, was the departure or re-assignment of a staff member whose specific remit had been the sourcing and management of placements.

Some respondents within this group spoke of a falling-off of management support for the F D, (said to be born of its low entry standards and relatively poor progression rates). This perhaps accounted for some lack of enthusiasm on their part, as academics, and certainly applied to one interviewee, already faced with the gradual running down of the programme. Another academic, since turned employer and interviewed within that group, told of a general disinterest by higher management in his provider institutions when offered the opportunity to meet visiting employers in quite senior positions. As the interviewee observed, *“you only try to build such links for so long, after which you may be tempted to give up”*. The result, less effective links. One academic, (A) suggested that the FD, and those studying it were seen by colleagues as being inferior to the Hons. route. This was not a perception evident in any interviewees themselves, but such an atmosphere may have played on their minds, as did their perception of a lack of support from their own management, above.

The suggestion was made, again by the academic-turned-employer, that the placement element of the degree with which he was associated was under-resourced. The hours of a staff member holding a specific placement-related brief had been cut and they could no longer give sufficient time to managing and maintaining the necessary relationships with industry. Another interviewee feared that a wholesale move of FD provision away from HE into the FE sector (already under way in some programmes examined) may risk the loss of the resources needed for effective delivery.

*“The standard will drop, yes. The effort I have to put into talking to employers ... they [staff in FE] are normally teaching 24 hours a week. They’re not going to have time to take a 3 hours drive up to XXX to see a student, 3 hours back. .. So, I have got concerns that with the fee charges that are happening now and the way things are going to be that Foundation Degrees will be pulled out of [universities] and they’ll be done much cheaper at FE Colleges but I think they’ll be done poorly.” (D)*

A more fundamental barrier perhaps is the failure on the part of many employers, as perceived by providers, to fully appreciate the potential attributes of FD. This is a concern shared by the professional bodies, as reported later.

*“Some employers don’t understand it .. they haven’t a clue what a Foundation Degree is.. they know what a HND or HNC is, they’ve been around for years.. I get employers ringing up and saying What’s this ? There are others, particularly those who were involved from the start who do understand what it is and what it’s supposed to deliver, and that its not just another vocational qualification.” (A)*

*“ I’m not sure they do see it as being a particularly useful or valuable qualification. The reason is two or three fold; [firstly] we don’t have many students who exit at FD level. They tend to go straight on to Honours. It’s not the stepping stone that BTec, HND and HNC were in previous lives. I think the employers ... because the individuals I deal with have been through the ONC, HNC, HND line, not undergraduate approach, still recognise their own letters, so the FD gets lost off in the morass of letters, NVQ, QAA and so on. The problem of the FD is that while its not intended as a re-brand of the HND it has been. “ (C)*

#### **4.3.3.5. (E). Successful placement – Added Value ?**

As for their definition of a satisfactory placement, interviewees range from the pragmatic and simplest, *“hoping for a trouble-free two weeks”*, (F) through to the requirement for the placement to *“form a piece of assessed work of a robust nature which fulfils the academic requirements of the qualification to which the student aspires.”* (C) This last response overstates a point perhaps, for it was made of one of the shortest placement, where such a requirement would be rather impractical.

One feature common to all, including the interviewee making the last statement above, was the main or subsidiary hope that the student would have a worthwhile experience, gaining an appreciation of what goes on in the workplace. Happily, most providers had been pleasantly surprised by the attention paid to their students and the opportunities afforded them.

*“ I think most students had better supervision than I thought they would have .. I worked for contractors and most contractors seemed to be short of time. [in this case] they’ve had reasonable supervision and been given some reasonable work to do.. . . I was half assuming there’d be a lot of photocopying involved ... companies haven’t always got the time to dedicate, to get students on board and by the time they’ve done that it’s time for them to go.” (E)*

*“... in nearly all cases the student had their own computer sat waiting for them when they arrived, to get involved with the company and its operations The companies responded very well.. there was no ‘ here’s a brush, go and sweep up,’ ...or ‘ sit here, here’s a brochure’ . The students actually experienced quite a lot and .... I was really impressed.” (B)*

The value added aspect of the work placement tended to tie in with the above, a source of similar comments. Again there was an emphasis on experiential learning, generic in nature, as seen elsewhere in this section, although the term was not used as such.

*“ They were doing some sheet piling and to actually stand there – a huge sheet piling rig banging in the piles you know, the noise, the atmosphere, the haul road that was required to put it there, the issue with the local cricket club because they had to dig up the cricket pitch too ... brings it all to life and makes it more exciting.” (E)*

Reference was also made, in more than one case, to the maturing effect of the placement on the student’s outlook and subsequent academic studies.

*“ Has something been added ? “Yes it has, very much.. for all the tutors who taught this cohort after they went on this placement it was like having a different bunch of guys in the room... their work improved ... for the student that was offered a job, his work rocketed.” (B).*

#### **4.3.3.6. (F). Support for a Common Framework**

All were receptive to this suggestion. A number cited examples where employers had expressed concern at not understanding either what students might be capable of and what might be expected of them, as employers. This directly reflects the data reported above.

*“ Here’s a list of things you’re going to cover on site and [ the contractor has ] signed up to this”.(A) .*

*“ It might help some employers;“ it focuses the employer’s mind .. I think it would be a help to them sometimes, as they sometimes seek guidance.” (B).*

*“ I think it would definitely be nice to say “ look, this is what we hope that the student, in their time with you, would be offered the opportunity to experience.” (F)*

However, respondents found it much harder to say what they would actually ask of employers. When answering earlier questions, relating to their preparation for placements it emerged that some might have very real difficulties with any formal system involving anything more than the most general advice to employers. The following reactions, though lengthy examples, may be important to understanding the framing of effective templates or frameworks;

*“ We don’t have any guidance at all, no, other than to verbally say to them .. that is something we have to do but other than that we say “ can you give them the widest experience possible and get them out on site rather than sitting all day long ... that kind of thing ... every employer’s different and we couldn’t guarantee anybody would be able to do X, Y , and Z in a manual.” (A)*

*“ The only thing that we did was, some places asked “what do you want them to have / achieve “ I pretty much answered that [question] ad hoc depending upon the company that was involved. You’d have very different sets of information for a contractor or an Architect, for example ... the only formal piece of paper involved health and safety policy. In terms of mentors several of them spoke to me on the phone.” (B)*

*“ Knowing in one sense that booklets and paper-based materials ... people aren’t going to want those.. that’s daft. They just want someone to have a sit down with them and [have] a quick word, say. If I knew the person who was to be mentoring [the student, make] a quick call and say “look, what do you do in your company ... how about getting the student to do this, and this and this “ if you go to a big company you might go around a different department every day “ any chance you can give them a taste of six different departments.” (F)*

The above was most clearly stated in relation to shorter placements.

*“ If it was for a month then yes, I definitely think some agreed formal training structure would help .... but for something as low as 6 days, No.” (F)*

Another, echoing the reservations of the tutor associated with the ten day placement, above, suggests that it may be unreasonable to have any fixed expectations of any employer

*“ I don’t think a firm will be able to say “we’ll guarantee that “ they’ll say “ look, we’re taking them on, we don’t have to take them on.” (F)*

One respondent, having expressed reservations as to the practicalities of a list, spoke of the guidance he would give students on always asking for meaning from those who instructed them in the workplace, the suggestion here perhaps that he or she of enquiring mind would learn, framework or no framework.

*“ Always say to the students “Even if you are doing the tasks, making the coffee, you know, doing something quite mundane in the office, the way you get something from it is the way you use your eyes and ears - and ask “what is that package I’m doing for this sub-contractor ... what’s it being used for ? ... it’s the questions you ask can add to your knowledge.” (E)*

#### **4.3.4. A summary of key Provider issues of relevance to Critical Success Factors and a successful framework**

**P.1.** Generally interviewees support the FD model, particularly the collaboration in its format as originally envisaged.

**P.2.** The providers, in the main, expect employers to respond pro-actively to their overtures to participate in liaison and representation. Faced with an absence of firm or regular contact, most have a clear conscience. This suggests a need for improved, stronger, communication.

**P.3.** All Providers speak enthusiastically of the value of practical WPL.

**P.4.** Providers are aware of the commercial pressures on the industry, affecting the supply of work experience.

**P.5.** Providers generally talk of workplace learning, rather than “experience”, but their documentation and accompanying assignments tend to call for student reflection of a general nature, rather than evidence of the acquisition of specific professional skills.

- P.6.** Providers are not equal in their approach to a required duration of workplace experience, nor in their positioning of these across the duration of the programme.
- P.7.** Some providers suggest that their own (university) structures may hinder the most effective use of offers of professional placements at various points across the year.
- P.8.** Providers differ in the assistance given students in finding their work placement.
- P.9.** Providers differ as to the type and depth of their communications with employers.
- P.10.** Providers differ in the number of credit points which they award for the work placement, in no strict correlation to its length.
- P.11.** In no cases do providers seek formal assessment by employers of the students' workplace experience (including professional skills acquired or developed).
- P.12.** Formal assessment of students' periods in the workplace appears to be based solely upon reflective diaries, which analyse experience in generic terms.
- P.13.** Providers appear not to actively seek potential teaching materials from their contacts in industry.
- P.14.** Providers differ in their attitude towards and responsibility for the student which the latter is on placement.
- P.15.** Professional Bodies and their training requirements receive variable respect, depending upon their Accredited status. Most do tailor their curriculum to match professional training requirements.
- P.16.** Certain providers expressed satisfaction that students were being treated better by employers than the providers had expected.
- P.17.** Providers generally supported longer placements (of over ten days duration), including 2/3 of those currently managing shorter periods. In practice most intended short placements were extended.
- P.18.** Respondents were initially in favour of some form of framework, although when questioned further all had difficulty in suggesting a firm set of learning requirements.
- P.19.** Could be characterised by a vagueness of expectations and shared lack of control /authority over the situation as a whole.

**Please Note:** the above references are used in Tables 4.8



#### **4.4. Student -related data**

##### **4.4.1. Questionnaire to past students**

###### **Perceived level and nature of Employer Engagement**

The students, reflecting on their time in placement, rate employer engagement at 2.54/5, though experience of this appears to range from 0 to 5, supporting the self-assessments made by both the other groups surveyed.

**Table 4:6 Student Questionnaire Responses (a)**

Type of issue	Employer Involvement in review	Employer Involvement in assessment at work	Employer involvement in assessment in Uni?	Degree to which Academic work aids WPL	Degree to which WPL aids academic work	Rating of effective integration of the two	Value of WPL as learning
Col 1-3 Students reporting such results	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>				
Col 3-7 Average rating				<b>3.31</b>	<b>3.36</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>4.31</b>

Direct comparison cannot be made, as between these results and those for Providers and Employers respectively, for students are reporting on these issues from a different standpoint. Individual scores relating to the value of WPL to university studies and vice versa and the extent to which, from the student's perspective these have been effectively integrated, vary quite widely (from 1 to 5 in all cases). Ratings in respect of the value of WPL as learning are generally high, according with those given by both employers and providers.

###### **Rating given to necessity of WPL .**

Not shown on the above table, the figure for this (average 4.23/5) compares well with both the providers and employers scores. There is one score of 1 for this item, the rest lie between 3 and 5, with 8/13 on 5.00.

## Support mechanisms

Students were also questioned to ascertain their perspective the following aspects of provisions made for them.

**Table 4.7 Student Questionnaire Responses (b)**

Type of issue	Was a placement Tutor appointed	Quality of genl. Support	Quality of learning support	Was a workplace mentor appointed	Quality of genl. support	Quality of learning support	Employer support generally
Students reporting such results	<b>9</b>	<b>2.54</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.77</b>	<b>1.31</b>	<b>2.46</b>

The students surveyed appear to have felt support to be weak. Of the 13 returns, 5 suggest that they had no placement tutor or were unaware of one being appointed. More alarmingly perhaps, in the context of this study, 9 students, well over half, suggest that no workplace mentor was appointed or, they were aware of none. The students were with different placements from one another and thus are reporting on differing employers, suggesting a variance in organisation and provision on the part of the latter. This tends to contradict the impression given by the employer group, which suggests that most do make special provision.

The ratings for the support given by both university tutors and workplace mentors are again low. Closer examination of the figures on the tables shows a spread of ratings between 0 and 5, with more low scores generally for the employer mentoring, as the lower average score would suggest. In the case of tutor support with learning most students give at least some positive rating, above. However, in the case of workplace mentoring the average of 1.31/5 is made up of just four students each giving a score of either 4 or 5. This could seem to suggest a high proportion of dissatisfied or poorly-served students. Alternatively, it could raise the question how defined or understood the term “learning” is. If so, they may be echoing observations of both Burke (2009) and Eraut (2008), discussed in Chapter Two.

A slightly better rating (2.46/5) is given under the heading “Employer Support Generally”. In this case respondents have all given some rating generally between 3 and 5. It may prove significant, when this data is reviewed in the context of data from other

questionnaires and from interviews, that three of the highest scores in this as in other areas are given by students from Provider D.

The question regarding the time and/or money given students in support of their studies was most relevant to PT students. Results vary, in line with the employers' questionnaire data above. In all cases, the part time student respondents in this study receive paid time off both for attendance at formal classes and for participation in examinations. Only two of these students reported being allowed paid time off for private study and /or preparation.

#### **4.4.2. Interviews with past Students**

Here, subjects were on the receiving end of the partnership created by the other two key stakeholders. Due to their position in the relationship they will not have views on precisely the same matters (A) to (F), above. They may, however, be able to comment effectively on the following, from their own perspectives;

- A. The students' appreciation of workplace learning within the syllabus.**
- B. The mechanics of the delivery of the FD, reflecting provider and employer input and support.**
- C. The students' perceptions of relationship between providers and the employers.**
- E. The success of the Placement.**
- F. Support for a common framework.**

##### **4.4.2.1. (A). The students appreciation of workplace learning within the syllabus**

As might be expected from providers' accounts, all students interviewed showed their appreciation of any exposure to the workplace, whether through opportunities to visit construction sites during their university-based studies or by virtue of their undertaking a period in the workplace. They suggested that workplace learning was more valuable than classroom equivalents in all cases, the only proviso to this being the comment that, in the case of one of the shorter placements, [B] there had not been as much time to see the job through as there had been on a term-long university based project.

##### **4.4.2.2. (B). The mechanics of the delivery of the FD, reflecting both provider and employer input and support**

There was no consistent relationship between length of placement and the attention which students felt that they had received, either from the provider or the employer.

Consequently, there were some on short placements who reported much help and attention from their Tutors and others who reported very little. It seems that employers gave much attention to the students in their charge, whether the placement was short or a longer one. However, responses from the students relating to provider engagement with them did correlate with those of the providers in question. Hence, for example, a student from [F] spoke of having to make all their own arrangements to find employment whilst a Student speaking of [D] confirmed the high level of help they had had from university networks as well as their own Tutor.

A student from [B] confirmed that they had been visited even on a ten day placement whilst those from [C] and [F] stated that there had been no contact whatsoever.

Amongst those interviewed, supervisor/mentor support within the workplace appears to have been good to excellent in all cases, mentors involving the student as much as possible in their own work.

Only one student reported any formal assessment of their workplace activity, although there was a general suggestion of informal monitoring by the supervisor in each case. Some supervisors were particularly attentive:

*"I was working with my Director... he had a pile of books on his table, and he was .. telling me to read different pages where I was struggling".[B]*

In no case was any assessment of the workplace activity fed back to the provider for formal recognition within a marking scheme. All students, even those on the shortest placements, were required to maintain reflective diaries and all had to produce portfolios, presented upon their return to university. However, all those interviewed denied involvement by their own supervisor/mentor in this university-based exercise, although one [D] did speak of his employer's involvement in other years. In two cases there were panels comprising employers but the latter were not known to these students. In most cases, assessment appears to have been conducted by providers only.

See comments under **E** below regarding the lengths of placements.

#### **4.4.2.3. (C). The students' perceptions of relationships between providers and employers**

In most cases the student was not placed with an employer long enough for them to develop an informed opinion as to the depth or otherwise of the long term relationship referred to above, although most were of the impression that there was nothing particularly deep or long-term. Only in the case of [D] was an ongoing connection spoken of. Observations regarding communication between the parties tend to mirror those reported under delivery, above.

Thus, there was an almost universal negative response when interviewees were asked their perceptions of ongoing relationships between the provider and employer beyond any communications relating to the specific placement of which they were a part. However, those interviewed did not seem to sense or feel concern at the apparent uncertainty of employers and providers (as suggested by interviews with the latter) about the content or purpose of the placement. This may be due to the strong support and direction which each student was given by his or her mentor in the workplace, leading them (at the time) to feel secure and purposeful.

#### **4.4.2.4. (D) Section not applicable to Students**

#### **4.4.2.5. (E). The success of the placement**

Mostly, the placement was valued for the experience it gave of the workplace in general terms, providing an appreciation of the real world, particularly so for those who had entered the FD from school and/or with no prior experience of the construction industry.

*“ In the early weeks of the FD you are asking why they want to be a QS and most people don't know and really didn't know anything about construction of what a QS did. So I guess part of that work experience module may have helped them reflect a little bit on the relevance of what they were learning and whether it was something they definitely wanted to do.. That's definitely an important aspect for me”.[F]*

In terms of the demands which placements made on the pre-existing technical skills of students, respondents differed. One Civil Engineering student suggested that his studies hitherto had equipped him adequately (in fact, some of his classroom skills he never got to exercise) whilst one QS student suggested that he felt rather lost and overwhelmed at first by the type and volume of work set him by the employer .

*"You know, I absolutely felt completely clueless because as I say I hadn't got enough experience." (F)*

This was not true of all QS Students however:

*"I think that they were quite impressed. They said that in the two weeks I'd worked really hard, used what I'd learnt at the university previously and that my knowledge was quite high for being in the second year of a full time degree." [B]*

The above student confirmed that they felt no deficiency in what they had learnt previously.

All interviewees suggested they found added value through the placement. More than one suggested having gained in self confidence, a sense of identity and a fuller appreciation of the place of the QS, Engineer or Construction Manager within the construction team.

Given statements above regarding tutor involvement, this perhaps owes most to the encouragement and assistance of the supervisor/mentor in each case. Some did refer to gaining a greater level of technical skill and in more than one case the motivation to continue academic and/or professional study. All students undertaking shorter placements suggested that they would have liked a longer period with the employer. Two had managed to extend their employment but one had not, due to this being in term time and there being no possibility of release from studies or of their adjustment. One did comment however on a fellow student's reluctance to extend their placement, for they had received far less help and support than the interviewee.

#### **4.4.2.6. (F) Support for a common framework**

All those interviewed were in support of some form of check-list or manual, indicating, in the case of one student [B] there already was such a list of sorts, used specifically as a point of reference by both the employer and visiting tutor upon the occasion of the latter's scheduled visit to the student. Reference has been made elsewhere to discrepancies between the expectations of employers and the capabilities which students might have to offer. Those particularly supporting a written framework felt that this would put them in a more comfortable situation, the expectations of both parties being more out in the open.

**4.4.3. A summary of key Student issues of relevance to critical success factors and a successful framework**

**G.1.** All students appreciate a distinction between workplace learning and that which could be achieved in the classroom via projects and/or simulation.

**G.2.** Students generally report that there were few if any ongoing links between their university and their employer, and/or poor communications.

**G.3.** Those engaged on short placements were generally dissatisfied with the attention paid them by their university tutor.

**G.4.** All who were interviewed expressed satisfaction with the help and attention given them by their workplace supervisor or mentor. This contradicts questionnaire data.

**G.5.** Generally there was no formal assessment of their workplace activity.

**G.6.** Generally there was no employer involvement with university led assessment of their Portfolio relating to the placement.

**G.7.** Respondents varied in the value they would put on pre-existing learning as an aid to their workplace activities.

**G.8.** Most valued the training /experience which they obtained in the workplace. Those whose placement had been short all considered that a longer placement would have been more effective /productive and would have welcomed more exposure to the workplace. 10 days was considered too short by those on longer placements.

**G.9.** Students would welcome guidelines as this would make clear what was expected of them and of the employer, as well as indicating to the employer their (the students') training and capabilities on arrival.

**G.10.** Notwithstanding a less than supportive input from certain tutors, none of the students expressed a sense of vagueness of expectations and shared lack of control /authority over the situation by the other parties involved.

**Please Note:** the above references are used in Table 4.8

#### **4.5. Professional Body-related data**

This study would be incomplete if it failed to examine the governing bodies appropriate to the professions concerned, and the influence, or otherwise, which they exerted on such education or training. They should be seen as stakeholders, having an interest in the end product, the new graduates, as potential members.

The Professional Bodies enter the equation from a tangent, so to speak. As has been seen, their influence is greatest, if indeed it is real at all, where a programme has been given accredited status. In such cases those managing the programme will be particularly aware of the accrediting body's requirements. Where a programme is not accredited staff may still have an interest in the professional body most appropriate to the students' studies, and may be members themselves. They will be conscious that students may wish to seek membership and thus would benefit from some early association. This last consideration was seen to have influenced the curriculum in the case of at least one of the non-accredited providers.

##### **4.5.1. Interviews with Professional Bodies**

The responses from the three Professional Bodies included within this survey are reported and analysed assuming the case where their stance is that of accrediting body. In this position, each might be expected to have views and opinions in the following areas, tying in to a greater or lesser extent with those reviewed above.

- A. The Professional Body's perceptions of and commitment to WPL, both generally and within the context of the FD in particular.**
- B. The mechanics of the delivery of the FD.**
- C. Engagement between the Professional Body and other Stakeholder**
- D. Perceptions of relationships between other parties.**
- F Support for a common Framework.**

Where the different Professional Bodies appear to share an identical procedure and/or perspective these have been reported as one. Where there are distinctions between differing bodies these are acknowledged and discussed.



**4.5.1.1.(A) The Professional Body's perceptions of and commitment to WPL, both generally and within the context of the FD in particular.**

All three Bodies are in broad sympathy with the objectives of the FD and as such strongly support workplace learning as a feature of the curriculum. All tend to favour it over classroom activities which seek to simulate the workplace, although one did suggest that where a placement was unavailable the simulated exercise could be of value and may even suffice.

*"When they first brought out the FD we thought it was going to be a very good thing, a good opportunity for people to study and learn in the workplace at the same time."*  
(CIOB)

However, they do vary in the status which they afford those who hold such a qualification, one allowing access directly to Level 6 of appropriate Hons Degrees whilst the others would only allow entry to Level 5. The RICS defend this policy.

*" Yes... you've got a number of areas where the policy is different between the CIOB and RICS and I suppose one reason for the difference of the RICS policy is that they do believe that the approach to HND and the approach to FD is different to the approach that is taken for [ Hons ] degree study. And what you expect from students at final level, which is the bringing together, the analysing, synthesising and so on and doing Honours level work is not really achievable by those who've done two years of a different type of qualification. " [RICS]*

The RICS is seen by some employers as somewhat elitist, in this as in other respects

All bodies recognise a failure on the part of industry to fully appreciate the FD as a possible stage in gaining entry to the professions.

*"The FD lacks a distinctive identity – the HND is a very much a technical qualification – employers know what it is ... it lacks a strong identity and that really is about the fact that it tries to be too many things... it's neither one thing nor another. It's not a vocational qualification and its not an academic qualification fully in the way that it could be. "* (CIOB)

This concern may be born of an interest all have in recruitment to their membership, by whatever route. The RICS stresses further the confusion of Employers.

*"If they see something called a degree they think straight away about the traditional degree, then when they see its called a foundation degree they're not really quite sure what it is, and the easiest thing if you're not quite sure what something is, is to ignore it. "*

Like the CIOB they value the work place experience component of the FD, but are concerned that this may be lost where employers cannot support it as they might.

*“We may sit here and think its a great idea, a qualification that has a mix, but if employers aren’t willing or able or whatever to take people on then it straight away is flawed or failed isn’t it ? “*

The ICE addressed the requirement for work place learning, suggesting that this in particular may prove a barrier to the take-up and development of this route.

*“Foundation Degrees are floundering with this extra thing.. the only thing the Foundation Degree was achieving that the HND wasn’t was that [ workplace learning] and its not achieving that at the moment at all delivering institutions.” (ICE)*

*“Foundation Degrees [aren’t] completely accepted within the Civil Engineering industry generally..... by employers. They say ‘well what’s wrong with H.N.D.? ‘ Well, what is wrong with H.N.D. ?”*

The RICS highlighted another current issue which they saw as threatening the FD, in the current economic times, namely the availability of Hons students willing to work for little more, if anything, than holders of the FD.

*“ I think that is very sad and we’re looking at this at a time when employment is not very good, and therefore employers have a huge market of students from all sorts of courses from which to select. We see the Assoc RICS as a qualification in its own right but also as a stepping stone for those who want to move on and would hope that the FD would allow this.”*

One professional body at least is quite specific in laying some of the blame for the decline of the FD streams within the HE sector at the door of upper management. This mirrors some sentiments expressed by some within the provider organisations;

*“ A lot of them have tended to focus on their overseas market and those income streams and have neglected their home students... .. they are great at getting in loads of overseas students and things but I do feel they need to engage more ... [links with local industry] is a vision and it doesn’t always translate into reality .... . “ (CIOB)*

#### **4.5.1.2. (B). The mechanics of the delivery of the FD**

The Professional Bodies have little, if any, influence over the length of workplace learning required by any particular programme, but will not allow a student to seek any form of accelerated membership before they have completed a logbook, itself based on a certain

number of weeks or months spent working in the workplace. All three bodies stated that they would not accredit an FD programme unless its students spent a reasonable number of weeks in the workplace. The term reasonable was not clearly defined, although all three stated that a six or ten day placement would certainly not be acceptable to them. In practice, providers C and F are winding down their FD programmes and so their lack of accreditation has ceased to be a concern to them. Provider B, involved with the ten day placement and currently seeking accreditation, will have to address this issue presumably.

One particular development has taken place over the past half year which could have a direct bearing on my study in relation to requirements for WPL, one which may directly inform any hoped-for “template”. When interviewed, all three bodies acknowledged the difficulties being faced by a growing number of their accredited providers in finding appropriate workplaces for their students. At the time the spokesperson for one body in the process of producing guidelines, stipulating the work which accredited providers must undertake to equate to the workplace experience. To date, the other two bodies have not followed suit, though the body suggesting change was the most demanding in the first place, and so the most likely perhaps to seek to impose certain standards, just as it is the most precise in its demand for engagement, as will be seen below.

Just recently, I have been sent a Draft Discussion Document addressing the issue. It proposes that where lacking the opportunity of workplace learning students be involved in WRL (Work Related Learning). Here an association may be seen with the debate in Chapter 2 and earlier, where this distinction was addressed. In the case of the above Draft, it is proposed that

*“ Employers and/or professionally qualified personnel working in practice would formally assist the academic staff at the institution in both the delivery and assessment of the unit. They would, in effect, be members of the programme team. The professional personnel involved would also be expected to provide (amongst other activities) mentoring and suggestions for the project content about to be undertaken by the students. ” (ICE correspondence)*

The proposal goes on to stipulate that the above unit, which shall be worth a minimum of 60 Credits, together with its outcomes will be subject to the scrutiny of the accrediting panel, with involvement, ideally, of the above professionals in the accreditation process.

The above is of interest not only because it recognises and seeks to address one of the key practical problems lying at the heart of the current study. More significantly perhaps, it

enshrines some of the most fundamental elements of FD provision, namely the hands-on involvement of industry.

#### **4.5.1.3. (C). Engagement between the Professional Body and other Stakeholders.**

As has been seen in the introduction to this section, the professional body is not automatically in a structured working relationship with providers. Where accredited, a programme will be subject to a regular cycle of review. Standards will have to be seen to be met or else the programme may risk the loss of its accredited status. No actual number of days in the workplace is stipulated, although there may be requirements regarding Credit points within the award as a whole. The three bodies vary as to the stringency of their requirements of providers whom they may agree to accredit. These range variously over such matters as research, the ratio of examinations to coursework and the quota of professionally qualified staff they expect to see on the provider's programme team. One Body makes no such requirement for the latter whereas in another all academics involved with the delivery of an accredited programme must have or be working towards appropriate professional qualifications. Whilst all three Bodies wish to see some element of workplace experience, its exact form and content is not stipulated, allowing some flexibility, but during this or some later period of workplace experience (undertaken after gaining the FD) the student must amass sufficient hours of experience within a framework stipulated by the professional / accrediting body.

*"Before they can come up for Eng. Tech. status which is the professional status you get from a Foundation Degree, that level, they are expected to have four to five years of experience and they look very carefully at how that mix has been ( and again that's very difficult in the current economic climate)."(ICE)*

It will be interesting to see whether, given the potentially worsening prospects for the acquisition of workplace experience, any of the Professional Bodies will consider lessening the overall number of hours in question. What seems more likely is some redistribution from within the degree to after graduation. The CIOB offer a picture of pre-accreditation procedure:

*"If they are already an accredited centre we would not necessarily visit them but if they are not an accredited centre or are delivering it through an FE partnership we would visit – we have to visit, and talk to students, talk to students, talk to teachers – look at the typical resources."*

The most common, and effective, contact between the professional body and provider (in the case of an accredited programme) is through the medium of External Examiners.

*“Actually I have seen some hugely valuable relationships develop from external examiners who are practitioners into curriculum development and in lots of other areas, so as with so much often in other areas it is down to the individual isn't it ?”*

These last will submit reports to the Professional Body which in very extreme cases might be the spur to the re-sitting of examinations and, given a negative report, the loss of accredited status.

The interaction between professional bodies and their employer members (the most common point of contact) varies; two out of the three appear quite proactive – engaging as much as possible with the employers, persuading them to take on students for training, and so on. The third is less proactive, seeming more likely to wait until a student has obtained a placement before interesting itself with the work content involved.

The RICS tries to facilitate effective relationships between the parties. It encourages liaison over possible research collaboration and the universities' use of practitioners as guest lecturers and the like. Here, the suggestion is that the employers may be the ones under-engaging. Asked whether they thought that employers engaged sufficiently they said not. However, this was tempered by an observation recognising the complexities involved.

*“ But that's a very blasé answer..there are very different levels of engagement from different employers and from different universities and what I have noticed over recent years is that universities have put more effort into engaging with employers, whether it be through Placements, through University Advisory Committees – by Guest Lecturing , whatever... we had this discussion at the meeting with QS employers in February last year. And sometimes it's help with project work, or maybe a site visit, or its actually making available some real live drawings.” (RICS)*

This suggests that in many ways links are strong and effective. At a local level, individual members are encouraged to go into universities, giving talks, assisting with project work and the like.

Links through research are also suggested. However, a close working research relationship between academics and industry, whilst it may be desirable, is not easy to generate or sustain in the surveying or management sector of the construction industry. Unlike the manufacturing sector, where liaison in terms of time and money may result in new manufacturing processes, (thus funding such research) providers of FDs are serving what is essentially a service industry. QS practice has developed slowly over recent decades, even with advances in Information Technology. The money required to fund

research into more advanced techniques has just not been available from the industry, there being no apparent commercial product.

All three bodies seek to establish and maintain links with students, whom they encourage to become formal “Student Members”. This is done through recruiting fairs at Freshers’ Week or Induction and also subsequent student-centred events at Universities.

*“Every university with an accredited programme has a staff student liaison officer and that person provides the link between the institution and the student. Every student studying on an accredited programme automatically becomes a student member of the ICE on applying for the same and there is no fee charged.” (ICE)*

A more recent element of accreditation visits for the ICE has been pre-planned meetings with students.

*“We’re introducing an extra hour and a half meeting on the final day over and above what we already meet with students into the accreditation visit and this is all an opportunity to meet the students. At the start of every academic year, in induction week or as soon as practicable the students are visited normally by the Regional Director or a member of his team to explain the routes to membership.” (ICE)*

Generally, a special student rate or free membership is offered to further encourage engagement. The three bodies differ in the methods and intensity of the advances they make, but all appear genuinely interested in the student population, perhaps with an eye to ultimate recruitment patterns, as noted above. Each also maintains a network of link-persons (their official titles vary across institutions) available to advise students on their career paths. Although set up originally to address those following Hons. Degree these persons have more recently extended their remit to cover student progress through the FD. In addition, all three bodies also engage in exercises for and with younger audiences, but this is outside the scope of this study.

All professional bodies are having difficulty with conversion rates, the process whereby students pursue and pass their professional exams, becoming full professional members of one or other of the professional bodies.

*“Conversion rate at the moment is not good – as in all the industry, is not good - the student conversion rate, once they student is less than 50% - they don’t upgrade their membership because they haven’t got a job.. if they have a job or perceive it as being of value then they upgrade, and we are certainly working very hard to improve that conversion rate.” (CIOB)*

#### 4.5.1.4. (D) Perceptions of relationships between other parties

All three Bodies seek to encourage consultation between employers and providers, one particularly so. Two out of the three expressed the feeling that providers could do more, though advances which had been made were acknowledged.

Such criticism of providers as can be read into this reflects that made by some employers themselves. One professional body specifically suggests that the hierarchy of certain universities may be to blame for neglecting industry at a local level in favour of overseas student markets, a matter of income generation and of academic status.

*“Vice Chancellors ... look at construction and think this a cash cow .. the strategic thing is another subject altogether. .... Maybe employment is not so important for overseas students because they are going back to where they came from presumably.” (CIOB)*

Similar points are made by a number of provider interviewees, reflecting upon course closures.

*“ When it was announced we were shipping [ the FD] away to XX it was partly because of finances, partly because of numbers (dropping) from the Government and its partly because of attrition rates which were always very high.” (A)*

*“I think there’s a massive socio-political thing going on out there which I don’t know enough about to comment on.” (C)*

*“I think this university I’m at now will be getting rid of them in the next couple of years, it takes away the hassle of placements and the lateness of grades.” (E)*

*“The University hasn’t to forget where it is and who it’s serving.. it’s become, education generally, a lot to do with statistics and I don’t like that. ... students are worth this much money and we’ve got to get it ... too commercial.” (F)*

As a pre-requisite of accreditation, one of the bodies specifically requires the provider to establish and maintain an employer liaison committee.

The suggestion is made that with ever-increasing fees students will be looking for ever-increasing and effective links between industry and providers. In this context, providers are encouraged to engage with a wide range of size and types of business, not just with larger players in the field, thus capitalising on any local contacts which they might have.

*[ because]” that’s not who the majority of them end off working for anyway.. just as the majority of scientists don’t end off working for XX the majority of Construction students don’t end off working for XX.... Also when you work for those people you can get a much wider experience than you get in an office at XX .” (CIOB)*

The professional bodies differ regarding their views on the provision of workplace experience through the offer of internships, an issue in the news at the time of writing, whereby employers offer work experience to students but for no remuneration. Such Internships may be satisfactory in the short term, for a period of work experience of up to eight weeks even, but two out of the three bodies are wary of anything much longer and certainly would discourage it as a technique applied to a traditional style year-long placement. Both expressed concerns lest such students may be seen as cheap labour, taking the place of a paid employee who may face redundancy, for example. The third body appeared less concerned about this, suggesting that other employers would understand and allow this.

Without exception, all Bodies use their more senior members in the role of External Examiner. Such persons bring direct industry input to as well as some control over academia, through the monitoring of standards both at the time of accreditation and on an annual basis through Exam Boards. There was some suggestion that relationships are not always as close and cooperative as might be wished for, and commitment to Employer Liaison Panels and the like was not always as strong as it might be.

#### **4.5.1.5. (E) Section not applicable to Professional Bodies**

#### **4.5.1.6. (F). Support for a common Framework**

The RICS highlighted the variety in demands of employers, typified by the following statement.

*“What you will do, and need to do is take views from a wide range of industry.. I mean how many times have you said if you get ten QS Employers in the room and asked them what they want and they’ll have different views wont they?”*

None of the Professional Bodies wish to impose a strict template upon placements concerning content or ways of working. They do draw attention to their Core Competencies, which those seeking membership (at some time after graduation) must attain.



#### **4.5.2. A summary of key Professional Body issues of relevance to critical success factors and a successful framework**

**PB.1.** It must be noted primarily that not all construction-related programmes are accredited, although apparently offering the same degree. There is no equivalent of the GMC within the construction industry – no single authority governing the conduct and standards of ALL construction professionals. Thus, non-accredited programmes may be structured and may behave differently to accredited ones whilst superficially offering a common qualification. This is the weakest card in the pack held by the Professional Bodies, if they wish to be regarded as serious players in this branch of vocational education.

**PB.2.** All three Professional Bodies strongly support work place learning. They stress the importance of this being of sufficient length but do not stipulate what this should be.

**PB.3.** All are aware of the pressures on the industry resulting in a reduced availability of exposure to the workplace. This is recognised as a particular possible threat to the take- up of this route (as one of its key components).

**PB.4.** One Body has addressed this by tempering its requirement for hands-on workplace experience with a scheme for classroom-based simulated exercises.

**PB.5.** They vary in the credit and rights to progression which they grant to holders of the FD.

**PB.6.** All are aware of suspicion and scepticism regarding the FD on the part of employers, a failure to appreciate the value of the FD to students and employers in the route to eventual professional qualification.

**PB.7.** They recognise a threat to FD holders eventual employment opportunities from Hons students who, in recessionary times, may be employed for similar remuneration.

**PB.8.** They have little real control over the mechanics of programme delivery or assessment, other than via their appointed External Examiners, who work in an advisory capacity.

**PB.9.** They vary in the stringency of the requirements they make of providers seeking to obtain and/or maintain Accreditation. There is no set pattern across the three.

**PB.10.** They maintain varying degrees of contact with providers.

**PB.11.** They establish and maintain varying degrees of contact with students.

**PB.12.** Both employers and providers are criticised to varying degrees for their perceived efforts to liaise with one another and work effectively.

**PB.13.** All would like to see their own senior members in the role of External Examiner, furthering their interests, raising its profile and championing its standards.

**PB.14.** They appear reluctant to stipulate and/or impose any content or attainment levels upon workplace learning, though all have sets of Core Skills (under differing names) which they expect eventually of students seeking full membership.

**PB.15.** They could be characterised by a vagueness of expectations and shared lack of control /authority over the situation as a whole.

**Please Note:** the above references are used in Table 4.8.

#### **4.6 Expectations, an important outcome**

Richard Benefer (2007:211), quoting another author, makes reference to the importance of any “diversity of expectations between stakeholders” as a potential barrier to developing a work-based learning curriculum with industry.

No direct question was posed, within my own questionnaires or the interviews, to ascertain the stakeholders’ expectations of the placement. Perhaps this was a significant omission. However, certain conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of responses to other questions relating to the mechanics and the parties’ accounts of “a satisfactory placement” or “added value”. The expectations thus created should not be ignored as they may prove an important element when designing a framework for the working relationship between the various stakeholders.

The product of such analysis can have two strands: the first relating to what each of the stakeholders has come to expect of their engagement with the others - a factual account, and the second something more aspirational: – what they might reasonably hope for from the relationship and its outcomes, given the surrounding circumstances. It is this second strand from which we may build the framework.

#### **4.7. Conclusion to this chapter**

Data has been collected from each of the four main stakeholders defined in chapter 1, both via questionnaire returns and through face to face interviews. This data has been analysed in each case and presented here in a summarised form. By bringing this together with the secondary data presented in Chapter Two the objectives of this work can

be addressed, moving closer to establishing certain Critical Success Factors and presenting these within a framework aimed at effective employer engagement. This is discussed in chapter 5 which follows. The tables used in the analysis of the data and the discussion are reproduced below.

Table 4.8. Key Framework Issues / characteristics taken from analysis of interviews. Areas of agreement highlighted. Sources [See] relate to summaries in Chapter 4.

	Issue	See.	Employer	See.	Provider	See.	Graduates (ex-students)	See.	Professional Bodies
<b>Ka.</b>	Value Workplace experience	E.4.	Valued over Classroom exercise/simulation	P.3.	Valued over Classroom exercise/simulation	G.1. G.8.	Valued over Classroom exercise/simulation	PB.2.	Valued over Classroom exercise/simulation
<b>Kb.</b>	Experience versus Learning	E.6.	Workplace exposure classed as experience rather than learning	P.5.	Considers experience to be part of learning		Workplace exposure classed as experience rather than learning	PB.14.	Some ambivalence between the two – not keen to stipulate type or volume
<b>Kc.</b>	Providers' structure/problems may hinder ...	E.16.	Incompatibility between workload patterns and positioning of placements	P.7. P.6.	Providers vary as to positioning of placements and some criticise own structures re flexibility			PB.8.	Prof Bodies admit to very little precise control over delivery, management or assessment of programmes
<b>Kd.</b>	Expectation re. students and professional tasks	E.3.	Not great, though it is hoped some existing skill be practiced or new ones learnt – particularly on longer stay.	P.11. P.12.	Not great. Assessment is purely related to reflection rather than performance of <b>prof skills</b> .			PB.8.	Prof Bodies admit to very little precise control over delivery, management or assessment of programmes
<b>Ke.</b>	Recognition of problems around available type/volume of workload	E.5.	General suggestion of negative effect of the recession on workloads, affecting ability to offer effective experience.	P.4.	Most Providers refer to pressures caused by the recession, limiting workload opportunities for students on placement			PB.3.	Prof Bodies all appreciate pressures on industry to provide effective work experience

	Issue	Sec.	Employer	Sec.	Provider	Sec.	Graduates (ex-students)	Sec.	Professional Bodies
<b>Kf.</b>	Expectation that students will not be fee earning.	E2.	Generally students not expected to produce commercial return for the employer		Not stated as such, but generally students not expected to produce commercial return				
<b>Kg.</b>	Establishment and maintenance of contacts	E10	Other party expected to take the initiative	P.2.	Other party expected to take the initiative			P8.8.	Prof Bodies admit to very little precise control over delivery, management or assessment of programmes
<b>Kh.</b>	Significance of length of placement	E12	Employers regarded short (ten days or less) as less or little value. Most are extended	P.17.	Most providers favour longer periods (over ten days) of wk. experience. Most are extended	G.8	Students engaged on shorter placement generally suggest the need for longer	P8.2.	Prof. Bodies are dissatisfied with placements they regard too short, but do not stipulate an ideal length
<b>Ki.</b>	Engagement with/of professional Bodies	E13	Mixed respect for prof. bodies, generally not great.	P.15.	Mixed regard for prof. bodies and their training regimes. Accreditation status can steer this.			P8.8.	Prof Bodies admit to very little precise control over delivery, management or assessment of programmes
<b>Kj.</b>	Assessment pattern	E7.	Limited formal assessment of practical tasks – none formally reported. Involvement in classroom rare	P.12.	Only assessment of workplace experience is by Reflective Diaries – relating to generic rather than technical skills	G.5. G.6.	Generally no formal assessment of their workplace activity – particularly on shorter placements. Employer involvement in classroom assessment rare	P8.8.	Prof Bodies admit to very little precise control over delivery, management or assessment of programmes

	Issue	Sc.	Employer	Sc.	Provider	Sc.	Graduates (ex-students)	Sc.	Professional Bodies	Page 171
<b>Kk.</b>	Support mechanisms for students	E.8.	Most employers provide targeted supervision, experienced but not trained	P.8. P.14. P.16.	Tutor support prior to and during placement period varies. Most satisfied with employer support of students	G.4. G.3.	Tutor support usually perceived as poor on shorter placements. Employer support good			
<b>Kl.</b>	Supply of teaching materials by Employer	E.11	Few employers supply teaching materials – rarely asked to	P.13.	Providers rarely seek teaching materials from employers			PB.8.	Prof Bodies admit to very little precise control over delivery, management or assessment of programmes	
<b>Km</b>	Value accorded to placement varies			P.10.	Providers differ as to the value they place on workplace experience, irrespective of length			PB.8. PB.5.	Prof Bodies admit to very little precise control over delivery, management or assessment of programmes. Value of accredited degrees varies	
<b>Kn.</b>	Demand for guidelines	E.17	Employers mostly in favour of some guidelines but nothing too prescriptive re technical content	P.18.	Providers mostly in favour of some guidelines but unsure as to what these should cover	G.9.	Guidelines considered helpful, to define and regulate the placement	PB.14	Saw some sense in this, but reluctant to stipulate content at all,	
<b>Ko.</b>	General level of understanding, control and / communication	E.18 E.9.	Vagueness of expectations and lack of control. Formal communication with provider is rare and usually informal	P.19. P.9.	Vagueness of expectations and lack of control. Levels of communication with Employers differ.	G.10. G.2.	Graduates generally sense no disorder, but do report a Lack of communication	PB.10 PB.11 PB.15 PB.12	Vagueness of expectations and lack of control. Both Employers and Providers are criticised regarding their engagement/communication. Own levels of communication with each of the parties varies	

Table 4.9: Issues as source material critical success factors - for inclusion within framework

Ref.	Research finding	Literature	Discussion	Suggested importance to Framework / action
<b>Ka.</b>	<b>Issues Agreed – Positive factors</b> Intrinsic value of WBL over purely classroom based simulation etc.	Large amount of literature relating to experiential learning. Community of learning etc.	Both the literature and primary data (all parties) stresses the value of experiential – in fact over simulation in the classroom too	This should be heralded as worthwhile – stress the value of the experiential
<b>Kf.</b>	<b>Issues Agreed – Neutral Matters</b> Expectation is that students will be none fee earning	Not referred to as such - incidental	In the majority of cases, and with short placements in particular, it is assumed that the student will not be producing work which would earn fees for the employer.	The earning or otherwise of fees could be attached as an issue for review / appraisal, but is unlikely to be seriously contemplated
<b>Kn.</b>	A need for some guidelines for issue to employers	Hinted at in the literature. Suggested in fact by students as well as academics	Not so much a criticism (complaint at lack of) but rather an appreciation of a possible enhancement. Note that these should not be too prescriptive. Bear in mind the core competencies and the like	Could be based on the processes contained within <del>Erasmus</del> ? include suggested capability of cohort as well as any targets etc.
<b>Kd.</b>	<b>Issues Agreed – Negative factors</b> Indecision as to the actual work content required/expected of the students on placement	Evidence in literature	This introduces, by default, the education versus training debate also, what ARE students expected to achieve – what is realistic, and so on... ??	May be addressed in response to <del>Kn</del> above. ?
<b>Kc.</b>	Incompatibility between workload and positioning of placements	Evidence in literature	Requires an institutional (university) reshuffle in some cases to allow most flexible positioning of the work placement	Consider the relationship between classroom studies and the placement... to give increased status to the latter. Address structures/ admin. requirements etc.

Ref.	Research finding	Literature	Discussion	Suggested importance to Framework / action
<b>Ke.</b>	Problems re adequacy of suitable type/volume of workload.	Highlighted variously, including by those who advocate simulation	Opens the door, or does it (?) to simulation with prof. body input / control.	Workplace experience vital What can we reasonably stipulate? something less technical ( see <b>Kd</b> also ? )
<b>Kg.</b>	Lack of responsibility for establishing and maintaining contacts	Much evidence of poor relations	Key to the success or otherwise of the partnership.	Must impart sense of importance of effective communication / involvement, etc.
<b>Kh.</b>	Shorter placements (typically, those of no more than 10 days) are thought likely to be ineffective by ALL	Certain recommendations exist as to the ideal length of placement – expressed in Credit point terms (CITB)	Part-related to what is decided for <b>Kc</b> , as there can be some relationship between length of placement and its positioning within the academic year	Important. What can we stipulate? Should this be something more uniform in length?
<b>Ki.</b>	Minimal regard for Professional Bodies	Some evidence from RICS Survey	Need to reflect on the actual status/value of the Accrediting body.	Perhaps introduce a monitoring / reporting system?
<b>Kl.</b>	Very limited exchange of learning materials	Evidence in literature	One of the key principles – supply / exchange of learning materials	Stress importance to quality generally as well as familiarity for students with workplace
<b>Ko.</b>	Poor communications linked to uncertainty as to requirements etc.	Evidence in literature	Another key principle – supply / exchange of information. Roles – expectations need clarifying. There will be a tie-in here with <b>Kd</b> , <b>Ke</b> , <b>Kl</b> , etc.	Much more clarity as to set-up, lines and means of communication. A regime / timetable for communication, visits etc.
<b>Km.</b>	Credit Value placed on the placement within the curriculum	Note the wide variations cited in the literature. Also consider the recommendations suggested in H above	Providers are not consistent and Prof. Bodies lay down no particular guidelines except the “ enough” referred to in	



Ref.	Research finding	Literature	Discussion	Suggested importance to Framework/ action
	<b>Areas of Little or no Agreement</b>			
<b>Kb.</b>	Perceptions / understanding as between the placement as " work Based Learning " and " Work Experience "	Evidence in literature defining WBL etc.	Different perceptions. May be talking about the same thing, may not... May depend upon the interpretation placed on "Work Based... Also, may bring into play the education versus training debate (as <b>Kd</b> ) again	Some emphasis must be placed on the Learning opportunity afforded by the placement... Different setting but still learning all the same
<b>Kj.</b>	Assessment pattern varies	Evidence in literature	Variation between providers but essentially all reflective – no workplace assessment included	Consider whether to include WBL assessment in scheme – employer report at least
<b>Kk.</b>	Support / interaction varies	Some articles on the management of the student experience, whether by academic tutor or by employer	Requires acceptance of responsibilities and "buying into" certain procedures.	Possibly obvious but list related students, tutors and employer/supervisor

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **DISCUSSION**

In this chapter I address objectives 5 and 7, namely;

- 5. To review the perceptions of each stakeholder group regarding others.
- 7. To identify factors instrumental to the effectiveness of work based learning within the FD – referred to herein as Critical Success Factors (CSF).

#### **5.1. Introduction to this Chapter**

FDs are designed on the premise that students undertaking them will obtain some at least of their learning within a workplace setting. As noted previously, most FDs appear to be orientated towards PT students. Provision of effective workplace experience within the FT degree has its own unique problems. It is these that the present study has sought to address.

In this chapter, I shall identify the key features sought by the stakeholders, as identified by my research, including requirements they may have of others. Through this I shall identify issues likely to determine the success or failure of employer engagement in such a setting, the basis for Critical Success Factors. I shall create a draft model agreement (Appendix F) accommodating these and constituting a framework within which the various stakeholders can work together effectively and through which the value of employer involvement can be maximised.

#### **5.2. An overview of the Data: Vignettes based on materials reported in Chapter 4**

The following three vignettes, “lives” created from my data, encapsulate the key distinguishing features of three differing work placement experiences. They are illustrative of increasing degrees of employer engagement. Names and locations have been changed.

Vignette 1 is based on provider, employer and student **F**. It illustrates a placement of 6 days in duration with the local office of a large National QS practice. The Student must fit his placement into the University study week and so is in the office for two days per week.

## **1. Peter**

*Peter is nearing the end of the final semester of his Foundation Degree in Quantity Surveying at F, a New University in Northern England. Like his fellow students, he was told to find a period of work experience of at least 6 day's duration . (The course documentation actually stipulated ten). His tutors were not proactive in finding students work placements, though did issue a list of firms who had offered placements in the past – suggesting that finding a placement for themselves was an important part of the learning experience. Peter found employment himself with the local office of “Kwickbill” a long-established national QS practice. Kwickbill have a tradition of supporting University F by offering placements of varying lengths to their students, and regard themselves as being “engaged”.*

*Due to his placement being during term time, Peter was only free from his studies for two days per week and so agreed initially with Paul Comp, Regional Partner, to spread his workplace experience over three weeks. Paul takes what interest he can in students placed with the firm but he is busy and assigns Peter to work for Helen Scale, a Chartered Surveyor who has been with the firm for eight years. Some of Peter's first day is taken up with getting to know the office and other staff, though by early afternoon he is given some figures to check by Mark, one of Helen's colleagues. This is a one-off task and Peter is not sure of their relevance. On day two of his first week Peter is given a set of drawings by Helen and asked to measure the site drainage. This particular task ought to take about a week and so at the end of the day Peter has to leave-off at the point which he has reached.*

*Returning to the office for his second week, Peter resumes the drainage measurement, working on this for both days. At the end of day two, Helen explains that the work is required by the end of the week and must now be given to a senior QS to be completed. Peter does not ask to see the completed work or how it is used within subsequent documentation. No further reference is made to the exercise and/or his performance.*

*Peter's third period of two days is spent mainly in identifying and filing superseded drawings, checking some sub-contractors' quotations against trade literature and*

*checking some arithmetical exercises by Mark. For the second part of his last day he is allowed to sit in on a meeting between Helen and one of the subcontractors referred to. Peter took no active part in the meeting but found the structure and content valuable as it tied in with what he had been told of such meetings.*

*At the end of his 6 days with Kwickbill, Peter visits Paul and asks if he might continue working with the firm on an informal basis, as he values the experience. Initially Paul is happy to agree. However, he brings this to an end after a further three weeks, explaining to Peter that there are insufficient unique tasks for him to perform and that the logistics of involving him in anything more long-term and/or substantial would be too difficult, given his pattern of attendance.*

*At no time do any tutors from the university liaise with “Kwickbill” and Peter receives no visit or communication from them during his placement.*

*In order to pass the work experience module within their programme, Peter and his fellow students each have to produce a reflective report. This concentrates on the students’ perceptions of the structure and the nature of the business of the organisation within which they were working. There is very little expectation of them having undertaken specific curriculum-related activity.*

Vignette 2, is based on provider, employer and student **B**. It illustrates a short term placement of ten days duration in a medium sized single-branch QS office.

## **2.Ryan**

*Ryan is in Year Two year of his Foundation Degree in Quantity Surveying at B, a New University in the Midlands. It is January, the first part of the Second Semester. He has just completed two weeks workplace experience in the office of a medium sized local QS Firm, “Measure & Bill”. Fortunately, despite the recession, the firm has quite a bit of work on. Personnel at the office comprised the Sole Principal, two Associates, five Senior Surveyors and two Juniors. Ryan obtained his Placement*

*himself by writing to the Principal, Martin Bill, as he did to a number of firms where his enquiry was unsuccessful. A list of possible employers was provided by the Programme Team.*

*On his arrival, two weeks ago, Ryan was placed by Martin to work alongside Fred Rule, a Senior Surveyor of 42, a professionally qualified QS who has been with Measure and Bill for 16 years. Fred has acted as supervisor for a number of other students like Ryan. After his first Monday morning, spent meeting other staff and seeing the office he would share with one of the Juniors, Ryan was given drawings and asked to sort these into sets for issue to Contractors. On Tuesday he was given a large pile of measurement done by two of the Senior and both Junior Surveyors, and asked to check the arithmetic. This continued to the end of Wednesday. Thursday was spent calculating measurement rates with one of the Juniors. At the end of the day, Fred checked and discussed this work with him. On Friday, as it was the end of the month, Ryan went with Fred to a building site to watch him carry out the interim valuation. Ryan helped measure the materials on site and watched as Fred met with a Sub-Contractor to discuss mistakes made by the latter. He also attended the monthly site meeting, though sat in silence throughout – merely observing what went on. They were late back to the Office.*

*Ryan spent the first two days of his second week again checking measured work and calculating some of the floor areas for which others had done the measurements. On Wednesday afternoon he was taken by Eric, another senior Surveyor, to help measure some recently completed road works (holding the tape and writing down the measurements, which Eric checked). On Thursday morning Fred gave Ryan a set of drawings relating to a Community College which was being managed by one of the Associates. He was asked if he could measure the floor finishes of each of the rooms in Phase One. This he did, colouring up each completed area as he had been instructed to do during the first year of his Degree. After lunch Ryan was visited for 45 minutes by his Tutor from University, Derek King. Derek talked with him about the various tasks in which he had been involved and looked at his measurement work on the offices. Before leaving, the Tutor spoke for 15 minutes with Fred Rule, whom he already knew from past visits. He could*

*not meet in addition with Martin Bill, as he usually tried to do, because Martin was not in the office on that particular day. Satisfied with Ryan's work to date on Phase One, Fred gave him a further set of drawings for Phase 2 of the same scheme, telling him to continue with this into Friday, his last day. All too soon it was the end of his time with the firm, and at 4.00 p.m. on the Friday afternoon Fred sat with Ryan, reviewing his involvement and the understanding he had gained over the past two weeks.*

*Now back at University, Ryan is required to write up his work experience as a Portfolio, with evidence (such as a copy he was allowed to make of some of his measurement work). His review includes his reflections on the structure and organisation of the workplace. He will meet with Fred Rule again, as the latter is one of the local employers who come into the university to sit on a panel assessing the students' presentations of their Portfolios.*

Vignette 3 is based on provider, employer and student **D**. It illustrates a placement of 13 weeks duration with a large firm of Civil Engineering Contractors and lasting the whole summer. The student's time is divided between work in head office and on site, where she worked extended shifts alongside regular employees.

### **3.Catherine**

*Catherine is at the start of her second year of a Foundation Degree in Civil Engineering at D, a New University in Greater London. She has just completed a 13 week summer placement with a large national Contractor, The Earth Moving Company ("Temco") . The company is mid-way through a large motorway extension. There are six Regional Offices and Catherine was attached to the Bristol Head Office though for most of her work placement she was site based.*

*She worked under the control of the Contract Manager, Tom Flemming. Tom has been with "Temco" for 7 years, since graduating himself from Sheffield University.*

*He is a Chartered Civil Engineer and member of the local committee of his Professional Institution. Catherine was one of a number of Students shortlisted by her Tutor on behalf of "Temco", who obtained her Placement with them through a competitive interview process. "Temco" have as many as 6 Students training with them at any one time.*

*Catherine spent the first six and last four weeks of her placement on the motorway site, mainly involved in setting-out construction lines and levels, agreeing earthmoving records and updating site copies of drawings. For the remaining 3 weeks of her placement she worked in the Regional Office, learning about checking designs and managing budgets and staffing levels associated with the motorway. Here she was working for senior project Engineer, Mark Weller. When on site Catherine worked site hours 8.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m. In addition she worked a number of weekends and two overnight shifts, when road diversion work was necessary. At Regional Office the standard day was between 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.*

*During the course of her 13 weeks with "Temco" Catherine took part in in-house company training sessions, and Both Tom and Mark encouraged her to attend local CPD meetings run by the ICE. Although only with the company for 13 weeks, Catherine was enrolled on the company's standard in-house training scheme and so had to record both her day-to-day training and CPD. Either Tom or Mark, depending upon where she was based at the time, carried out a monthly review of her work and progress, measured against the company scheme. On such occasions checks were also made against the requirements of her university curriculum generally, as well as the Module guide for the Workplace Learning Module. The Placement Tutor, Sarah Gasgill, has visited Temco over a number of years and knows most of the senior personnel, but as Catherine was to be on a new site and Tom was unknown to Sarah, the latter paid a visit prior to Catherine's placement to meet Tom and go through the student's progress to date, explaining what the University and Catherine might each expect from the placement. Tom, for his part, detailed the kind of project(s) Catherine would be working on. An informal agreement was reached between Tutor and Manager about what might be attainable learning objectives. Sarah made a second visit in week 8 of the placement (a trip to The Regional Office) and a final one in week 12 (on site). On each of these*

*occasions she spent 45 minutes with the student, slightly less with the manager.*

*Before the end of week 4 of her Second Year Catherine must produce a Portfolio relating to her placement, detailing her completed tasks (mapped where possible against items within the curriculum) as well as giving her reflections on the overall company structure and her place within this. Every year, either Tom or Mark will be invited to the University by Sarah, as are representatives of a number of other employers, to join a Panel to help assess a presentation of Portfolios. Usually one or other has been able to attend.*

### **5.3. The Ideal ? Workplace learning**

The workplace experience with which this study has been primarily concerned occurs within the sometimes broader context of WBL, which in turn is located within, driving to a greater or lesser extent, vocational study programmes such as the Foundation Degree.

Within the above statement, possibly the most important word is that which occurs both literally and metaphorically at its heart. It is “Learning”. The various stakeholders involved, providers, employers, students and Professional Bodies accrediting FDs, may disagree over its precise definition, process and quality. However, all will be able to relate to a particular setting or settings, whether classroom, workplace or both, seeking an effective learning situation. The main focus of this study relates to employer engagement, most visible in the nature and quality of workplace experience. This has been informed by reflection on the debate amongst educationalists and others as to its perceived value or otherwise within the curriculum and the relative merits of alternatives such as classroom simulation.

#### **5.3.1. Employers’ perspective on WPL**

All data from employers within the construction sector, whether via questionnaire or interview, suggests support for at least some workplace experience to be included within the educational programmes of those studying for entry to the profession. Indeed, its importance is cited by some as being one of the deciding factors when considering applications from prospective employees. Their own capacity to offer effective workplace

learning to students will vary, however, depending on the volume and type of work upon which they are engaged at any time. In terms of there being some form of driver for employers’ support of the period of workplace learning, or as they tend to term it “work



*experience*”, this is often expressed in altruistic terms, but there is also some suggestion that time spent by the student in the workplace is seen by employers as a test of the student’s suitability for longer-term employment, and some workplace training may be aimed at this. A number of instances were cited (by employers or students) where a student initially granted a short-term placement was offered further employment either concurrent with or at the end of their FD studies. Thus some return to the employer may be more immediate than might have been expected.

### **5.3.2.Provider’s perspective on WPL.**

Various authors have examined learning processes in the context of vocational education. (Burke et al.,2009; Gherardi, 2006. Tynjälä, 2008; Eraut,(2007). There is general support here for students being given experience in genuine work settings which complement, more or less, their classroom studies. There is less agreement as to the measurable value of such experiential learning, born perhaps of variances in its type and volume and concerns relating to assessment, all factors which threaten the consistency of quality that today’s academic systems require. Clearly, the controlled setting of the classroom enables all those in a particular cohort of students to experience an identical learning module, with identical materials, assessment methods and criteria.

Some critics of placements have suggested that time spent in the workplace may in fact serve as a distraction from the learning process. Some suggest that bad habits which may be passed on to students here taint a certain purity which they attribute to classroom study (Slotte, et al.( 2004) . Certain others, whilst not actively opposing workplace learning, have quite demanding requirements of it (as per the list produced by Williams and Thuriaraja (2009)), where the practical obstacles may deter the faint hearted. Mostly, however, authors praise the superior value, as they see it, of experiential learning over classroom learning, referring to the positive effect on the learner, based in a work setting, becoming a member of a community of learning and gaining from the presence of colleagues through both formal instruction and informal contacts. (Burke et al.,2009; Gherardi, 2006. Tynjälä, 2008) In this environment the student can contextualise, or be helped to contextualise, their classroom learning. This aim may be achieved through the formal guidance of a workplace mentor, where one is available, but also through the students’ coming into contact with employees of the same or a different discipline to their own.

### **5.3.3. Students' perspective on WPL**

Both past and current research suggest that all students, like employers, highly value any exposure to the workplace, whether via occasional site visits or through longer term exposure offered by a placement. (see reported evidence on p.50 et seq.) As observed above, the type and quantity of work may vary, but all is valued for what it can add to the student's appreciation of the workings of the industry generally and, sometimes, for offering increased technical understanding. Besides data from questionnaires and interviews, further weight is added to this argument by NSS returns (NSS, 2011 -2013) where programmes in disciplines providing site visits and /or placements receive the highest ratings.

The nature and quality of learning achieved by students will vary depending upon the work made available to them and upon their own prior knowledge. In addition, it is impossible to guarantee a consistent similarity between work done in the classroom and the work experience offered on site. Whilst one student reported a fairly trouble-free transition between college and the workplace, being set tasks in which they already possessed certain classroom-instilled skills, another reported having felt somewhat out of their depth when faced with work outside their comfort zone.

### **5.3.4. Professional Bodies' perspectives on WPL**

Again, there was agreement amongst all those interviewed that the ideal educational route is one offering a mix of academic study and practical hands-on learning. This enthusiasm was tempered slightly by one Body, suggesting that equal value might be gained from simulated exercises carried out in the classroom, though this was a route only to be followed if genuine hands-on experience was not available. Notwithstanding their apparent authority, via their accreditation of a number of programmes, the Professional Bodies display varying degrees of actual control over curriculum content and programme management. Ironically, this appears to be particularly true of their requirements regarding the provision and assessment of workplace learning.

## **5.4. The Reality: Engagement**

The general consensus emerging is in line with the recommendations of the original exponents of FD education. Both the literature and my own research have presented possible drawbacks to putting the recommendations into practice. Here the word "Engagement" is of particular significance.

### **5.4.1. Defining Engagement**

When looking to label examples of employer engagement as either more or less effective, the suggestion emerges from various stakeholders that engagement should not be seen as a purely one-sided relationship. It concerns not merely employers engaging with providers, students and possibly also Professional Bodies but also, in each case, the reverse. In cases where relationships appear to have failed or been less fruitful than was hoped for, there has predominantly been the suggestion, whether explicit or implied, of a lack of communication or understanding by the provider.

### **5.4.2. The Employers' perspective on engagement**

The employer's presence and the part they play within the relationship is an essential factor, for without them engagement between the stakeholders will have no vehicle via which to operate. Greenwood et al (2008) have suggested certain key characteristics of "engagement", namely: involvement in the establishment and initial design of programmes, ongoing engagement through the provision of effective placement opportunities and learning materials, and engagement through involvement in assessment and the formal processes of course review. This pattern closely matches the recommendations of the QAA (2004) and others at the time when FDs were first set up and can act as a useful yardstick against which to test the "engagement" evidenced by different relationships.

My own research suggests that most employers involved in delivering workplace experience begin their association with a provider by expressing enthusiasm for all three elements above. However, ongoing liaison decreases in most cases and most employers do not maintain much more than openings for workplace experience and sometimes, in addition, the provision of learning materials.

A number of academics in my survey suggest that employers have simply abandoned ongoing liaison altogether. The suggestion also emerges from the literature. However, some employers whilst acknowledging in interviews the pressures on their time, suggested that if providers sought more involvement in liaison committees and provision of materials they would attempt to co-operate.

### 5.4.3. The Providers' perspective on engagement

There is a general suggestion amongst academics, expressed quite strongly by some of my interviewees, that certain employers are unwilling, as well as unable, to play a constructive role. Some suggest that employers may not only lose interest and be generally unsupportive but that, in addition, they may be incapable of making effective assessments of student work, whether this be the latter's practical skills or academic reports. As a consequence of this perhaps, in most cases studied the employers were not invited to take part in any sort of assessment of outcomes of the placement which would contribute towards the student's final grades. Nowhere was an employer- assessment of students' workplace activity included in their final grade. It may be argued that a short placement affords little opportunity for any tasks of a meaningful nature to be set, performed and assessed. But this should perhaps be viewed as a criticism of the placement's design rather than of the employer, and addressed accordingly. It is noticeable that, however short the placement, it was considered long enough by the providers to provide the basis for a full report by the student, assessed on all matters except the technical content of their work placement.

Involvement of tutors varies; in some cases the student is deliberately left to find and arrange their own employer and period of workplace experience. Here the academics concerned defend this as a valuable part of the students' learning process. Elsewhere, the student's tutor or some other body within their academic institution take partial or even total control over finding the students an employer. Once placed, the degree of communication and support from tutor to student varied from institution to institution.

These alternative approaches are open to debate on academic grounds, depending upon how far one thinks that the learning process should extend beyond the bounds of the actual placement. The level of effort made by tutors to ensure that students found a placement and, subsequently, the extent of their communication with the student during the placement may be seen as some measure of engagement on the provider's part, but such a judgement should be made in the light of their declared standpoint.

As with the differing strategies for assisting the student, above, similar distinct models of communication are apparent between provider and employer.

In the first example (such as that of **Catherine** above) a best-case scenario in relation to QAA aspirations, the tutor communicates with the prospective employer prior to the

placement, discussing the nature and scope of any workplace learning. The same provider may visit the student more than once during the course of their placement, and the employer may well be invited to (though may not participate in) assessment sessions at the conclusion of the placement. In a worst-case scenario (such as that of **Peter**

above) the provider makes no contact with the employer before, during or after the placement, relying on the student's own relationship with the employer to see the placement through to completion and to satisfy any stipulated aims and objectives the provider may have put upon it. In such a situation the student gets no support or encouragement and the employer may feel "used" and possibly an unimportant part in the learning process.

I suggest that the first provider, above, is doing more to foster and maintain effective engagement between the parties. The FD ideal QAA, (2010) suggests that providers and employers be equal partners. The employer, finding themselves in the latter situation above and busy with their own concerns, may perhaps be forgiven for not pursuing the relationship further. A pattern could set in which may be repeated across a number of placements.

#### **5.4.4. The Students' perspective on engagement**

Unlike those of either employers or providers, who are usually equipped to take the long-view, student responses must be placement-specific, and thus can reflect only the content and management of their own WPL.

Both the literature and my own research suggest that there is no uniform type or level of support, either from providers or employers. Hence, not all students will be allocated a Tutor and not all will be assigned to a workplace mentor or supervisor, although in fact all my interviewees had both. Regarding the quantity and quality of help which they were given my own respondents mirrored the mixed findings of previous research. Most students were satisfied with the support given them in the workplace. Some however, particularly those associated with shorter placements, were less happy with their tutors. Some resented the failure to provide support with finding placements and, in some cases, the tutor's failure to visit or even enquire at all of the student's progress during their period in the workplace, as in Peter's case, above.

#### **5.4.5. The Professional Bodies' perspective on engagement**

Whilst valuing workplace learning, none of the Professional Bodies actively monitor

engagement, even where it forms a part of Accredited Degree studies. None stipulate either the nature or the volume of what ought to be learnt whilst on placement. In cases where a Programme is accredited they all suggest that a placement should not be “*too short*”, but none state a precise minimum length below which the Programme would not be

accredited. Their control, therefore, in practical terms, is rather limited. Concerning the operation and content of workplace learning they seem only recently to have become aware of and responded in concrete terms to the possible negative effect of the current economic climate. One in particular is currently issuing guidelines suggesting that in future workplace experience might be substituted for by classroom-based studies, but using materials supplied by industry and delivered and assessed by local practicing professionals. This last would seem to be the only significant Prof. Body contribution to a formula for an effective way forward. It is an interesting development in the context of this study, for whilst allowing a shift of emphasis away from the workplace it does actively seek to involve professionals in the day-to-day education of students in a more structured way than has been the case to date.

### **5.5 The Time, Cost, Quality Debate – towards Critical Success Factors**

Typically, the factors critical to the practising QS in managing a project for his or her client relate to three principal variables: time, cost and quality. An effective service to the Client (or one's employer in the case of a Contractor's Surveyor) consists of a juggling exercise between these. Usually it is possible to satisfy two but not all three. That is to say, for example, savings may be made on time and cost but quality will suffer and the finished product will be poorer than the client had hoped for. Alternatively, if we allow all the time in the world and demand top quality then cost control will suffer: the final cost will undoubtedly be higher than the client wanted, or can afford (Ashworth and Hogg, 2007).

To some extent, the equation involving the Critical Success Factors within my proposed framework, or their operation, could be seen as a similar one. Cost is perhaps not such an important a factor, but my own research does suggest some relationship between time and quality.

#### **5.5.1. The importance of Time**

Data generated by my questionnaires demonstrates that the placements required of FT student may vary in length between 6 days and 40.

The primary concern should be the quality of workplace learning, regardless of how we choose to measure it. I suggest, though, that if seeking to meet certain learning outcomes there could be an optimum timescale over which these might be achieved. A finding of this study is that a six day placement is considered too short to be satisfactory, both by tutors operating such restricted systems themselves as well as by those operating longer ones.

Generally, the employers and students associated with such programmes also agree. 70 days placements may be too long and, in any case, present logistical problems, which my research has highlighted. Principally, longer placements must be accommodated within the academic calendar or in its intervals, and a ten week placement may put at risk essential classroom studies.

One factor which could help rationalise the apparently random current system might be to recognise more effectively the number of credits awarded for the placement. Both the literature and evidence from different participants in my own sample, albeit a small one, display a wide range of credit values, varying between 10 and 40. Again, the introduction of some norm or standard related to the length of placement may help.

If only for the sake of apparent parity between otherwise similar degrees, I recommend that some sort of cross-programme levelling exercise be considered and certain guidelines be given.

### **5.5.2. The importance of Cost**

Until now I have played down this part of the equation. As noted previously, none of the employers whom I interviewed presented cost as a deterrent to their provision and supervision of workplace learning. There are costs, of course, in terms of the resources they must commit, diverting senior staff to mentoring duties and so on. Most accept that, in the short term at least, the student will not be fee-earning and so in this respect anything expended on them is a drain on finances. However, the employers' chief concern was that the student took something meaningful from the Placement, rather than that they were fee earning.

From the Provider's perspective there will be a cost in terms of resources, as staff must expend some time managing the placement. Visits to students may add significantly to the cost of a programme. We live in financially straightened times and, as we have seen, university policy on cost may persuade tutors to have fewer contacts with students than they might like or see as appropriate.

### **5.5.3. The importance of Quality.**

To measure the quality achieved within a given time-frame, we have to examine content. Almost without exception my interviewees suggested that the key and universal quality which they would ascribe to the workplace was its capacity to instil a heightened appreciation of atmosphere. Various writers, Gherardi (2006) in particular, subscribe to this, valuing this opportunity of experiencing the real thing on a par with any technical learning acquired there. One academic I interviewed did voice a hope that students on placement would acquire or at least enhance certain professional skills relating to their degree studies. Employer D did in fact plan and deliver a series of precise professional tasks in which the students should be involved, but this was the longest placement; in most cases expectations on both sides were low. My own research suggests that constraints on employers are various and very real. Any proposed framework should take these into consideration. We may publish certain targets, but it may not be possible for even the most willing of employers to meet all of these.

Certainly most providers and students expect the placement to require, test and reward certain transferable skills, including timekeeping, personal time management, communication skills and energy for the task set.

Such skills are generally accepted by all employers as being within their capacity to provide.

The extent of technical ability that can be instilled in temporary employees must be a function of the type and volume of their employer's current workload at any time. This is suggested by interview material from employers, and confirmation of this comes from providers and students alike.

The following factors emerged from interviews, relating to the significance of the tasks in which the student might or might not be involved.

**(a) The degree of skill required to accomplish a given task and the urgency with which it is required may determine a supervisor's or mentor's willingness to allocate it to a student.**

The manager must weigh up the importance of the task, the degree of supervision that will be required if the student is to accomplish it effectively and the loss in time and money if it has to be repeated by another employee. The urgency must not place the student under unfair pressure but may be a valuable spur to their accepting some responsibility which,



for the student, can be satisfying in itself. As observed by more than one employer in my study, under-employment can be as destructive as over-employment.

**(b) The personal enthusiasm of the supervisor or mentor to expose the student to new experiences, general and technical, and their authority to do so**

A thread emerging from most interviews was the degree of employers' enthusiasm for seeing students take in as much "atmosphere" as possible, particularly where working on site. Generally the supervisor or mentor was given unfettered responsibility for the student and could engage them in whatever activity seemed appropriate. Employers appeared to trust the supervisor or mentor to set work appropriate to the student's capacity. It was observed from interviews that the supervisor or mentor was appropriately experienced in instructing others, many having undergone a similar placement themselves.

**(c) The appreciation and satisfying of the learning needs of the student**

This was an area in which there was less consistency. Only two employers made a point of aligning the tasks set the student with what they understood to be the syllabus, either to underpin or extend their technical capability. The rest took a less structured approach, involving the student in whatever came along: there is some suggestion here that any experience would be good experience.

Eraut (2008) lists a number of factors which will determine the experience made available, some of which mirror those above. With respect to the allocation of work to the student, a point relevant to both (a) and (b) above, his research found supervisors or mentors "*best able to judge the appropriate level of challenge*". (Eraut,2008:419)

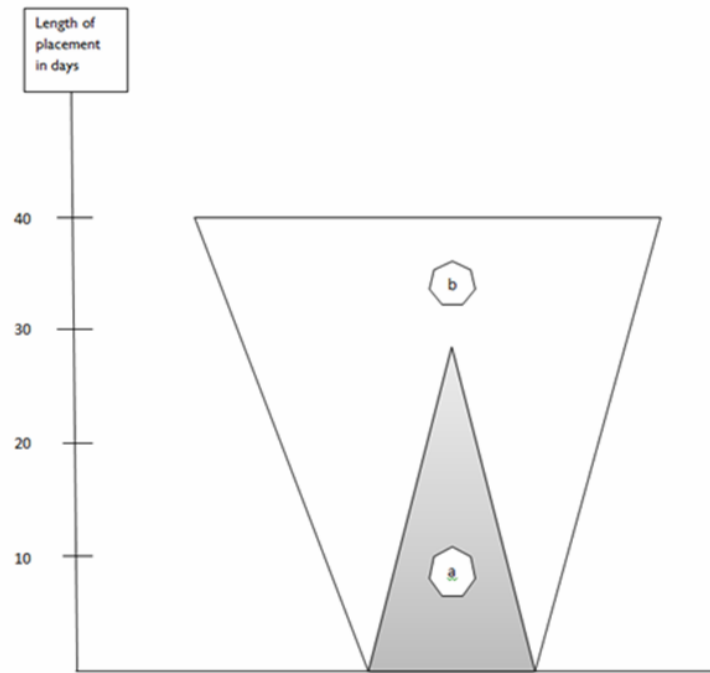
The scope of experience available within the construction industry is far more workload-related and less predictable than in the fields of Health or Education or Health, both sectors in which FDs feature significantly and areas in which literature abounds, ( e.g. Crandall, 1993, Fulmer, 1993). Within these last two professions the pattern of tasks requiring involvement, whether cyclical or constant, can almost be guaranteed. In construction things may be further complicated by the positioning of a work placement in the academic year. The curriculum may introduce students to a particular technology, but there is no guarantee that the site or office in which they undergo work experience will be involved in projects which can demonstrate related practical learning, either then or at any time in the future.

Those seeking to identify and subsequently stipulate some “concrete examples” of specific workplace learning opportunities might consider an adaptation of Eraut’s Typology of Early Career Learning. This was introduced in Chapter 2 and a revised form is presented at section 5.8, below.

#### **5.5.4. The relationship between Time and Quality – a representation**

A number of my interviewees suggested that a relationship may exist between the acquisition and development of generic transferable skills versus practical/professional procedures. Figure 5.1 is an attempt on my own part to illustrate such a relationship.

**Figure 5.1** A suggested Learning balance between generic/ transferable skills versus practical/professional procedures



The diagram suggests how the acquisition of new basic or life skills (zone **a**) will diminish over time as these are gradually mastered. The acquisition of technical or professional skills, ( zone **b** ) may continue for as long as a student is in a workplace situation which will grow in its coverage and complexity, particularly in the context of shorter periods of WPL This can be supported by both Ghirardi (2006) and Eraut (2008).

## 5.6. **A Proposed Framework – meeting expectations**

My respondents all expressed some interest in a standard framework encapsulating clear guidelines. Indeed, certain stakeholders called specifically for such a support document. The word “Framework” suggests a firm structure. Clearly, any document seeking to be widely adopted must respond to reasonable expectations: both in terms of meeting varying academic / professional standards and requirements but also reasonable in light of commercial and other practicalities which come into play, as discussed elsewhere.

If learning outcomes across FD providers within the same discipline are aimed at an equivalent award and at the same time aligned with ultimate membership of a Professional Body, then it might be of benefit to have a framework. Nearly all Sandwich Degrees are accredited and nearly all share a common structure, or framework. Not all FDs are accredited and, as already seen, they lack commonality in terms of structure or content of WPL.

At a practical level, where a particular tutor may deal with up to 70 different employers all in respect of the same period of placement experience, common guidelines might be a valuable time-saving aid.

To this end I have isolated those issues identified as being most significant to each of the stakeholder groups, arising from my data analysis in Chapter 4, shown here as Table 4:8; (Pages 156-158). In a further step towards the identification of Critical Success Factors, I have indicated (shaded) those issues over which there is already some agreement amongst the stakeholders. It will be seen that not all the agreement is over positive matters, as is the case with the value placed upon workplace experience (**Ka**). There is significant agreement over issues which are felt result in less successful employer engagement; for example, poor and/or uncertain communications between Employer and Provider (**Kg**) and (**Ko**) and the fairly poor contact with Professional Bodies . (**Kl**). There is also agreement over certain facts: for example, the effect of the recession on

availability of workplace experience (E) and the desirability of a certain minimum period of exposure to the workplace (**Kh**).

Table 4.9. (pages 159 - 161) re-groups the above items according to the level of common agreement they attracted. Each element is now examined below, comparing testing my own findings with findings from the literature. From this, proposals relating to CSF, and thus a framework, will emerge.

**Please Note** The alphabetical references against descriptive passages within sub-sections 5.6.1. – 5.6.4. below relate to the items as they appear on Tables 4.8 and 4.9 in the final section of Chapter 4. above

### **5.6.1. Issues Agreed – Positive factors**

**1. (Ka).** The strongest agreement concerns the positive contribution of workplace learning to the FD. This is much supported by literature. There is strong support also for the suggestion that the closer and fuller the employer's involvement the greater is its value.

**Implications for the framework.** None specifically, save perhaps the repeated use of some clear nomenclature, such as "Workplace Learning" (this last reinforcing the point discussed in item **13.** below) employers should be encouraged in their positive approach to participation.

### **5.6.2. Issues agreed – neutral matters**

**2.(Kf).** Another significant area of agreement is the need for some formal guidance to be given to stakeholders. This might take the form of an agreement setting out the expectations of each of the parties, along the lines of a learning contract. In addition to any provider-targets, it could include information from the provider regarding students' likely capabilities and information from the employer regarding the range of possible experience available (including its technical content). It is suggested in the literature that employers should not be automatically assumed to understand the system and a number of interviewees took up this point. This is further highlighted by recent studies;

*"60% [of employers] expressed dissatisfaction, or partial dissatisfaction with the curriculum. This begs the question as to whether their dissatisfaction might be linked in any way to their self confessed lack of awareness of the detail" (Perera and Pearson, 2011:34)*

The vignettes above suggest that **Catherine** is the only student over whose placement any prior preparation consultation/preparation took place between tutor and employer.

**Implications for the framework.** a document should be created enshrining the above, known to all parties prior to the commencement of each placement. This should incorporate some flexibility and be reviewed in the light of each new or repeat encounter (of whatever length) between provider and employer in the light of the latter's current workload. There are possible criticisms of learning contracts and agreements (Edmund et al, 2007), regarding flexibility, enforcement and sanctions. However, the prime function of this particular document, I believe, is to inform and enable an existing process rather than to suggest sanctions. **Table 5.1**, below, may be of value here.

**3.(Kn).** There is general acceptance that, in the majority of cases, students will not be engaged upon any fee earning work of any significance, chiefly due to their short association with the firm. Consequently, there will usually be no payment made to students for their work.

**Implications for the framework.** None specifically, though provision could be made for reference to the payment of any expenses etc., if applicable.

### **5.6.3. Issues agreed – negative factors**

The largest group of issues concerns those of a negative or critical nature. However, in cases where two or more parties are in agreement that some problem or negative situation exists, it should be possible, with some understanding, to effect movement by one or other of the parties towards a more effective approach.

**4.(Kd).** As noted above, students will rarely be engaged upon fee earning work. They may however be expected to undertake some practical tasks. The nature and volume of such work will, necessarily, vary between employers. Currently there is uncertainty about the expectations of both providers and employers in this area. Some interviewees suggested that certain generic skills (attendance at meetings, minute taking, simple report writing or whatever) be identified and that these be expected of all periods of work experience, however short.

Only in **Catherine's** case, above, is clear reference made to employers seeking to relate a student's WPL to the providers curriculum. **Ryan** did perform some tasks which related to his academic studies to date. **Peter** was engaged upon various tasks but was unable to complete any satisfactorily due to his work pattern.

**Implications for the framework** This presents one of the biggest issues: namely, arriving at a set of tasks or duties which might reasonably be expected of the student whilst on placement. There may be no easily-arrived-at common features. The form could suggest certain generic skills (of which a certain number should be aimed for) and provide space for entry of a number of employer-specific tasks. It is suggested that this be completed (say) two weeks prior to the commencement of the placement, to fairly reflect the employer's actual workload in each case. In creating experiential learning, examples might usefully be taken from **Table 5.1**.

**5.(Kc).** The mechanics of making space for placements within the academic year concerned both employers and providers alike, both recognising that students' interests are not best served by a system which forces their period of workplace learning into a prescribed (and often necessarily short) time of year. At worst, the student may encounter nothing which can be aligned to classroom studies. University policies and structures should be specifically challenged to facilitate more effective and valuable participation by employers, thereby enhancing students' learning opportunities.

**Peter's** case, above, illustrates a programme bound by university timetables and an annual teaching regime which will not allow a block of WPL to be acquired outside of this. Not only is he bound to a two week period, but cannot extend it even if he wishes. **Ryan's** case, above, illustrates the problem of fitting WPL in amongst ongoing and seemingly inflexible classroom schedules. Only in the case of **Catherine** has WPL been removed from the academic calendar, allowing a lengthy stretch to take place over the summer.

**Implications for the framework.** My own recommendation, based on my findings, would be that the student undertake a block placement during the summer break between years one and two. Provision should be made for assessment at the commencement of Year two, with marks entered into the university's recording system as soon as possible after this. To accommodate the above, the provider's recording scheme should be revised, where necessary, to accommodate the marks awarded beyond the usual deadlines. Though not reported in Chapter 2, recommendations made within the Review by Employment and Learning may be worth noting, as they largely accord with the foregoing. (Employment and Learning, 2008:53) suggesting a more flexible delivery model.

**6.( Ke).** All stakeholders recognise the possible effects of the recession upon employers' workloads and the knock-on effect that this may have for individuals. This should be kept under constant review both prior to and during any placement, so that any outcomes set

but not met may be addressed through simulated work exercises, either within the workplace or, subsequently, in the classroom.

Both **Ryan** and **Catherine** appear to work for employers with healthy workloads. This is stated in Ryan's case. Perhaps the reluctance of **Peter's** employer to keep him on for two days per week is not just a measure of the disruptive nature of such an arrangement but also of the lack of small one-off tasks available in the office.

**Implications for the framework.** The issue may be addressed via some form of employer -centred check list such as that proposed under item **4.** above, subject to review.

**7.(Kg).** Some, whether employers or providers, display signs of avoiding real responsibility, each expecting their opposite number to take and/or maintain the initiative. In the absence of links being formed or maintained one may blame the other. Though an area not addressed in any detail by this study, there is also the matter of student engagement. I suggest that it is important that, in addition to being prepared and mentored, the students themselves have a positive outlook towards the process. Most do, but this may still be an area worth including within any agreement.

Amongst those featured within the vignettes, **Peter** is the only student who fails to engage with his training, asking no questions to explain its relevance to his studies. Similarly, his tutor is the only one who makes no effort to engage with his employer at any stage.

**Implications for the framework.** Hopefully, the two main stakeholders will adopt and maintain a proactive attitude towards their partnership. The framework document should have check points to be signed up to, relating to pre-placement exchanges of information, reviews of students' progress during the placement and reporting structures during and after the placement (depending upon its duration). I suggest that a strict regime of meetings prior to, during and after the placement be signed up to and observed. To address the student's role an additional clause may be included to reinforce the need for effective student engagement. This may also be an appropriate place for Learning Outcomes to be clearly stated, particularly if these are to form the basis of any assessment, whether by employer or provider

**8.(Kh).** Both employers and providers associated with shorter placements (6 -10 days) expressed some dissatisfaction with so little exposure to the workplace. Likewise, students generally called for longer in the workplace, regarding this as a rich source of



learning. The Professional Bodies all suggested that a placement which was “too short” would not meet with their approval, though none would stipulate a minimum length. Evidence from employers suggests that a block release is far more satisfactory for them than a succession of one or two day placements, and so the latter should be avoided if at all possible. Going to the other extreme, the CITB (2004:25) recommends that up to 25% of the Credit value for the programme consist of WPL. This suggests a 15 week period if absorbed within the usual Semesters. This last would seriously impinge on the time available for classroom-based exercises. It is more in line with the levels of experiential content regarded as necessary to FDs in nursing or teaching.

The problems with shorter and/or disjointed placements are illustrated in the vignettes. It would seem that the value to them of each student’s WPL might vary in proportion to the length of their placement.

**Implications for the framework.** From the evidence I gathered regarding the content of placements in relation to their length I would recommend an optimum block placement of six weeks duration (30 working days); “optimum” in terms of their being long enough for some measurable learning to occur but not so long as to intrude detrimentally into classroom delivery time. I suggest that such placements commence immediately after assessment of formal classroom studies in the second year. Failing this, a block of six weeks should be found overlapping with the other second year breaks or, as a last resort, during the first semester of the second year. Classroom studies should not be disrupted/neglected if at all possible.

**9.(Ki).** Few employers or providers exhibit very close relationships with Professional Bodies except those necessary to the maintenance of accredited status. It could be argued that a far from equal relationship exists, in that Professional Bodies need the providers (as a source of future members) more than providers need Professional Bodies. Individual employers or tutors may have involvement at a personal level, arising from their own membership. Only on the longer placements can serious heed be given to the training requirements of these Bodies.

Only the account of **Catherine’s** placement suggests a relationship between employer organisation and the relevant Professional Body, whereby the student is encouraged to establish and maintain contact with it by her supervisors. At least one of the latter is himself an active member of that same Professional Body.

**Implications for the framework.** Currently, it is difficult to see how Professional Body requirements with regard to specific training can be imposed universally across all placements. However, programmes should be made aware of Professional Body requirements regarding length of placements where these can be determined. Both employers and providers should be required to take account of the Core Competencies of the relevant Professional Body in preparation of learning materials, as students will undoubtedly benefit from having studied relevant materials if they eventually seek membership.

**10.(K).** Both the questionnaire and the interview data demonstrate a very limited transfer of learning materials from employers to providers. Stakeholders operate in isolation where, instead of this, there could be effective cross-fertilisation..

None of the vignettes suggest that in these examples was there any transfer of actual materials from the employer to the provider, although the experience gained by some students should prove useful.

**Implications for the framework.** Maximum exchange of information should be encouraged wherever practicable. If FD ideals are to be adhered to, employers must be encouraged to supply materials (data, drawings, etc.) for use in classroom-based exercises. In addition the employer could also facilitate some aspect of the student's classroom learning through involving them in appropriate tasks within the workplace. Perhaps the matter should be raised/ monitored via meetings if these are instigated as per item **7** above.

**11.(Ko).** Most significantly perhaps, a clear picture emerges from most employers and providers of very weak lines of communication between these two parties. In addition there are instances of a failure of providers to communicate with and support students, as discussed in **15**, below.

A wide variance in communication levels is quite clear from the Vignettes

**Implications for the framework.** There should be a firm commitment from tutors to communicate with employers, even if they are not intending to shadow the students closely during the placement. This last should be signed up to in some way, as per in item **7** above.

**12.(Km).** There are acknowledged differences between Credit values awarded to work placements in relation to their length. This is not the employers concern. The Professional Bodies are aware though appear not to exercise control. Any normalisation of the length of placement should result in some standardisation. Further evidence of such disparities comes from Construction Skills (2008,p.24). Here, out of just ten FDs studied, the work based learning credits ranged from one at 7% of the total diet through to a number at between 25% and 33% and one as much as 50%. The lowest this author is aware of is 4% (Provider F).

#### **Implications for the framework:**

If the recommendation of, for example, a 30 day assessed placement (as in **8**, above) were to become accepted, this could be equated to 30 Credits, allowing for 240 hours of contact time within the workplace and 60 hours for private study and preparation of material for assessment. The figure suggested by CITB Construction Skills (2004:25) of 25% of the programme (or 60 credits) seems too ambitious, as some of this time must be taken out of the academic year, already a matter of concern to some of the academics interviewed. This information may be included on the Framework in parentheses, but is not of such relevance to the employer as are other matters on the form.

#### **5.6.4. Areas of little or no agreement**

This is the most challenging area of my findings, suggesting the need for serious change by various stakeholders, adjusting their expectations and/or the efforts they make to meet these. The first two are issues concerning the understanding and operation of the system. The third relates to support for people. All must be addressed in some way as all are important to the effective partnership we seek.

**13.( Kb).** Not all stakeholders perceive WPL in the same manner. This may be purely a matter of semantics, and so of relative unimportance. Attention was drawn in Chapter Two to the importance of the possible differing meanings attached to the same words by the stakeholders. (p64). Alternatively, it may be symptomatic of a difference in understanding which could undermine this element of the curriculum if, as a result, certain learning objectives were to be overlooked. Employers and students tend to refer to the placement as “work experience” whereas providers refer to it as “Workplace learning”. The distinction may or may not be important, depending upon the discussions surrounding item **1** above and the perspective on the learning potential of the placement, remarked on under item **6**, above.

**Implications for the framework.** It should be emphasised, to both employers and students, that the work placement is seen, and valued, by the provider as an essential part of the overall FD curriculum. If, as suggested elsewhere, this may simply be a matter of varying nomenclature between the parties, the use of the term “*workplace learning*” within the framework and any associated documentation may help cement a common understanding and purpose.

**14.(Kj).** A certain assessment regime characterises all providers in this study and beyond. Formal assessment of workplace learning is restricted to a written reflective report by the student, concentrating on generic, management and communication-related issues of their period in employment. This requirement appears much the same regardless of the length of placement. The employer will, typically, have little or no input into assessment of this report. In none of the establishments studied is any credit-related assessment made (by the provider or the employer) of any practical tasks undertaken by the student whilst in the workplace, and providers appear satisfied with this. In some cases they express doubts as to the capacity of employers to conduct effective assessment. This point, surely, risks devaluing WPL and could be a significant factor in any negative appraisal by senior management in some institutions, affecting their support for this aspect of vocational education. Providers claim to invite employers to participate in class based assessment exercises (typically review of the reflective diaries), but suggest that take-up is poor. Certain employers, for their part, suggest that they are not being asked.

The vignettes illustrate all of the above points. In all cases the student is required to submit a reflective report upon the conclusion of their period of WPL. As to employer assessment, there is no evidence of any serious appraisal of **Peter’s** work by his employers. His performance of tasks is not referred to at all. In the case of **Ryan** there is reference to an end-of-placement review of all his work with the firm. During her placement, **Catherine** took part in in-house training (presumably subject to some sort of assessment). She was subject to monthly reviews of her work and progress by her supervisors, and specific mention is made of her tutor’s enquiry into her progress.. Presumably her placement ended with a further review by her employers although this is not referred to here.

**Implications for the framework.** To secure more effective engagement between providers and employers, the latter should always be invited to join panels, working alongside tutors to examine students’ Reflective Diaries. It is unlikely that all could/would

take up this invitation, but it is important to the relationship that it be made. Further to this, I suggest that some percentage at least of the Module mark be generated by the employer, based upon their assessment of the student's workplace activities. A template for such assessment would need to be agreed between provider and employer, which could be based upon matters agreed in **2**, above. To address any employer's lack of confidence in their capacity to conduct effective assessment (or allay provider's fears in this respect) the employer could be offered some guidance in this area.

**15.(Kk).** The level of support for students appears variable, and no common thread emerges from the study. Students attached to certain programmes report dissatisfaction with Tutor support whilst these same tutors claim that they do give proper attention or, in some cases, choose deliberately to leave students to sink or swim in the work situation (perhaps without explaining their reasoning). Contact between providers and employers is minimal in some cases, particularly where the placement is of short duration. Such employers appear to be asking for more contact regarding students in their care. Employers, for their part, appear to be supportive of students to whom they give placements and the students mostly confirm this. Contact with and support from Professional Bodies for each of the stakeholder groups is variable.

Again, the vignettes illustrate the varying degrees of engagement between tutors and students. In **Peter's** case both assistance and subsequent contact appears totally lacking. **Ryan** is visited despite the relatively short duration of his placement and **Catherine** is well prepared and monitored throughout, by a series of visits. In the case of both **Ryan** and **Catherine** their tutor makes a point of discussing their progress etc. with their workplace supervisors as well as meeting with the student. In terms of finding a placement, Peter received no assistance; **Ryan** was given material suggesting firms to whom he might apply. **Catherine** was aided directly her tutor's action of sending out her CV to specific companies, as he did for all students. The support and inclusion given by workplace supervisors appears variable. In **Peter's** case it would appear that he is required to perform tasks very much as an additional pair of hands. His employers seem not to take much time to explain or follow these up. He is included in a site meeting, but this seems to be his only non-technical engagements. **Ryan** is included both in some work on site and at related meetings. **Catherine** appears to have been fully absorbed into the workforce, exposed to a wide variety of experience including overnight working as a member of the team.

**Implications for the framework.** As with communication issues, agreement should be sought and formalised regarding the intended levels of support and interaction between tutors and students, which should be recorded in the framework document. A template could also be included for workplace supervision or mentoring. An additional feature of the tutor-mentor relationship might be the offer by providers of some formal mentor training, formal or informal, within the agreements between the stakeholders. On a practical note, one researcher has drawn attention to the potential offered by electronic communication between tutor and student (Canter, 2006:35), the tutor using these both to provide support and obtain feedback. This last may address some of the concerns of academic managers who see tutor time spent visiting students as costly in terms of both time and money.

### **5.7. A suggested Document**

Arising from the above exercise, I have formulated a draft framework document incorporating CSF which is presented as **Appendix G**, hopefully meeting the expectations of each key stakeholder whilst also addressing their concerns and accommodating as much as possible the commercial challenges facing the sector. Items are cross-referenced to CSF as will be seen in Chapter 6.

### **5.8. A Proposed map of generic learning opportunities**

It is suggested that some benchmark document may be desirable, setting out certain skills appropriate to WPL, for incorporation within a Framework Document. This section seeks to present and explain such a document; See Table 5:1, overleaf.

**Table 5:1 A Map of Generic Learning Opportunities**

**Adapted from Typology of Early Career Learning ( Eraut,M.2008)**

<b>Column A</b>	<b>Column B</b>	<b>Column C</b>
<b><u>Learning Opportunities located within the workplace</u></b>	<b><u>Processes with learning as a by-product</u></b>	<b><u>Learning Activities facilitated by Learning Opportunities</u></b>
Tackling challenging tasks and roles	Being supervised Being coached Being Mentored	Listening and observing Asking questions Getting information Problem solving Trying things out Reflecting Learning from mistakes Consolidating, extending and refining skills
Participation in group processes Working alongside others	Shadowing Being Mentored	Listening and observing Asking questions Getting information Problem solving Trying things out Reflecting Learning from mistakes Consolidating, extending and refining skills
Visiting other sites	Shadowing	Listening and observing Asking questions Reflecting Consolidating, extending and refining skills
		Independent study

**Table 5.1** above, derived from Eraut's Typology of early Career Learning, (see page 72) reflects my own research findings. It identifies those experiences and learning opportunities expected to be available within the Construction Sector and avoids stipulating the acquisition or development of specific professional skills.

The significance of the above to my own research is as follows:

Column A suggests opportunities presented by the workplace.

- 1. Tackling challenging tasks and roles:** Whilst in Eraut's research this refers to an increasingly skilled level of practice I use the term in the context of the current

study to cover the performance of specified tasks set by the supervisor/mentor. These need not be high level or even professional in nature: indeed they are unlikely to be so. The heading does suggest the giving and receiving of instructions and compliance with the same. In my own findings, more than one interviewee stressed the importance of giving the student identifiable tasks of some significance, to instil a sense of purpose and of belonging. There may also be some opportunity to practise and enhance existing technical or professional skills and/or make a start on learning new ones.

2. **Participation in group processes and working alongside others:** Activity conducted as part of a team to which a task has been allocated (perhaps an opportunity to get involved with something more demanding than they might at this stage if left to work alone). The important issue here is that the student will work alongside others in their profession, usually more skilled than themselves. Importantly, this will afford opportunities for informal coaching and mentoring as discussed below. Team working may also strengthen the student's sense of professional identity.
3. **Visits to other sites /situations:** In almost all cases the students interviewed were removed from their usual working environment to make visits, specifically to broaden their experience. Eraut (2008) quotes a research subject (an Engineer) who emphasises the added value of seeing the whole picture, over and above the formal, office-based procedures relating to a project. What is true of engineering is equally true of construction, as has been discussed elsewhere. The value of this "situational learning" is a strong thread through Gherardi's work (2006).

Column B categorises the student's interactions with others arising out of the above situations

1. **Being supervised:** Eraut finds little evidence of this (perhaps due to his subjects being postgraduates, probably with some prior experience) However, this appears to be a key feature of the placement student's learning process, since all my interviewees referred to their having had and worked for a specific line manager, and to this being of benefit.



**2. Being Mentored OR Coached:** Eraut tended to run these together with the above, finding a less than expected level of formal mentoring (as per “Being Supervised”, above) but more coaching, by which junior staff who, though not appointed to this role, would instruct and assist the new staff member. My own research suggests there are important distinctions and that Mentoring and /or informal coaching are indeed of significance to WBL. This may specifically come to the fore in team or group-work situations, where students are working literally side by side with someone of greater experience than they. Again, Gherardi’s work (2006) supports this.

**3. Shadowing:** Rather less formal than the previous categories (being mentored or coached), this refers to opportunities for students to gain understandings from professionals as they pursue their work, although students have been said to shadow their Mentor also. Eraut claims the same outcome for **visits to other sites**. All of the subjects in my own research suggested the great experiential value of site visits.

Much of the above bears out the suggested value(s) of communities of learning, and so backed by examples from Gherardi (2006) of the unofficial mentoring of the novice by fellow workers, sometimes of differing professions from the student.

Column C suggests learning skills developed/encouraged by the above interactions.

1. **Listening and observing:** The value to the student of these processes, Eraut (2008) suggests, will depend upon what the particular student can grasp. This will depend upon their preparation for specific tasks which prior to embarking upon the placement. My own evidence suggests this is variable between providers.
2. **Asking questions and getting information:** My own findings suggest both encouragement in and an expectation of this approach. Clearly this is seen as a valuable part of the learning process. For his or her questioning to be of maximum value, the student must have some prior classroom-driven knowledge.
3. **Problem solving:** An activity which necessarily involves and fosters learning. Hopefully the energy, enthusiasm and capacity to engage in this will be instilled in the student before they join the workplace. There is a tie-in between this item and the

previous one, given the value which various stakeholder's place on students being of enquiring mind.

4. **Trying things out:** Self-evidently perhaps, the opportunity to experiment, within a safe (supervised) environment, builds confidence in subsequent situations. When combined with reflection, (below) the student will subsequently be able to formulate their own effective strategies.
5. **Reflecting ;** As suggested above, a consequence of "Trying things". The usual requirement of the student for assessment purposes is a reflective diary and report. The reflective habit should be instilled in students before commencing the placement and will prove valuable generally. Through reflecting on their practice students should seek to learn, both from success and from failure, as noted below.
6. **Learning from mistakes;** As Eraut (2008) observes, not just the student's own but also the mistakes of others can prove an opportunity (not always taken up) for learning, and for the revision of strategies. Again, Gherardi (2006) makes a similar observation. This presumes an open atmosphere in which mistakes are admitted and reflected upon, either individually or in groups. A number of interviewees in my study (both employers and students) referred to "sweep up" sessions during which such discussions might take place.
7. **Consolidating, extending and refining skills** It is suggested that this is a particularly important element of early professional training, and hopefully students on placement will aspire to this, whether during the placement or upon return to formal, university-based studies. In the case of the placement student should also include contextualising their classroom learning.

Hitherto I have not commented on **independent study**. In practice, Eraut's (2008) subjects built more on interaction with others (in a community of learning) than through independent study. It may be that independent study (a classroom-related requirement) is inappropriate in a day-to-day work setting, where the student has instant and ready access to help and advice from colleagues. Their recourse to independent study may be confined to any research they must conduct in order to write up their time in employment reflectively. It could be used were their assessment to be extended to matters of a more technical nature.

The above points, or similar may be used as some form of yardstick in agreeing the experiential learning opportunities within each particular placement, and may be referred to in the framework document.

Gherardi (2006:115-117) incidentally, offers a table entitled a situational curriculum. This is more specific to the role of her subject but shares with the above the concept of opportunities for learning.

### **5.9. Making it all work – Overcoming Traditional Barriers**

Generally speaking, the differing stakeholders appear to work effectively together. Whilst they might disagree openly as to the level of communication and co-operation that each had engaged in with the other, each seems to display some understanding for the others' position.

Therefore, perhaps some of the assumptions some academics make about the assessment skills or some employers' view of academics as being rather distant and aloof, may stem from deeper origins than their personal experiences of workplace learning.

In their study Perara and Pearson (2011) demonstrated that many academics regard employers as unhelpful and unaware of educational aims and objectives in most cases, just as many employers appear to perceive most academics as unaware of the real world and the actual requirements of industry as regards training. For example, only 7% of employers were more than "reasonably satisfied" with lecturers' capacity to deliver the (QS Hons) programme. (Perara and Pearson, 2011:34)

These assumptions may be symptomatic of a culture of mutual distrust between differing groupings within the construction sector, an "us and them" mentality. This is something of which the QS, for example, whether academic or practitioner may see themselves to be a part, a manifestation of the adversarial culture referred to in Chapter 1, and further fuelled perhaps by the opposing roles illustrated on figure 1.1.

The above is hardly the stuff of a happy and effective partnership?

Employer engagement is only going to be fully successful if it goes hand in hand with culture change and a change in attitudes .

Added to the above we have a situation, peculiar to the provision of workplace learning opportunities for FT students, in which the employer is in the position of offering a gift –

workplace learning – but receiving little in return, (except perhaps the hope of securing an effective employee at some future date). This contrasts with the situation of an employer sending an existing staff member for education (as a PT student). Here the employer will usually have a financial interest through the payment of fees. The latter have more cause, and might reasonably be expected, to monitor and possibly seek to influence the content and management of programmes with which their employees are associated.

As suggested elsewhere in seeking placements for their FT students, the provider needs the employer more than the employer needs the provider. From this it could be argued that the provider has more to lose through a series of poor placements than have the employers involved, and that the onus should therefore be on the provider to make a particular effort to achieve and maintain effective engagement.

#### **5.10. Conclusion to this chapter**

In this chapter I have brought together my findings. I have reviewed the factors which appear to influence the success of particular work placements, with particular reference to effective employer engagement. This has included not only the mechanics of the placement relationship but also the understandings which each stakeholder holds of their own situation and role.

The key finding is that, notwithstanding the existence of guidelines for the effective operation of FDs and, within them, recommended periods of workplace practice, not all workplace learning is achieved at equal depth, due to differing levels of engagement between stakeholders. This last can be attributed to a combination of factors, chiefly as follows:

- **Differing understandings of the nature, purpose and value of workplace learning within the curriculum and differences in expectations.**
- **Different approaches to the management and assessment of workplace learning by different providers.**
- **Weak and/or inconsistent communication and relationships between the parties.**
- **External factors, peculiar to the current economic climate, beyond the control of any of the stakeholders.**
- **Inconsistencies in accreditation practices which might otherwise impose certain minimum requirements.**

To address the above, suggestions have been made as to appropriate content and management strategies aimed at ensuring an effective period of workplace learning in the majority of cases.

Chapter 6 will isolate the Critical Success Factors which have been derived from this study and show their incorporation within a common Framework.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **6.1. Introduction to this chapter**

In this final chapter I draw together my results in order to meet my final stated objective;

7. To develop a draft framework for the effective collaboration and engagement of all stakeholders, informed by the CSF developed above.

My study has explored the phenomenon of Employer Engagement. This has been conducted within the context of Full Time Foundation Degrees within the Construction sector.

Although students following FT routes form a significant cohort numerically this is an area which has been given little specific attention by previous researchers, who have concentrated instead upon the mechanics of PT provision.

In terms of the interactions between stakeholders, failure to engage effectively (as envisaged by the QAA) appears to be born of differences in understandings, expectations and communication between the key parties (providers and employers), which lead to further failure to engage, and so the cycle continues ... Weaknesses within individual relationships can be magnified further by changes in personnel and by structures and external forces outside of the control of the parties.

There seems to be acceptance by all stakeholders that the placement offers a valuable learning opportunity. But there is a lack of clarity as to what exactly is to be learnt and its value within the curriculum. It is rare for providers to set learning objectives which call for exposure to specific professional skills. Consequently perhaps, assessment is rarely aligned with the actual hands-on experience which the student gains whilst on placement. Rather, students are asked, whatever the length of their placement, to reflect on their experience in generic terms. This last is an exercise carried out, essentially, outside of the workplace itself and seldom draws on the opinion of the employer.

The decline in recent years of the availability of appropriate workplace experience is in itself a problem. There is less WPL out there and there are more students seeking it. This has thrown the above issues into sharper focus. When work was plentiful in the sector

there was some certainty that a FT student sent out on placement would, almost automatically, be exposed to an appropriate range and depth of discipline-related practical experience. It could be taken for granted by all the parties that the placement would provide this. Hence, perhaps, placements and the WPL they appeared to promise were taken for granted, assumptions made as to the learning taking place. The problem with the supply of appropriate experience exposes certain characteristics of the structures surrounding it which, in easier times, may not have been in question.

There is evidence of the above being a feature of some PT programmes, although here one would expect easier adherence to QAA goals, given the long-term association between the employer and the provider. However, in the case of those FT programmes studies it seems almost universally true.

This study has identified the differences referred to above and, through the creation of Critical Success Factors, offers a vehicle for a more satisfactory way forward; one which seeks to address the problems.

Section 6.3, below, collates my findings, expressed as CSF, together with comment on their importance to the relationships within which they must operate.

## **6.2 From Theory to Framework**

As a practitioner researcher involved in the delivery and assessment of WPL in the context of FT programmes I have an interest in, and seek to enhance, the effectiveness of engagement between the various stakeholders, principally that between providers and employers.

Through my literature search I hoped to find details of the demand for and processes of delivery and assessment of WPL in the context of Full Time Foundation Degrees. Evidence relating specifically to FT provision seems very limited. Such a marked gap in the literature suggested value in researching this area. I perceived a need, ultimately, for some form of framework, incorporating guidelines for the effective operation of WBL for FT students..

Existing literature, both that relating to FT provision and also that relating to PT, seems to indicate a genuine desire on the part of all stakeholders to incorporate WPL, but inconsistencies in delivery and assessment such as those noted in section 6.3, below. Underlying these appear to be weak or poor working

relationships in many cases between certain of the stakeholder groups, often born of weak or poor communications between them. Mead's Symbolic Interactionism, with its emphasis on understanding the effect of past relationships upon those in the present appeared relevant to the above. I resolved that if improvements were to be made generally, and some sort of consistent standard arrived at, perhaps via the application of a common framework, then I must examine in some detail the past and current workings of a number of selected programmes. I collected and analysed qualitative data from the various stakeholders connected with these, chiefly through interviews, placing particular emphasis on the mechanics of the interaction between the parties. I explored the nature of the above "mechanics" through the 6 principal lines of enquiry indicated by the research questions set out at the end of my literature review (section 2.8.2.).

Certain positive and the negative characteristics of the above relationships and their workings suggested by the literature are supported by my own research findings. In more extreme cases the negative ones appear to contribute directly towards the success or otherwise of the WPL with which stakeholders are involved. These I have christened Critical Success Factors (CSF) and each is addressed below.

Recommendations based specifically on the CSF and their potential effects are utilised in the formation of the Draft Strategic Framework document (**Appendix F**)

### **6.3. Critical Success Factors**

Both the literature and my own research findings suggest strong support for WPL but both present practices which are inconsistent. Inconsistency begins with definitions and understandings of what is or should be expected. There is inconsistency in what is required by Providers and what can be or is actually offered. Communications surrounding this appear either inconsistent or in some cases totally lacking. There is inconsistency in the assessment of and the value placed on WPL. So many inconsistencies are unacceptable across programmes and work situations contributing towards the same qualification.

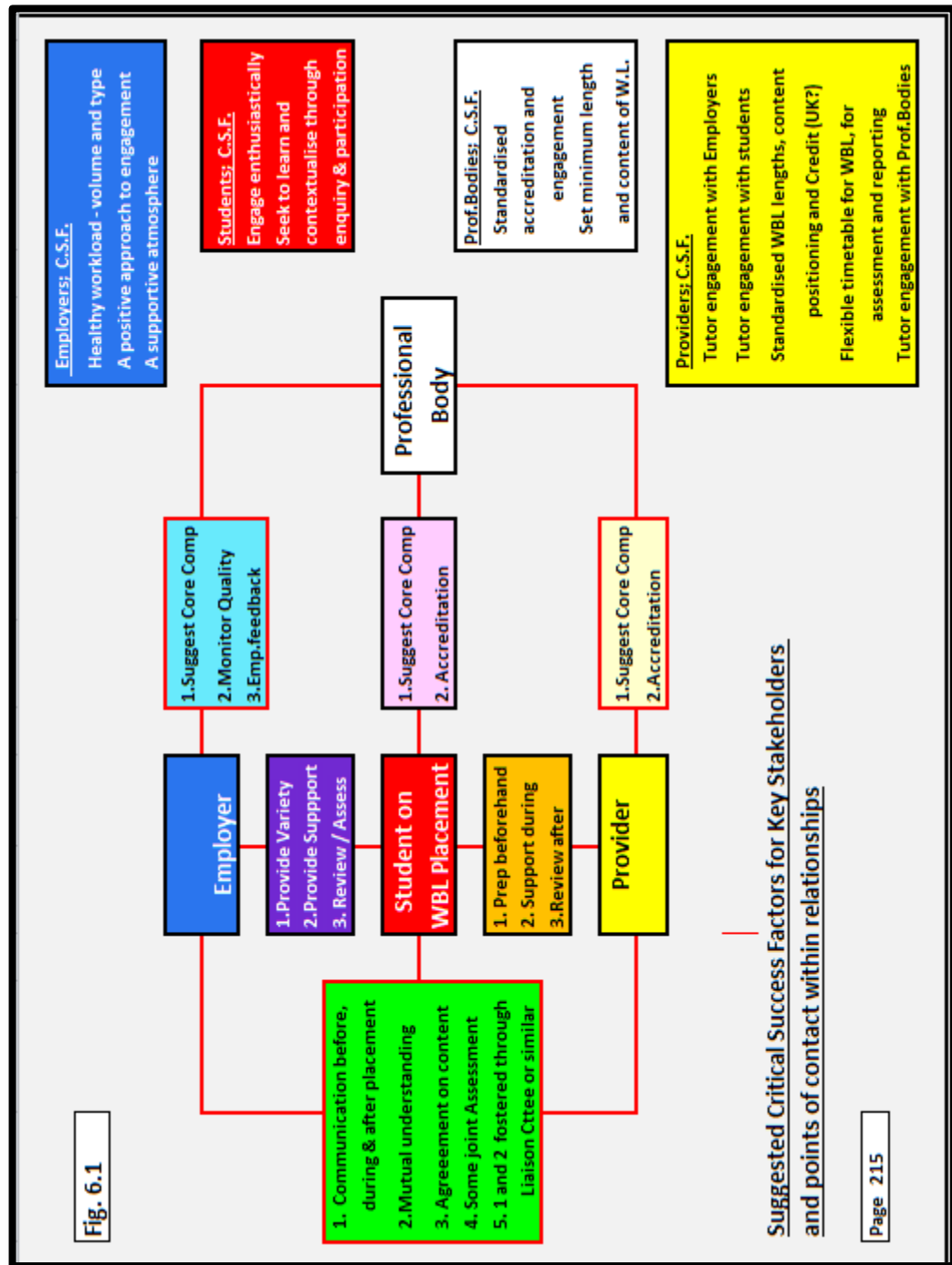
I present, in **Fig.6.1** (overleaf) an overview of the CSF emerging from my study. The principal factors are presented in boxes to the right hand side. The specific constituent



elements within the operation of the CSF are shown in the boxes linking the stakeholders. The colouring employed relates back to that used on the initial suggested CSF in **Fig.2.2**.

The CSF are presented and discussed below in a suggested order of significance.

**Links with elements in the Draft Strategic framework DSF (Appendix F) are given at the end of each section below**



### **6.3.1. C.S.F. Employers**

#### **A healthy workload – volume and type**

This is a prime factor in seeking the best WPL. My findings have throughout have highlighted the concern of all stakeholders about the scarcity of varied and in-depth experience. Workload within the industry, although one of the chief factors, is something over which academics have little control. To gain best value they could clarify the skills they seek of the workplace and to encourage employers to be imaginative with the use they make of such projects as they have available. Perhaps it is in recognition of the academics' lack of control in this area that the majority of programmes appear to set Learning Outcomes which focus on the non-technical, the generic, the "atmosphere" common to most if not all WPL.

Addressed by **DSF (2)**

#### **A positive approach to engagement and relationships**

Particular attitudes held by individuals within each stakeholder group have proved to be of some significance. We hope for positive and constructive attitudes towards engagement but have seen how, for example, an employer's own past experience may colour these as may, for example, the approach adopted by particular providers. The green box linking provider and employer suggests constituent parts of the relationship we seek, all of which have been examined at points within this study. Effective communication is the issue highlighted the most by all parties, both in the literature and throughout my own findings as that which fosters and maintains the best engagement. It is, perhaps, the easiest to understand but most difficult to establish and maintain, for reasons seen in this study.

Addressed by **DSF (1) and (6)**

#### **A Supportive Atmosphere**

A reference principally to provision for students, this manifests itself through the provision of workplace supervisors / mentors. Generally speaking the employers surveyed for this study appear to offer such an atmosphere. Features of this are listed in the purple box linking employers and students. Assessment has proved to be the only problematic element, but this is an issue for providers and employers rather than one between employers and students.

Addressed by **DSF (5) (7) and (8)**

### **6.3.2. C.S.F. Providers;**

#### **Tutor engagement with Employers**

The 5 constituent parts of this relationship have been referred to in 6.2.1. above, under engagement. Evidence and opinion has emerged both from the literature and my own findings suggesting that it is appropriate to expect the provider to be the prime-mover concerning the management of WPL. The provider is best placed, being at the hub and known to all parties, to instigate and maintain contact, set standards and the like. In addition, the providers' need is the greatest, giving them the greatest incentive to make the partnership a success. All the elements listed in the green box have emerged from this study, as concerns of one party or of both, and each has been considered within chapters 4 or 5. As suggested during the study, some element of joint assessment, taking into account the employer's appraisal of the student's workplace learning, is deemed desirable if not essential to the relationship.

Addressed by **DSF (1) (6) (7) and (8)**

#### **Tutor engagement with students**

Evidence has been presented demonstrating that tutors vary in both outlook and commitment. In the best scenarios, from students' perspectives, they perform a supportive role as itemised in the orange box linking provider and student. Most feedback from students, both that in the literature and from my own data suggests that the student expects help in finding a placement and, still regarding themselves as students rather than employees, would welcome more tangible support from tutors for the duration of the placement. Further to the immediate student support which a tutor visit to the workplace this link with the employer is valued by the latter and sought by most. It is a feature which employers themselves cite as contributing to effective engagement.

Addressed by **DSF (6) (10) and (11)**

#### **Standardised WBL lengths , content positioning and Credit**

Concern was expressed by providers and employers alike at the variation between placement lengths and their positioning across the year, sometimes driven by seemingly rigid and unalterable university regulations and procedures. It is suggested that a regime be adopted which allows best-length, best-placed periods of experience. Based on the evidence collected certain suggestions have been made within chapter 5.

Addressed by **DSF (4 )**

### **Flexible Timetable for WBL, assessment and reporting**

A continuation of the above, but introducing the further issue of an appropriate assessment regime, inclusive of the employer as much as possible and conducted to suit both parties concerned rather than driven by the university.

Addressed by **DSF (4)**

### **Tutor engagement with Professional Bodies**

This was listed after the above as its positioning could be said to be ambiguous. To some, the relationship is of prime concern, born of desire for accredited status, and this feature should be first of the list. However, accreditation is not universal and the influence of Professional Bodies concerned is not as great as it might be. It must be said that those tutors who align themselves personally with their own Professional Body appeared better equipped, through contacts and so forth to enhance the student experience. The cream coloured box linking Professional Bodies with providers suggests the formers' current prime contact with providers is as an accrediting body and that, in addition, they may supply (but perhaps within the latter, rather than separately) guidance on certain core competencies. Training and practice in some of these last may be available within the workplace, and tutors do well to observe these.

Addressed by **DSF (9)**

### **6.3.3. C.S.F. Students**

#### **Engage enthusiastically**

Although the student is seen as the recipient and beneficiary of WPL rather than its instigator, it is important that students take seriously this element of their curriculum. The enthusiasm for work experience is almost universal amongst all surveyed. Engendering and maintaining such enthusiasm may be of particular relevance if placements are to be positioned during vacation periods, as suggested in chapter 5.

Addressed by **DSF (12)**

#### **Seek to learn and contextualise through enquiry and participation**

A number of interviewees, both academics and employers, stressed the value to the student, and to the maintenance of valuable relationships, of students approaching all aspects of the learning process with an energetic spirit of enquiry. Hopefully they will seek

associations between everything they encounter in the workplace and aspects of their formal classroom studies.

Addressed by **DSF (12)**

#### **6.3.4. C.S.F. Professional Bodies**

##### **Standardised accreditation and engagement**

A threat, perhaps, to the assumption that all stakeholders can be tied to one another and, as a result, will operate in a consistent manner, is the gaps which exist in accreditation. Perhaps all FDs could be obliged to obtain accreditation as a strict condition of funding. With all providers within the same stable the setting, monitoring and imposition of standards (which I suggest would be of advantage to all) would be much easier. One consequence of universal accreditation could be a common strategy for engagement between the Professional Bodies and providers, and which might also encompass relations with employers. At present, the Professional Bodies relationships with providers and students are largely restricted to the features shown in the cream and pink boxes. The light blue box raises the possibility of more feedback from employers. At present this is principally evident only where employers act as External Examiners, appointed by the Professional Body and report back to it as required.

Addressed by **DSF (9)**

##### **Set minimum length and content of WBL**

This would be a new departure for the Professional Bodies who, evidence suggests, make no firm recommendation on either of these matters. Duration of the work placement is said to be of concern to them, but no period is stipulated. Similarly, no definitive content exists. There may be logistical problems (provider-related) with setting timescales, philosophical problems and practical problems (workload-related) regarding content, but these could at least be constructively addressed from a common standpoint were accreditation to be a universal requirement.

Addressed by **DSF (9)**

#### **6.4 The Operation of CSF**

It will be seen that most of the CSF are interconnected and in some cases inter-dependant. A constant theme running through my findings has been the essential two-way process that constitutes “engagement”. As will be seen below, the prime drivers of

engagement between the parties would seem to be effective maintenance of relationships and effective communications.

### **6.5. Implications for Practice**

As noted elsewhere, much documentation has been issued offering guidelines on procedures for the establishment and maintenance of effective working relationships between stakeholders, mostly in the area of PT Degrees. Studies have been conducted and reports written demonstrating the disparate nature of provision, notwithstanding the overarching recommendations of the QAA. My own findings have mirrored these, this time in the field of FT programmes.

In my CSF, above, I have identified areas where existing understandings might be addressed and barriers lessened or overcome altogether via better communication and procedures (such as standard University timescales).

The only stakeholders common across the sector, known to all others and to whose requirements they might be made subject are the Professional Bodies. As has been seen, the latter have relinquished their former hold to varying extents. If a common approach to content and conduct of WPL is thought desirable and is to be actively sought then they provide clearly defined vehicles through which this could be engineered. Professional Bodies could set a “gold standard” which must be met as a condition of any bid for Accreditation. It follows from this that if all programmes were required to be accredited, as is pretty much the case with Hons. Degrees, then such standards as are considered appropriate could be achieved. It appears that at present a fairly strict requirement for adherence to certain standards is expressed and enforced out by only one of the Professional Bodies whose policies and practices were reviewed.

### **6.6 Limitations to my study**

At one level my study achieved what it set out to do, that is in identifying providers and those associated with them through whom it would be possible to examine employer engagement. I feel that the six programmes chosen and studied acted as faithful mirrors of the different situations and practices in operation across the spectrum that exists, as suggested to me by the literature.

Where it most falls short of what I originally hoped and planned for is in its sample size. I should like to have surveyed and interviewed a larger number of employers and former students from each of my chosen provider institutions. I was prevented in this principally by the Data Protection Act, by which representatives of all of my providers were prohibited from disclosing contact details for either employers or students. This had two consequences. The first was that since I was not able to proceed without the co-operation of academic staff and others at the provider institutions I was at the mercy of their time scales and priorities rather than my own. In some cases the momentum was lost or at least “dented” along the way. The second is that all my dealings in choosing employer or student representatives had to be through the medium of these staff members.

It is fair to question whether the data which I received from subjects chosen by those who, in part, they were to critique can be guaranteed to be reasonably objective. From the data which I did receive I am led to hope, and believe, that it is.

## **6.7 Areas for further investigation**

My own study has examined the situation surrounding WPL rather than its content. Content has been shown to be important, and three elements of my findings suggest the need/opportunity for research related to content.

The first concerns the understanding held by each of the three key stakeholders, employers, providers and Professional Bodies as to the nature and appropriate extent of any learning required of the period of WBL by each party. In this area the current study has shown more confusion than certainty. As in other matters, my examination of the required Learning Outcomes of my six chosen providers has shown inconsistency.

The second, which might be of direct significance to the first, might be scientific, primarily quantitative, research into the relationship between the time spent on workplace experience and the nature of the experience gained. This was not attempted as a part of the current research although its outcome could have been of assistance as one measure of effective engagement.

The final issue is the extent to which Professional Bodies would in fact be willing and able to re-engage with higher education, returning to the levels of ten years ago and more. Such engagement might include stipulation of very precise requirements for WPL, and for



relationships between providers and employers, and a bar to membership for all but those students from an accredited programme.

## **6.8. Conclusion to this Chapter and to the study**

My study has been conducted as Practitioner Research. It was born of a personal concern to maximise the effectiveness of links between academic providers and industry. I did not perceive this as an issue unique to my own practice but one which must face all those on both sides of the academic /industry fence, all who seek to provide students with meaningful programmes of study. Literature suggested perceived “problems” with employer engagement. I set out to explore and address these.

Few things are as easy as they seem at first sight. In line with this, pre-conceptions, tending to be lightweight interpretations of what seems to be out there, often miss the plot: they fail to capture the full picture.

I began my study believing there might be one chief culprit, and perhaps one simple solution to the problem. I believed employer engagement to mean simply the degree to which employers themselves engaged with educators and others. Based upon anecdotal evidence, I mentally labelled this as poor. My proposed solution at that stage was a simple set of guidelines for employers. I felt that, given these, all parties could work well together and all students be educated to an equal standard.

On all counts research has proven my preconceptions wrong or at least only half truths: also proving my solution wrong, or at least less easy to achieve than I had imagined. In answer to my research question (1.5), workplace learning does not just occur and will not always be an automatic success without effective engagement between the parties.

In cases of ineffective engagement I have discovered that employers, as a body, are not all to blame. Providers are not all to blame. Weaknesses in a particular partnership may arise from weaknesses on either side. These may be failures of communication (the strongest force), failures in understanding or capacity to perform in the manner required, and sometimes, indeed, weakness of commitment. All this is overshadowed by and can be affected by the outside pressures of recessionary times, whether within industry or the education sector. No simple solution emerges, although a model is offered which seeks to identify and address the chief concerns of each of the main stakeholder groups.

My own contribution to knowledge has been an examination of the delivery and assessment of workplace learning within FT provision of Foundation Degrees in particular.

I have looked at the factors, both internal and external, from the standpoint of all interested stakeholders, which surround and influence effective employer engagement, an essential element of any vocational degree provision. Disclosure and examination of these factors, some peculiar to the construction sector, should usefully inform other providers and other stakeholders in any construction-related programme where workplace learning is considered an essential element. In the context of traditional sandwich degrees, these issues, and my search for solutions, may outlive those foundation degrees which formed the basis for my study, and others, which in many HE institutions are cutting provision even as I write. (Hansard. 2004; HEFCE, 2014:4)

I feel that my work has investigated the importance of effective employer engagement, as required my principle research question (p.17) and has produced evidence of its value, together with a vehicle for maximising this . However, perhaps my own work and that of certain others has been steered too narrowly by the rather exclusive *ideal* of “**employer engagement**” first championed by the early exponents of Foundation Degrees. Perhaps in future we should start with the more all-inclusive *realities* of “**stakeholder engagement**” and see where that study takes us... ?

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## **Key Points of Case Studies Not Discussed in the Text**

### **Relating to Part Time Foundation Degrees**

1. *A Success Story and Case Study of Foundation Degree development at Kingston University .. PT* (2004). Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 1. p.7. **Key Features;** Illustrates close collaboration between a provider and a specific industry sector, aero engine maintenance and repair. A marriage between academic and industry qualification, which called for maximum collaboration and communication between the parties. Driven by very specific client requirements.
2. *Hospitality Management at Thames Valley University* (2004) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 1. p 10. **Key Features;** The embedding and stressing of the importance of Personal Development Scheme within the programme.
3. *Working with Employer s; Making Partnership a Reality* (2004) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 1. p.13. **Key Features;** Designed to meet specific needs of Employer s within the sector, and with the underlying assumption that this will be an ongoing long-term relationship. Adaptation of University key Dates to accommodate student/employer needs.
4. *Foundation Degrees – All sewn up – apparel, footwear and textiles subjects.* (2005) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 4. p.27. **Key Features;** Targeted at sub-FD qualified personnel already working within the industry, seeking to extend and formalise a career ladder. Aligned with Skills Council initiatives. Flexible learning a priority.
5. *Case Study – Flexible Delivery. Health and Medical Sciences: Paramedic PathwaySt. George’s Hospital Medical School and Kingston University.* (2005) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 4. pp. 22-24 **Key Features;** specific fast track professional qualification route. Flexible learning refers to part timer study plus distance learning elements.
6. *Bridgewater College’s strategy for employer engagement – a joined up approach?* (2006) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 8. P.12. Claims close and on-going relationship with a large number of local employer s. Specially appointed liaison staff at the College establish and maintain this. **Key Features;** Commitment to Employer engagement requires commitment to continuous quality improvement. Employer feedback sought throughout a training period.
7. *Developing a building services engineering Foundation degree framework.* (2008) Reported in Fdf Issue 15. p.33. **Key Features;** Specific sector. Points up the particular need in this case to ensure that teaching meets the rapidly changing requirements of the industry . ( New legislation and regulations). Suggests here that the FD may be a training vehicle for existing students but holders of non cognate degrees. Awareness of the FD is low in this sectors, as in others.

8. *Employer -College Partnerships: Developing a Materials Foundation Degree. A Case study from the UK Centre for Materials Education* By Ian Taylor AN Adam Mannis for HEFCE/HEA and Bradford College (2008) **Key features** ; Project work is generated through/from genuine problems facing the student's company. "The Project must build upon college studies but must also translate learning beyond the academic world into the industrial context." Very much aimed at enhancement of a pre-existing workforce.
9. *Employer-led Foundation Degrees in Construction Management: building upon practice* - a conference based at Salford University, four case studies.(2009) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 17. pp.23-24. **Key Features**; Part time . delivery via classroom teaching as well as ICT. Note that employers did not favour ICT stand-alone distance learning. Recognised need to tailor to local need and two of the programmes had special option modules accordingly. A ten point list is given regarding possible marketing strategies/content.
10. *Learning from Employer Engagement ; Royal Mail and University of Huddersfield* (2009) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 18. p.22.-25. **Key Features**; Purpose-designed programme for existing Post Office managers. Required fast-track validation process (June of the start year) following identification of need, to start same September. Flexible delivery entailed block teaching , its point of delivery alternating between the University and the Post Office Training Centre.
11. *Building success by degrees; Jewson (builder's merchants) and Birmingham City University* (2010) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 20. pp.36-37. **Key Features**; Derek Longhurst (Fdf) stresses the importance of such an initiative (in staff development terms), particularly in recessionary times.

### **Relating to Full Time or Block release Foundation Degrees**

1. *Foundations For the Future – Edmund Nuttall (Construction) Ltd* (2004) reported in Fdf Journal Issue 3. p.12. Key Features; Uses block release over two years; One Semester in classroom , two on site (WBL), then 2 on site (WBL), one in classroom. Block release is said to make it easier for students to concentrate upon the academic content.
2. *Work Placement, work related, in the work place , simulated work ... what constitutes a valid interpretation of work experience for Foundation Degrees ?* A case study at City College Manchester FT (2004) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 3. P.28. **Key Features**; Recognises the difficulties of too rigid a requirement for "placements" . Incorporates looser structure of work experience in the (Design) industry. Uses employer s to give series of lectures and workshops .
3. *The FD in action at Salisbury Cathedral FT Bournemouth University* (2005) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 7. p.4. Key Features; Sector –specific.. Full time but designed with Employer's needs in mind. Speaks of the promise of relevant employees if Employers engage. The Employer has a tradition of engagement with

4. the Provider. Employer stresses need of “good craft skills” point is made specifically re willingness of existing staff to pass on their skills and knowledge to placement students etc.

### **Relating to mixed or multi-mode delivery Foundation degrees**

1. *Employer partnerships: working both ways. FdA in Business Management at Richard Huish College* (2008) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 14. p25. **Key Features;** Employer engagement/collaboration exposed Employers’ reservations re students’ basic interpersonal skills. (OK with computer screens, less good with colleagues and customers) In response personal skills development has been integrated throughout the Foundation Degree .
2. *Foundation Degree in Public Service Management* (2004) A research exercise. Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 1. p.15. **Key Features;** Designed for a range of employers; public service, local government, charities and voluntary organisations. **Makes specific reference to difficulties with engaging employers.. beyond that of paying the student’s fees.**
3. *The Railway Engineering Foundation degree, at Sheffield Hallam.* (2005) Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 4. p.15. **Key Features;** Directly related to the needs of the Railway Industry. Suggestion of added security of the sustainability of the degree through its association with major (infrastructure) industry. Employer vets applicants for the Full Time programme as there will be future employees. Delivered in seven month (academic) and five month (WBL) blocks.
4. *Foundation degrees in Construction Operations Management.* (A national framework for providers) a conference based at Salford. Reported in Fdf Journal Issue 22. Pp.43-45. **Key features;** Focusses on the need for a Framework which takes account of employer s requirements n(including specialist interests at regional level) as well as recognising professional body requirements.
5. *Case study: London South Bank University and EDF Energy (Networks Branch); the Fd in power distribution..* A report for the Higher Education Authority (Engineering Subject Centre) **Key Feature(s)** :A collaborative venture aimed primarily at mature male or female students through full or part time modes. The expectation is that participating full time students will progress onto a full B.Eng. Hons degree and upon successful completion of this will go on to full time employment. “A programme designed to integrate work-based learning into many units across the curriculum “ There were some uncertainties as to whether the client could supply enough students to make the “tailor-made “ programme commercially viable. Subsequent reviews have heralded the programme a great success, as “exciting and innovative” which was “ a model for future developments”

6. *Case Studies of High quality; University of Central Lancashire, Foundation Degrees for Construction.* A Report to CITC Construction Skills, Constructing Excellence, Construction Industry Council, and CEBE. **Key Features;** Principle features were the development of a core work based element designed to reflect professional body core working competencies and a range of course modules which incorporate negotiated portfolio assessments. Also notable for the need to resolve various issues including restricted industry support and the need to support full timers, ensuring the provision of effective work based learning.



## **APPENDIX A.**

### **Comparison of key duties between Clients and Contractors QS**

	<b>Client's / Private QS</b>	<b>Contractor's QS</b>
<b>Pre contract duties</b>	Produce Cost Plans and Prepare Contract Documents in Office	May be involved in preparation of subcontract documents, perhaps some pricing tenders .
<b>Post contract duties</b>	Agree valuations with the Contractors' QS Monitor and report costs to the Client as the work proceeds	Agree valuations with the Client's QS . Monitor income against expenditure, prepare and submit reports
<b>Place of work</b>	Predominately in office surroundings	Predominantly on site – may have periods working in Head Office
<b>Contact with site</b>	Occasional – to check materials and progress of the Works	Can be constant – following up sub-contractors', suppliers' and own profit and loss
<b>Contact with others</b>	Possibly Client – unlikely during training. Colleagues and occasionally Contractor's QS, for valuation purposes	Colleagues on site and at Head Office. Sub-contractors and suppliers
<b>Level of responsibility</b>	Traditionally, little during training – tasks allotted and performed under quite strict supervision	Can be quite significant - for responsibility a site will be given to suitable person before or soon after qualification

## APPENDIX B

### **Suggested problems with assessment of WBL – from Williams, A. Thurairaja, N. (2009) – a response ..**

*A. Real work may include materials which cannot be reproduced electronically*

After what seems much agonising over this, the authors conclude (thankfully, I feel ) that the University may have to accept real work.

*B. The work usually has a word limit ..*

So.. where does/should the work or assessment end ?

The authors next suggest asking students for “a resume or critical analysis drawn from the real work.”. thus making for an additional work – work which is, once more, no longer the real thing surely ?

*C. Consider teamwork ... this may be natural in the workplace but the university may suspect students of plagiarism*

I feel that the authors, in concentrating on plagiarism are missing a more important point; namely, that as a general rule the University ( and many students themselves, from my own experience) may prefer an individual rather than a group mark – where the mark awarded the individual may be adversely affected by the efforts of group members. In my own situation I have been aware of many instances of student feedback in which they complain at the danger (as they perceive it) of their own marks being pulled down by poor and under-performing students within their group. Serious thought must be given in such circumstances perhaps to how the University can be sure that a mark is given at the end of all this which is truly representative of the achievements of the individual student.

*D. There is a danger of students submitting (perhaps inadvertently) materials of a confidential nature*

On this occasion, the response to this is reasonable ... caution the students as to what they use and share.. accept that the best work may of necessity be real and warn the students to be careful in what they say to one another – do not disclose outside the study setting

*E. Consider quality of documentation – it is suggested that “live” documents (materials actually produced in the work situation) may be less perfectly presented than those prepared for a simulated exercise. Students may wish to submit the real thing.*

It is suggested here that the academics involved accept there may be differences and set clear criteria re the work-based materials, making allowances for the differences between the real work and the simulated....

- F. Consider the case where the real work presented for assessment fails to cover all points required by University and/or is sub-standard, but is evidence of thought processes and skills way above what is required

This is put forward by the authors as a real challenge for grading purposes (as in similar college based situations too ) .. They merely suggest discussion with other tutors, and that advice should regularly be sought from External Examiners. To me this seems a weak response to the problem. This calls for serious reflection ( by the academics ! ) as to what they are in the business of assessing, and for whom ? Is it another case of too much intrusion by academic measures into the world of work where capabilities could be judged by workplace practitioners ?

- G. *A Student fails the assessment but has provided work which has achieved the standard required within the workplace*

Here the authors stress that assessment for the University is against the learning outcomes of the module and not the ability of the student. The general tone of the article so far suggests this would be the expected answer. However, it perhaps calls for a debate as to which is of more importance to the world in which the student works.? . The response perhaps will be governed by the degree to which the employer has developed the programme and, thus, what **they** would wish to see in successful students .

- H. *An organisation has many students and all are needed for a sudden new task not related to that on which they were to be assessed.*

The same could be said for an individual in an individual firm surely ? ... c.f. with the keeping back of students from college so that they can finish a valuation etc.

The authors consider awarding extension of time to one or all.. Their worst suggestion, in my opinion, is to immediately replace the real exercise with a simulated exercise. Their only good suggestion, I feel, is that there should be consultation between tutors and employers to address the eventuality before it happens and consider strategy .. whatever that will be ?)

A section follows in which suggestions are made as to making university's communications with employers effective.. Comment is made on the tendency of academics to use ten words where one might do ..

A Set of employer-generated issues are discussed.. Some are interesting / useful.. Some are rather simplistic perhaps, such as “they are on site not in a classroom – How can they get their assignment in ?” There is an attempt at discussing the situation where Academia stipulates pass mark as 40% whereas employer wants one of 55% ... The expert answer here appears to be, explain to the employer but, essentially, be inflexible ! A more pragmatic approach surely would be for the University to re-grade their work by a scale, whereby a 40% awarded by the university was presented to the student and his/her employer as 55% , and so on.

Interestingly, set against this intransigence re the expressing and reporting of marks is the suggestion that all written documents should make clear that the University understands that business imperatives must take priority. How well does this lie with the education vs. Training aspects of all that has gone before, and the assertion elsewhere that the standards used to judge work based learning should be essentially academic ones?

## **APPENDIX C.1 .. LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS AND CONSENT FORMS**

### **LETTER TO PROVIDERS**

#### **First stage – to all Providers**



Dear **Name from database**

#### **Research into Foundation Employer Engagement with Foundation Degrees Provision in the Construction Sector**

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in the above research, which I am conducting in connection with my Doctorate in Educational Studies (Ed D).

I propose to do a comparative study, across a number of providers of both full time and part time programmes, assessing the nature and extent employer engagement with the same. The Construction Industry is currently suffering from a recession and I am interested to examine the extent to which employers in this sector are able to maintain effective involvement in educational provision within Foundation Degrees and the effect this may or may not have upon the latter.

**Stage One** – an Email questionnaire for the collection of basic data relating to following;

- Demographics – Number, age and gender of students on Full Time and Part Time modes, each year
- Background – Outline programme content, detailing length, type and typical locations of the Work Based Learning content (WBL) , if any.
- Module descriptors, or the like, for the WBL detailing type and length(s) of experience and any assessment thereof
- The nature of your links with Industry and the extent and nature of their involvement in Module development, delivery and assessment, and including representation at review processes and the like
- The nature of any links that you have with Professional Bodies associated with the accreditation of your programmes

**Stage Two** – (selected Institutions only) - a telephone interview, with your consent, in which I should like to discuss and record your opinions on the following

- The effectiveness of WBL as a learning medium within your Programme(s)
- The effectiveness of your links and working relationship with the Industry
- Your assessment of any problems/ issues with the above
- The effectiveness of your links and working relationship with Professional Bodies
- Any other issues you may wish to raise

I appreciate the potentially sensitive nature of information which I am seeking in both stages One and Two, above and can assure you that any data or opinions which you or any of your colleagues may provide will be treated in strictest confidence , and anonymised where used in my Thesis. Where intending to use any part(s) of interview material I shall send these for your approval beforehand.

I hope very much that you and/or colleagues will agree to help me in this. If so, I should be grateful if you would give me a contact address for future correspondence, both to collect the Stage One Data and, should it come to this, to arrange an interview with yourself and/or others.

Each stage of my research is subject to approval by the University Ethics Committee and so, should we proceed with either of the above, I would provide formal consent forms for you to sign, confirming your agreements to confidentiality, subsequent use of materials and the like.

I look forward to hearing from you.,

Yours sincerely

J.S.D.Pearson BSc (Quantity Surveying), LLB. M.Ed. FRICS  
 Subject Director, Quantity Surveying  
 School of the Built Environment  
 Northumbria University

## **Second stage - to Case Study subjects only**



2<sup>nd</sup> November 2011

Dear **Name from database**

### **Research into Employer Engagement with Foundation Degrees Provision in the Construction Sector - Phase 2**

Firstly, may I take this opportunity to thank you for the help which you have given me to date with my research.

I found the data which you sent me of particular interest and I am writing now to ask if you would be willing to participate in the second, more detailed phase. This would consist of the following;

- 1) an interview between myself and yourself or an appointed colleague, (at a time to suit yourselves) to explore in more detail your relationship with Employer s associated with your programme. Ideally I should like to conduct this with you in person, though a telephone interview may prove the only practical way.

As detailed previously, I should now be seeking to address the following issues;

- The effectiveness of WBL as a learning medium within your Programme(s)
  - The effectiveness of your links and working relationship with the Industry
  - Your assessment of any problems/ issues with the above
  - The effectiveness of your links and working relationship with Professional Bodies
  - Any other issues you may wish to raise
- 2) supply by yourselves, please, of contact details for Employer bodies with whom you work/have worked in connection with your Foundation Degree(s), in order that I may issue them with questionnaires and possibly interview a sample of them.
  - 3) supply by yourselves, please, of contact details for past student s from your Foundation Degree(s) , this being to facilitate initial research and possible follow-up as per (2) above.
  - 4) Supply by yourselves, please of an electronic (or hard) copy of the Module Descriptor of your Work Based Learning Module

I appreciate that in requesting disclosure of the contact details referred to in points (2) and (3) above may I risk putting you in breach of the Freedom of Information Act. If this were so, I wonder if it would be possible instead for you to issue an Email to these parties, which I should prepare for the purpose, inviting participation from those concerned ?

All other safeguards as regards ethical approval of my research and assurances regarding confidentiality in respect of any data collected apply just as before.

If you are willing and able to take part in the second phase of my work, as described above, please could you let me know, so that we can discuss the details of the way forward.

Please note that you have the right to withdraw from this research at any time should you wish to.

I look forward to hearing from you.,

Yours sincerely

John Pearson ( a signed original of this letter will be sent to you for your records)

J.S.D.Pearson BSc (Quantity Surveying), LLB. M.Ed. FRICS  
Director of Learning and Teaching  
Department of Property and Surveying  
School of the Built Environment  
Northumbria University



## APPENDIX C.2 LETTER TO EMPLOYERS



November 2011

Dear **Name from database**

### **Research into Employer Engagement with Foundation Degrees Provision in the Construction Sector**

I was supplied with your contact details by **(enter University in question)** some of whose FD students I understand are your employees and/ or persons to whom you have offered periods of work experience recently.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in the above research, which I am conducting in connection with my Doctorate in Educational Studies (Ed. D) at the University of Northumbria. The provisional title of my Thesis is as follows;

“Development of a strategic framework for stakeholder collaboration and engagement in Quantity Surveying and other Construction related Foundation Degree programmes, with particular reference to effective employer involvement”

I propose to do a comparative study, across a number of Employer s associated with providers of both full time and part time programmes, assessing the nature and extent Employer engagement with the same. The Construction Industry is currently suffering from a recession and I am interested to examine the extent to which Employer s in this sector are able to maintain effective involvement in educational provision within Foundation Degrees and the effect this may or may not have upon the latter.

**Stage One** – an Email questionnaire for the collection of basic data relating to following;

Demographics – Number, age and gender of students employed / given work place experience .

Background – Outline typical nature of work experience, level of responsibility, length, type and typical locations of the Work Based Learning content (WBL) .

The nature of your links with the University and the extent and nature of your involvement in Module development, delivery and assessment, including representation at review processes and the like

The nature and extent of your own internal provisions for the training, supervision and assessment of those undertaking formal study on the Foundation Degree. .

The nature of any links that you have with Professional Bodies associated with the accreditation of the above programmes.

**Stage Two** – (selected Institutions only, a sample chosen based on the above ) a telephone interview, with your consent, in which I should like to discuss and record your opinions on the following

- The effectiveness of WBL as a learning medium within your workplace
- The effectiveness of your links and working relationship with the University
- Your assessment of any problems/ issues with the above, including your own provisions for the training, supervision and assessment of those undertaking formal study on the Foundation Degree. .
- The effectiveness of your links and working relationship with Professional Bodies
- Any other issues you may wish to raise

I can assure you that any data or opinions which you or any of your colleagues may provide will be treated in strictest confidence , and anonymised where used in my Thesis or elsewhere. Where intending to use any part(s) of interview material I shall send these for your approval beforehand.

I hope very much that you and/or colleagues will agree to help me in this. If so, I should be grateful if you would give me a contact address for future correspondence, both to collect the Stage One Data and, should it come to this, to arrange an interview with yourself and/or others.

Each stage of my research is subject to approval by the University Ethics Committee and so, should we proceed with either of the above, I would provide formal consent forms for you to sign, confirming your agreements to confidentiality, subsequent use of materials and the like.

Please note that you have the right to withdraw from this research at any time should you wish to.

I look forward to hearing from you.,

Yours sincerely

J.S.D.Pearson BSc (Quantity Surveying), LLB. M.Ed. FRICS  
Director of Learning and Teaching  
Department of Property and Surveying  
School of the Built Environment  
Northumbria University

### **APPENDIX C.3. LETTER TO STUDENT S / PAST STUDENTS**



November  
2011

Dear **Name from database**

#### **Research into Employer Engagement with Foundation Degrees Provision in the Construction Sector**

I was supplied with your contact details by **(enter University in question)** where I understand that you are engaged / student d from study on the **( title of award from data base )** ..

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in the above research, which I am conducting in connection with my Doctorate in Educational Studies (Ed. D) at the University of Northumbria. The provisional title of my Thesis is as follows;

“Development of a strategic framework for stakeholder collaboration and engagement in Quantity Surveying and other Construction related Foundation Degree programmes, with particular reference to effective employer involvement”

I propose to do a comparative study, across a number of current and past Students of both full time and part time programmes, to gain your perceptions of the nature and value of the Work Based Learning (WBL) component on your Foundation Degree. The Construction Industry is currently suffering from a recession and I am interested to examine the extent to which employers in this sector are able to maintain effective involvement in educational provision within Foundation Degrees and the effect this may or may not have upon the latter.

**Stage One** – an Email questionnaire for the collection of basic data relating to following;

- Demographics – Age and gender of students on Full Time and Part Time modes, each year
- The nature of your links with Industry – the length and character of your employment / work placement.
- The nature of your employer’s involvement with any delivery and assessment by your employer of any materials relating to your academic studies.

**Stage Two** – (selected students/ student s only, a sample chosen based on the above ) - a focus group meeting, with your consent, in which I should like to discuss and record your opinions on the following

- The effectiveness of WBL generally as a learning medium within academic programmes.
- The strength of the relationship between your work place experience / studies and your formal academic studies .
- The processes for your training and any assessment conducted by your Employer
- Your assessment of any problems/ issues with the above
- Any other issues you may wish to raise

I can assure you that any data or opinions which you may provide will be treated in strictest confidence , and anonymised where used in my Thesis or elsewhere. Where intending to use any part(s) of interview material I shall send these for your approval beforehand.

I hope very much that you will agree to help me in this. If so, please confirm that the address which I have used is an appropriate one for future correspondence or suggest a preferred alternative and I shall contact you again in the near future with the Stage One Questionnaire. Depending on the results I obtain from my Stage One enquiries generally I may wish to contact you further regarding the possibility of your being involved in a Focus Group / Interview to pursue matters in more detail .

Each stage of my research is subject to approval by the University Ethics Committee and so, should we proceed with either of the above, I would provide formal consent forms for you to sign, confirming your agreements to confidentiality, subsequent use of materials and the like.

Please note that you have the right to withdraw from this research at any time should you wish to.

I look forward to hearing from you.,

Yours sincerely

J.S.D.Pearson BSc (Quantity Surveying), LLB. M.Ed. FRICS  
Director of Learning and Teaching  
Department of Property and Surveying  
School of the Built Environment  
Northumbria University

## **APPENDIX D.1 Questionnaires to Providers**

### **QUESTIONNAIRES TO PROVIDERS**

#### **Foundation Degree (FD) Provision**

#### **Foundation Degrees in Construction and Quantity Surveying**

##### **SECTION ONE - General information**

for  
coded ref.

1	Name of Academic Institution		
2	Name of person completing this questionnaire		
3	Post held		
4	Titles of current Foundation Degree Programmes in Construction or Quantity Surveying related subjects		

##### **Approximate Current Total Student Numbers**

	Programme title	Full Time	Full Time	Part Time
a.				
b.				
c.				
d.				

##### **SECTION TWO - Programme Details**

5	The approximate number of Employer organisations funding/ sending	
	Part Time Students during 2010 - 2011	
	Practice	Private
	Authority	Local

Other

6

The approximate number of Employer organisations providing Work Placements for Full Time Students during 2010 - 2011

Private Practice

Local Authority

Contracting

Other

7

The minimum period of work place experience expected of each Full Time Student across ALL years of the programme - in DAYS

a.

b.

c.

d.

8

The Progression rate (%) of successful FD Students from the above programmes onto Hons degrees in Construction / Quantity Surveying related subjects during the latest year of completed records

At your institution

FT

a.

b.

c.

d.

%

%

%

%

PT

%

%

%

%

At another Institution

FT

a.

b.

c.

d.

%

%

%

%

PT

%

%

%

%

### SECTION THREE - Involvement with Employer s

At Development stage

9

To what extent were Employer organisations involved  
at the inception of the above programmes ? (On a scale of 1 - 5)

Not at all

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

 Fully

10

If involved, what types of involvement was this ? Please tick all which apply

General Consultation

Course Content

Delivery

Assessment

Provision of learning materials

Other


If "Other" please specify


**Current involvement**

11

To what extent do Employer s actively contribute to ongoing programme  
delivery and/or assessment ? (On a scale of 1 - 5)

Not at all

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

 Fully

Contin'd .....

12

Do they contribute to assessment by ;

Providing source materials for formal  
workplace assessment ?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Taking part in formal workplace  
assessment of Student  
work ?

Yes

☐

No

☐

(i.e. Marking / judging Student work)

13

In what other ways are employers involved with your Institution ?.


14

What level of Employer involvement do you actually have? (On a scale of 0 - 5 )

None	0	1	2	3	4	5	High
------	---	---	---	---	---	---	------

In your opinion :

...

15

 What level of Employer involvement with your programmes would you say was appropriate generally ? (On a scale of 0 - 5 )

None	0	1	2	3	4	5	High
------	---	---	---	---	---	---	------

16

 How would you rate the quality of any Employer involvement which you do receive ? ( On a scale of 1 - 5 )

Poor	1	2	3	4	5	Very good
------	---	---	---	---	---	-----------

17

 How necessary would you say that a period of workplace learning is to a Foundation Degree ? ( On a scale of 0 - 5 )

Not at all	0	1	2	3	4	5	Very
------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	------

Thank you for your assistance with the above

 Please return your completed questionnaire to me at  
[john.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:john.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk)

 Would you agree to take part in an interview  
 in connection with the above at some future

Yes

☐

No

☐

date if invited ?



## APPENDIX D.2 Questionnaires To Employer s

### QUESTIONNAIRES TO EMPLOYER S

#### Foundation Degree (FD) Provision Foundation Degrees in Construction and Quantity Surveying

##### SECTION ONE - General information

for  
coded ref.

1 Name of Organisation

2 Name of person completing this questionnaire

3 Post held

Type of Organisation

Private Practice

Contracting organistaion

Local Authority

Other

If "Other" please  
specify

4 Academic Institution(s) to which you send your existing employees as Part Time FD Students or from which you take Full Time FD Students on a Placement

	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

5 Approx. number of Employees currently on Part Time FD programmes?   
Average number of Full Time FD Students taken on a Placement p.a.

6 Total Length of the typical work-based learning period which each Full Time Student spends with you (in DAYS)

##### SECTION TWO - Management of Work-based Learning

7

Do you allocate a specific dedicated workplace Mentor / Supervisor

To Employees studying an  
FD?

Yes

No

To Students with you on work placement ?

Yes

No

8

Have such Mentors/Supervisors been specially trained for this work

Via in-house training ?

Yes

No

Via outside training ?

Yes

No

9

Do those involved in such special duties as Mentors / Supervisors receive;

Reduction in their other duties ?

Yes

No

Additional payment in some form ?

Yes

No

Contin'd ....

10

How regularly is progress reviewed with employees/Students ?

Delete as  
AppropriateEmployees/ FD Students  
every

once

FD Students on Placement  
every

once

weeks /  
months  
weeks /  
months

11

Do you have an in-house structured training plan ?

For own Employees/FD Students ?

Yes

No

For FD Students on work placement  
?

Yes

No

12

If any of your employees study an FD on a Part Time basis, how involved/supportive would you say that your organisation is with their academic studies ?

(a) Through enquiry regarding the content/ relevance of their classroom studies

Often

5

4

3

2

1

0

Never

(b) Through enquiry / monitoring regarding their academic progress/results

Often

5

4

3

2

1

0

Never

(c) By allowing time off for scheduled studies

Paid	Unpaid	None
------	--------	------

(d) By allowing time off for private study

Paid	Unpaid	None
------	--------	------

(e) By allowing time off for Examinations

Paid	Unpaid	None
------	--------	------

### SECTION THREE - Involvement with Academic Institutions

(A) Employer involvement at initial programme development stage

-

13

To what extent were you involved with the Academic Institution at the inception /design stage of the programmes in question ?

Not at all

0

1

2

3

4

5

Fully

14

If involved, what type(s) of involvement were these ? Please tick all which apply

General Consultation

Stipulation of course content

Design of course content

Delivery of course content

Assessment (award of marks)

Provision of learning materials

Other

If "Other" please specify

Contin'd ....

(A) Current Employer involvement in programmes

-

15

What level of ongoing active involvement do you have with the Academic Institution(s) as regards delivery and/or assessment ? (on a scale of 1 - 5)

None

0

1

2

3

4

5

High

16

If involved, what type(s) of involvement are these ? Please tick all which apply

General Consultation  
 Stipulation of course content  
 Design of course content  
 Delivery of course content  
 Assessment (award of marks)  
 Provision of learning materials  
 Other


If "Other" please specify


17 What level of involvement with programmes would you say was appropriate ?  
 (on a scale of 1 - 5 )

None 

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 High

In your opinion;

18 How would you rate the quality of your relationship with the Academic Institution(s) with which you are involved ? (on a scale of 1 - 5 )

Poor 

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

 Very good

19 How necessary would you say that a Placement is within a full time Foundation Degree ?

Not at all 

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

 Very

Thank you for your assistance with the above

Please return your completed questionnaire to me at  
[john.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:john.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk)

Would you be happy to take part in an interview in connection with the above at some future date ?

Yes 

--

 No 

--

QUESTIONNAIRES TO STUDENTS

Foundation Degree (FD) Provision  
Foundation Degrees in Construction and Quantity Surveying

SECTION ONE - General information

for  
coded ref.

1

Name of person completing  
this questionnaire

2

Name of the academic  
institution which you attended

3

Title of the Foundation  
Degree which you studied

4

Mode of attendance

Full  
Time

Part  
Time

5

Name of Employer (s)  
Type of firm / Organisation

6

If a Full Time student, what TOTAL number of days of  
workplace experience were you required to complete

Days

Management of your workplace experience

7

Did you have a specific Tutor / Supervisor  
appointed by your University / College

Yes

No

8

What would be your overall rating of the help/support which he/she gave you ?

	Poor			Good	
Generally	1	2	3	4	5

Better  
aspects

---

---

---

---

Weaker

Aspects

-----  
-----

With Learning

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Better  
aspects

-----  
-----  
-----

Weaker  
Aspects

-----  
-----  
-----

9

Did you have a specific Mentor/Supervisor  
Yes  
appointed by your place of work ?

		No
--	--	----

10

What would be your overall rating of the help/support which he/she gave you ?

	Poor				Good
Generally	1	2	3	4	5

Better  
aspects

-----  
-----  
-----

Weaker  
Aspects

-----  
-----  
-----

With Learning

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Better  
aspects

-----  
-----  
-----

Weaker  
Aspects

-----  
-----  
-----

11

IF YOU WERE AN EMPLOYEE/ PART TIME STUDENT how supportive would you  
say  
that your Employer was of your University / College studies generally - in terms of,  
for example, routine enquiries into the nature of your studies and your  
progress with these

Poor	1	2	3	4	5
------	---	---	---	---	---

12

IF YOU WERE AN EMPLOYEE/PART TIME STUDENT , what practical help/support did they give you with each of the following ? (please tick the appropriate box)

(a) time off for private study / preparation ?

(b) time off for attending scheduled classes ?

(c) time off for Exams/ assessments ?

Paid	Unpaid	None
Paid	Unpaid	None
Paid	Unpaid	None

13

To what extent did your employer / workplace mentor / supervisor engage with your University/ College in terms of, for example; supply of materials which they could use for project work, giving guest lectures, providing you with work exercises which could be assessed as part of your qualification ?

Poor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

14

Was your employer / workplace mentor/supervisor involved in any of the following ?

(a) Programme Review meetings or other consultations

(c) Marking of your work at the workplace

(d) Assessment exercises at your university/college

Yes No


In your opinion

15

To what extent would you say that your academic (classroom based) studies increased your understanding of your work place tasks.

Not at  
all

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Fully

16

To what extent would you say that the work place tasks you performed increased your understanding of your academic (classroom based) studies

Not at  
all

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Fully

17

To what extent would you say that your academic (classroom) studies and your work place tasks were effectively integrated within the curriculum

Not at

0	1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Fully

all						
-----	--	--	--	--	--	--

**18** Please rate the value to you of your work tasks as a learning experience

Low	1	2	3	4	5	High
-----	---	---	---	---	---	------

**19** How necessary would you say that a period of workplace learning is to a Foundation Degree generally ?

Not at all	0	1	2	3	4	5	Very
------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	------

Thank you for your assistance with the above

Please return your completed questionnaire to me at  
[john.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:john.pearson@northumbria.ac.uk)

Would you agree to take part in an interview in connection with the above at some future date if invited ?	Yes		No	
--	-----	--	----	--



## **APPENDIX E.1 Interview Schedule Employer**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE/KEY ISSUES ; EMPLOYER S**

#### **Issues for Employers**

**With which University programme are you associated ?**

**What is the nature of your business ?**

**Do you take students on Part time study / short period Workplace experience ?**

1. In the case of Full Time students, what length of work placement is required ?
2. What period is usually undertaken ?
3. Are you aware what help is given by the university to Students seeking /arranging placements?
4. Are placements fitted into term time or do they take place wholly / in part during university holidays?
5. Generally, what would you describe as a **successful** work placement/employment (a) from the student's perspective? ( b) from the university's (c) from your own ?
6. Do you appoint a specific workplace supervisor or mentor to each student / group ?
7. Do your supervisors / mentors have specialist training to equip them for this role ?
8. Did the student's tutor or a.n.other from the university visit and/or advise your appointed supervisor/mentor as regards the nature of the student's placement and/or what **you** (as employer) should be doing ?
9. Did the student's tutor or a.n.other from the university visit and/or advise this supervisor/mentor as regards particular things they would have liked **the Student** to have experience of and/or learn ?
10. Were you (as employer) aware of the Module Specification/Descriptor for work place learning ?
11. If so, How closely did you seek to / were you able to comply with this ?
12. What (other) ongoing links were/are there between yourselves and the university ?
13. How strong/close were/are these ?
14. How were/are these maintained long-term (Meetings/visits/reports/committee membership within the university etc. ) ?

15. Do you have any particular feelings regarding the quantity and/or quality of the
16. relationship between yourselves and the university ?
17. To what extent and in what detail does the student's syllabus / curriculum influence/inform their workplace activity/workplace learning with you ?
18. To what extent and in what detail do you believe that the student's workplace activity influence/informs their classroom studies ?
19. In your experience, are there any ways in which a student's classroom learning might fail them in respect of what you (as employer) may expect of them whilst they are with you in the workplace ?
20. To what extent do you feel that workplace experience can be effectively replicated in the classroom ?
21. Do the university conduct any review(s) of students' workplace activity during the period of their placement with you. ?
22. Do you (as employer) monitor or review their classroom studies during your period of employment with them, as regards (a) content (b) performance ? [ PT students principally ]
23. Are you (as employer) involved in any formal assessment of the student's workplace experience (marks from which count towards the students FD award ) ?
24. Are you (as employer) involved in/at any review or assessment of the student's university reflective diary or any presentations in the university relating to their placement?
25. Did the student's programme/placement tutor visit them during their employment/ placement?
26. If so, how many times during the period of a typical course /placement ?
27. Did they see/assess the student's workplace activity (formally or informally) ?
28. Did they speak with yourselves during this visit (formally or informally) ?
29. If you employ Part Time students in addition to offering placements, [how] does the treatment of these two groups / types of student differ ?
30. Would you say that the student's period in work place learning **added value** to their programme of study ... what might you measure /demonstrate this ?
31. The Importance of Mud (or being in the Office) ??
32. The education training debate generally?
33. Do you see value in the creation of a checklist/framework for the workplace training period ?

34. Have you any further observations you would like to make on the above or other matters not addressed above ?
35. Your feelings about the FD , its place ion your organisation and its future

**THANK YOU**

## APPENDIX E.2 Interview Schedule Providers

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE PROVIDERS

#### Employer Interviews – Version 2

#### Research into Employer Engagement with Foundation Degrees

John Pearson , UNN – June 2012

#### Interview Schedule – key issues/questions

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Questions to Providers</b>	<b>Introduction; I should like to explore with you the relationship between learning at University / in the classroom and learning at work</b>	
<b>General</b>		<b>Who are you ?</b> <b>Role / responsibilities within your in the organisation ?</b>	
<b>A) Overview</b>		<b>How would you describe fine a “successful” work placement</b> <b>from the point of view of (a) yourselves (b) the Student</b> <b>Does this supplement / compliment the classroom learning or does it not bear any relation to it ? Do you plan that it should ?</b>	
<b>B) Define (discover) the level (type and volume) of engagement of each stakeholder</b>  <b>Subsidiary question re</b>	<b>Discover the nature of involvement with Employer (and with Students undertaking workplace experience )</b>	<b>1. How long has your university been associated with Employer s (particular ones/ generally) as providers of workplace experience for your Students</b> <b>Some examples please .... Type / length etc.</b> <b>2. What form exactly does your wider / more long term association with them take</b>	

<p>the management of the Placement</p> <p>Subsidiary question re quality / effectiveness</p>		<p>Initial Programme Design</p> <p>Ongoing programme Review – written or attendance at meetings</p> <p>Involvement with/in creation of assessment materials for use by/at University      Ditto, used formally within the workplace</p> <p>Involvement in assessment exercises based at the workplace</p> <p>Involvement in assessment exercises based in the University</p> <p>Award of assessment marks within the workplace</p> <p>How do you view the above?</p> <p>3. Has the pattern in (3) above changed over time (become closer/ less close – encompassed increasing / decreasing involvement)</p> <p>4. Is there anything that you would like employer s to be more involved with (or less ?)</p> <p>5. What factor(s) do you feel influence the effectiveness of the engagement of employer s with yourselves (a) from your own perspective (b) from that of the employer (s)</p> <p>Is it YOU , or is it THEM ??</p>
<p>C) To establish (discuss / suggest) critical success factors</p>	<p>Explore reaction to involvement with Employer and Students. Is there a desire for less or more</p>	<p>1. Who should take the lead in the management of the placement?</p> <p>2. What value has been added by to the students' education by the</p>

	<p>contact/involvement</p> <p>etc. ? On what grounds can that be justified ?</p> <p>What level of involvement is practical ?</p>	<p>work placed learning and how would you measure this ?</p> <p>3. Describe the placement experience offered to the Student in terms of (a) your own management, supervision, support and monitoring and (b) the management, supervision, support and monitoring undertaken by the employer</p> <p>Describe the nature / quality of workplace supervision as you [perceive this, and how you would rate it 1 (poor) – 10 (excellent ).</p> <p>How and to what extent do you feel that Students learning is affected by the above ?</p> <p>4. What duration and depth of contact and involvement by each of the two main parties (self and employer ) is (a) desirable (b) practical</p> <p>5. How appropriate would you consider the term Value Added in association with the period of workplace experience</p> <p>How might this be measured and expressed by (a) yourselves (b) the Employer (c) the Student ?</p>	
D) To develop (explore possible nature of ) a framework	What are the key features /areas of the syllabus. Which (if any) can/should be experienced in the	<p>1. Which ( if any) of the syllabus do you think should be introduced primarily in the classroom and subsequently experienced in the workplace ? Why ? ...</p>	

	<p><b>University versus the Workplace ?</b></p>	<p><b>Specific topic areas ?</b></p> <p>2. Which ( if any) elements of the syllabus do you think should be introduced primarily in the workplace and followed up subsequently in the classroom ? <b>Why ?...</b></p> <p><b>Specific topic areas ?</b></p> <p>3. What duration and depth of contact and involvement by each of the two main parties (self and employer ) is (a) desirable (b) practical</p> <p>4. How (a) valuable / necessary (b) practical is it to have an agreed formal training structure common to all Employer s with whom you engage</p>
<p><b>E) To review the role of Professional Bodies</b></p>	<p><b>Possibility of involvement through Accreditation – what influence has this ?</b></p>	<p>1. What is the nature of your association (if any) with Professional Bodies relating to your programme(s).</p> <p>2. What formal influence (if any) do they have over the academic content of your programme(s) ...</p> <p>3. What is your feeling towards their involvement ? (supportive vs. Interfering ).. how practical /realistic are their requirements of your syllabus from your perspective ?</p> <p>4. What are the expectations of professional bodies (if any) in respect of workplace experience ?</p>

		<p>How realistic do you believe these to be ?.... Why ?</p>
<p>F) <u>AND ...</u> to conclude</p>		<p><b>Of Foundation Degrees generally;</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How “successful” have they been ?</li> <li>2. What do you see as the future of the Foundation Degree (and other such Vocational Education)</li> <li>3. To what extent do you feel that work place learning can be effectively reproduced through/via simulated exercises within the classroom ... How? Why ?</li> <li>4. Where do you “sit” in the Education versus Training debate ?</li> </ol>



### **APPENDIX E.3 Interview schedule Student s**

#### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE/KEY ISSUES ; STUDENT S**

##### **Issues for Student s**

**At which University and on which programme did you study ?**

**Full**

**Time / Part Time ?**

**What was your employer ' s busi ness at t hi s t ime ?**

**Questions 1.- 3 Full Time Students onl y ... Questi ons 4 – 29 ALL**

1. If a Full Time student, what length of work placement were you required to fulfil ?
2. What kind help (if any) was given you by the university in seeking a placement ?
3. Was your placement fitted into term time or did you have to work during university holidays to accomplish it ?
4. Generally, what would you describe as a **successful** work placement/employment ?
5. Did you have a specific workplace supervisor or mentor appointed to you ?
6. Did they have specialist training to equip them for this role ?
7. Did your tutor visit and/or advise your employer/supervisor as regards the nature of your placement and/or what **they** should be doing ?
8. Did your tutor visit and/or advise your employer/supervisor as regards particular things they would have liked **you** to have experience of and/or learn ?
9. Were you and/or your employer aware of the Module Specification/Descriptor for work place learning ?
10. If so, How closely did you seek to comply with this ?
11. What (other) ongoing links were/are there between your university and your employing organisation ?
12. How strong/close were/are these ?
13. How were/are these maintained long-term (Meetings/visits/reports/committee membership within the university etc. ) ?
14. Did/does your employer express any particular feelings regarding the quality of the relationship between your organisation and the university ?
15. To what extent and in what detail did your programme team/tutor/syllabus influence/inform your workplace activity/workplace learning ?

16. To what extent and in what detail did your workplace activity influence/inform your classroom studies ?
17. Are there any ways in which your classroom learning failed you in what was expected of you /it within the workplace ?
18. Are there any ways in which your workplace learning failed you in what was expected of you /it within the classroom ?
19. Did your employer/supervisor conduct any review(s) of your workplace activity during the period of your FD ?
20. Did your employer monitor or review your classroom studies during your period of employment with them, as regards (a) content (b) performance ?
21. Was your employer/supervisor involved in any formal assessment of your workplace experience (marks which counted towards your FD) ?
22. Was your employer /supervisor involved in/at any review or assessment of your university reflective diary or any presentations relating to your placement ?
23. Did your programme/placement tutor visit you during your employment/placement ?
24. If so, how many times during the period of your course/placement ?
25. Did they see/assess your workplace activity (formally or informally ) ?
26. Did they speak with your employer /supervisor during this visit (formally or informally) ?
27. If you were a Part Time student, did you perceive any differences between the management of your time in employment and that of any full time Students on placement ?
28. Would you say that your period in work place learning **added value** to your programme of study ... how would you measure/demonstrate this
29. The Importance of Mud (or being in the Office) ??
30. The education training debate generally ?
31. Do you think there would be3 an advantage to a checklist/framework ?
32. Have you any further observations you would like to make on the above or other matters not addressed above ?

**THANK YOU**

John Pearson , Northumbria University. September 2012

## **APPENDIX F.**

### **Data and Data Analysis**

### **Sample Materials**

## APPENDIX F.1 – Example of Summary Spreadsheet (a)

APPENDIX F.1. - Example of Summary Spreadsheet, provider questionnaire (a)

Inst. Code	Titles	Students		Empl.		Part Time		Empl.		Full Time			Total WBL	Credit Value	Prog. To Hons.(%)	
		P.T.	F.T.	PQS	LA	LA	Contr	Other	PQS	LA	Contr	Other			Own Inst.	Other
	Con Man		18						0	0	5	2	10	10	0	50
E	Con & Surveying		9										10	10	0	50
	HNC Con	40		5	15	40		10						10	0	5
	HNC Civ.Eng	30												10	0	5
B	Con & Surveying	0	60						0	0	0	0	10		25	25
	Con (Arch Tech)	6		2		6							2	15	0	30
	Quantity Surveyg	7											2	15	0	30
D	Construction	13	23	1	2	10		0	2	2	15	0	40	45	0	0
	Con Man	2	2								4		12	15	83	0
	Con Man (top up)	4	0	1	5	0		0						15	56	0
A	Construction	15	27	1	1	4		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	90	100
	Con Man	4	55	1	0	2		0	1	0	2	0	50		100	0
	Facilities Mangt	20	0	10	2	5		3	0	0	0	0	0		0	0
	Sust. Constructn	21	0	15	0	0		4	0	0	0	0	0	Emb	0	20
C	Construction	3	42	1	1	5		0	10	1	10	0	6	10	100	0
	Arch Tech	6	35	1	1	5		0	10	1	10	0	6	10	76	0
F	Quantity Surveyg	8	27	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	6	10	56	0

# **APPENDIX F.1 – Example of Summary Spreadsheet (b)**

APPENDIX F.1. - Example of Summary Spreadsheet, provider questionnaire (b)

Inst. Code	Initial Employer Engagement											
	Rate 1 - 5	Genl	Cse Con	Design	Delivery	Assesmt	Lrn Mats.	Other				
	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	Placements				
E	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	Placements				
	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	Day Release				
	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	Day Release				
B	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0				
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
D	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	Validation				
	5	1	1	1	0	0	0	0				
	5	1	1	1	0	0	0	0				
A	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0				
	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	Tech req'd				
	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	5				
	5	1	1	1	0	0	0	0				
C	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0				
	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0				
F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
2.47		13	6	6	1	1	1	8				

## APPENDIX F.1 – Example of Summary Spreadsheet (c)

APPENDIX F.1.1. - Example of Summary Spreadsheet, provider questionnaire (c)

Inst. Code	Ongoing Programme delivery							Actual Level	Approp. Level	Actual Quality	Necessity of W.B.L.	Will do Int view				
	Rate 1 - 5	Genl	Cse Con	Design	Delivery	Assessmt	Lrn Mats.						Other			
	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	Placements	4	4	4	5	1			
E	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	Placements	4	4	4	5				
	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	Day Release	4	4	4	n/a				
	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	Day Release	4	4	4	n/a				
B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	4	1			
	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	4	1			
	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	4				
D	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	4	4	4	5	1			
	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	Placements	3	4	5	5	1			
	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	5	5				
A	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	Site visits	1	3	5	3	1			
	5	0	0	0	0	1	1	Site visits	3	4	5	5	1			
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	3	3	3	5	1			
	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	4	4	1			
C	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	Attend req	1	2	2	5	1			
	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	5				
F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	1			
												2.12	3.29	3.18	4.53	
												2.29	11	1	2	10

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## **APPENDIX F.2. – Sample excerpts from full interview transcript – Students**

### **Student D**

You said before we started this that it is fitted into, it is over the summer essentially this ? your summer holiday, your first six weeks of it ? 40 days of it, is summer time yes ?

*Yes.. the way the university normally works is the course will end in June and then in July they have the examination , so after the examination .. end of July and in August we'll have the 40 days. The employers were very flexible as to when I would like to start and finish and so were the students themselves, and luckily I didn't have any retakes, which would then have clashed with my placement.. so, some things you just have to up-front negotiate.*

What would you say was, how would you describe a successful work placement ? If you've got 40 days what do you think makes it successful or not ?

*Truth be told, I was studying Engineering. I had never been in an Engineering environment. I had been on a building site, but as a labourer or working along with the site managers . But to walk in and think as an Engineer you do need a fair amount of time on site and with the resources available to help you question, to question your peers in a sense, so the biggest successful thing I thought, for me , was the resources available as a student, a newcomer to the environment. They gave me access to the internet they xxxxx so as I was working in an environment where most of the Engineers were site managers I felt more comfortable asking them.. methodology , whether it was up to date. The success comes out of how comfortable you feel with the people in the team you are working with*

I don't want to put words in your mouth, but some people have said it gives you a sense of identity, so you suddenly feel you are becoming, say, an Engineer instead of just ... [ *I did feel that* ] you worked as a labourer but you never really had to do anything important, if you know what I mean, as an actual professional, but now you ...

*It helps you with your responsibilities, what your responsibilities should be. Of course Health and safety is with everybody, but the main one. The most successful thing I learnt was that the health and safety you learn in class is different when you apply it on site, and that for me was the biggest, especially night working, because as a labourer you just think management are not giving you the tools , the equipment, as an employer you think, you have to balance the safety with the workload and quality of work and doing it cheap. .*

That's good .. did you have a particular guy, a workplace supervisor, mentor, looking after you ?

*I was appointed to the Senior Engineer on the office floor. He would weekly check our diaries and he would see what targets, - not targets, but he would see what activities we were allocated and how far we had progressed.. ask what checks we were doing , and these were the concerns we should have had.*

Did he have any specialist training to make him a better mentor.. he had experience as a mentor maybe , or ?

*To be honest he does do a lot of voluntary work within the company, so he will take on health and safety seminars*

So has quite a teaching background ... teaching is not new to him

*Yes, he is used to giving a helping hand*

Your tutor visited you some times, or visited him ?

*The Tutor was very involved. In the initial start of the placement he sent us the documentation.. what needed to be , what aspects needed to be touched upon while I was on placement and whilst I was on placement he visited twice to see if they were meeting the criteria of what the placement should meet.*

He came middle and the end was it ?

*He came middle and the end, yes*

He was saying when I talked to him that he tried to get there mid-point ... he certainly went at the start and at the end he said.

*At the start he helped us to set ourselves up. So what we do get ourselves involved with does affect the criteria we had to meet, and the report we had to write up.*

So he went through that with your supervisor as well [ yes] so he knew what was sup[posed to happen

*Yes, I think that was a very good point for me, because obviously going into a new work experience was a bit nerve wracking and I didn't know exactly what I should get out of it ... to Have my Tutor speak to me and speak to the mentor made a nice comfortable environment for me to learn and write the report up accurately.*

He had maybe met him before that had he ?

*The mentor and the Tutor had met before. After the selection process obviously*

Maybe they had worked together in the past had they ?

*I don't think they had worked together in the past but they definitely had communication, they kept communication as to what we should get out of the work placement*

He did say to me that there is sometimes so much work on, so many people that you have not met before that he maybe has not met the employer before

*There are so many people coming and going*

I thought he was very good, to be honest. I probably shouldn't say so – but he seemed very hands-on

*He did .. he made sure of the most we could get out of it. He did push us to ask the mentor for these types of roles or this type of responsibility*



So, you had this Module Specification .. I've seen it actually ... did you and the employer try to stick to this or did you do something different ?

*We did, like I said, every week we checked it out*

That's good – because there were some quite technical skills I remember

*Yes you had to use technical drawings, I didn't have the opportunity of producing them , but using them was almost on a daily basis.. they were trying to find tasks that would help me use drawings. [ that was on site was it ?] that was on site*

Are you aware of any other long-term links the university has with the employer, or the other way around, you know ?

*No, I was more aware of the employer having links with other universities .. when I was there for 40 days you have the chance for not meetings as such but they help you network with other people so you go along to the event and they have meetings [ like CPD you mean ?] Career development Plans , where you meet other apprentices and interns [within their company ?] here within the company , which is a very good experience.. so you get to know how big the comp[any is ..*

Very team building of them, isn't it ?

*Yes, almost like a family environment*

So they looked after you well but they didn't have any particular ongoing links with there

*Well they did .. they did come here to speak to my course a few times, to gain more students [recruiting here?] yes, for more summer placements*

They don't come and sit on management groups or anything ? they don't plan the course?

*They don't plan the course as such at all I don' think, but what I do know is that they do come in to do presentations of the work they are doing , to promote people into thinking of coming along and doing a summer placement.*

How do you think the employer felt about their relationship with the university .. were they happy with the university or

*Yes, they were happy with the type of talents coming out because we were so ... I wouldn't say naive but we were so amateur in terms of being on site. We didn't have a CSCS card , and weren't aware of the different documentations, so almost the bare basics [ they were happy, or ?] they were happy to take them on and give them the bare basics ... they weren't really holding their hands throughout the whole 40 days at all. I did feel I was chucked in the deep end and make the most you can out of it.*

## **Student F**

So, .. you were a full time student on an FD programme [ yes ] so what was the requirement of you in the way of getting some work experience

*At the time of the original seminars they did suggest that it was a minimum six days, but because of the constraints of the economy they said they would consider if people were struggling .... something less, so you know its really down to the initiative of the individual really... and after the point of confirming that you had managed to engage with an employer you were left pretty much unregulated by the university as to what when where and how you*

Do you think that's because (in the best sense of the words) you were lucky to get one at all they weren't going to fuss over what you did ?

*I think there was a part of that and having moved onto the honours degree and seeing it from a different angle I guess now that what you don't see when you're doing an n FD is how many people you're competing against, so what you're looking at effectively is a lot of people targeting a few employers within the local area.*

Right – well, that's fair . this next follows on well actually because what you've sort of implied is What period is usually undertaken.. how many of you actually achieved the six days, as a batch, do you think ?

*From what I gather, most people out of the seminar group that I was in .. I probably achieved more than that, albeit a lot of the work I did – i took work home to do as well.*

Six days is “naff” but what did you actually do.. were you tied up with somebody for a month or ??

*No I actually worked with .. the practice was actually owned by a single Quantity Surveyor dealing with measurement work .. the place was a mansion .. quite an unusual design and ... yes, it was just pure measurement work which he did the original plan because he was project managing this brand new build .. sent all the drawings out to the contractors and let them submit the price .. i got involved because he asked me to measure and*

Old style quantity surveying eh ? Centralised QS. Did you say he was a sole practitioner, a one-man-band sort of thing ? [ yes ]

Yes, *that's correct* yes

You say most people did get at least six days, of your gang, do you reckon ?

*I think so, yes*

And they didn't exceed that, usually, because it was fitted in amongst term times.

*Yes, very much fitted into term time, and because I think it was kind of a minimum stated of six days when people were getting to six days they were thinking that was it .. they'd done their tour of duty [mistook the word minimum for maximum ? ] well exactly, yes, and*

*hadn't tried to see the benefit of trying to continue with that*

Interesting, because I spoke to somebody [ recently] who said he has someone for six weeks , from here I think.

Now, I should have asked this at the beginning but how would you describe a “successful” work placement.

*I think one that is structured so that the student understands what they need to accomplish and the student understands the value of doing it, both to the employer and to themselves . I think that partly has to be driven by the core competencies which are directed by the RICS. That was never drilled down, as to the pre-requisites – the idea of doing the work placement was*

The core competencies for students doing the Foundation Degree for technologists or whatever they call them, the technician grade of membership, for which they have a set of competencies.. is that the ones you mean ?

Yes

Because they are only the same as the main ones only a bit watered down ?

*Yes, very much so, but I think its understanding what they are at an early stage so you can easily understand more , as I say, the relevance and importance of doing it xxxx at the time of doing the work placement there wasn't a prerequisite of doing any Quantity Surveying of any form.. it was , you might , in broad terms , you might be working in an office and you may have to do things like photocopying and things like that . you might appreciate that most people are going in at the bottom rung so to speak but at the same time care must be taken that there is some good mixture of experience going in*

But you yourself had got some, well, lots , of basic skills anyway hadn't you – you had had dealings with this, that and the other ? I was thinking that a real, raw, school leaving student it might do them good to do a bit of tea making

*Kind of, but you just need to be careful that you don't find yourself doing things that can ordinarily be done in any occupation. [ unless you've never done them ? ]*

I did miss one off here but never mind. What kind of help, what degree of help was given you by the university to seek a placement, and how did that happen ?

*Well, the seminar was really just based on going out and approaching employers which I thought , my initial thoughts were that the university would have long list of employers and that may say we'll take X Y and Z to do these things [but] that was pretty much the last resort .. so the university had a couple of letters that were draft status to circulate and it was a matter of populating these with your personal details and then it was a case of you searching .*

So arguably you were trained to find a job but nobody found one for you ?

*Correct, that's very much so, yes*

I think that's regarded as a good idea [ yes ] except I suppose that in a recession it would be nice if they knew of some people wouldn't it ?

*Yes and that's been another thing that there are so few employers out there at present and I appreciate the difficulty of achieving it in the time span available in the semester but the constraints get greater as the recessions deepens . the Foundation Degree is currently done in two years and there is speculation that probably it could be done in one year but nonetheless what about trying to get a core of employers and getting a cross section of students and lapsing the work experience over different timescales for different groups*

That's interesting yes

*The students over that time period because of what needs to be delivered in the work experience module was really just to "experience" work and then to do I think it was a thousand word assignment which was broadly based on what the structure of the company was and X , Y and Z and so you are kind of thinking that could be done [on] a rolling basis and that company could assimilate so many more students..*

The university could have been more flexible ?

*Yes, i think so*

I see where somebody else has said that. These [next questions] are a bit naff because you worked for a single person.. so, did you have a workplace supervisor, yes [ yes, yes ] but obviously he or she was your / the boss anyway , and worked with you quite well / closely presumably ?

*Yes, as closely as you can expect. He was at the end of the day a sole practitioner and so he had a multitude of things to do which were primarily generating an income for himself and also his support staff [ he had one, staff, did he ? ] yes he had two [ did he pay you anything ?] No, no, he didn't. He suggested that he was going to pay expenses and I had to give in receipts for that but I never really got round to it.*

### APPENDIX F.3. NVivo9 Exercise – sample output – employers

<Internals\Interviews\Employers\Interview with C1> - § 3 references coded [4.38% Coverage]

**Reference 1 - 1.47% Coverage**

Yes i think its difficult . I think they'd struggle ion the three weeks to get a feel for what the person's like, whether they're going to like construction or not. But I think that in the year out you can get a good idea. I think it would be a good thing on our year out to align our training. For me, it would be quite good to align our training with what was required , rather than just from our point of view

**Reference 2 - 0.37% Coverage**

my worry about the six day placement, that's all, that you're not going to get very far

No you're not

**Reference 3 - 2.54% Coverage**

Again, its dependent on the time period again I think . in six days I don't think people get much out of it. We have school children in for five days and i wonder what it is they get out of it except " do I want to work in this business or not " and we can see what they're like. It's a bit short and sweet. They get a choice of different departments and they can make a decision. But again, its dependant on the individual and its dependant upon workload the company has at the time .. because if they come when there's a smaller workload they're going to get more one-on-one time .. whereas if they come when you're busy they're going to get more experience on site, and there's quite a fine balance isn't there ?.

<Internals\Interviews\Employers\Interview with Employer B1> - § 5 references coded [7.95% Coverage]

**Reference 1 - 0.93% Coverage**

We've done a two week one .. the only one we've really done with XX . The only university we've dealt with directly min taking on placements is XX . We had a guy on a placement for two weeks and we're taking another one after Christmas.

**Reference 2 - 1.92% Coverage**

in a two week placement i'd say that in a two week placement that probably is a disadvantage in that we can't really set them going on any significant tasks because of the length of placement, so what we try to do is give them some idea of the jobs we're working on, give them some architectural tasks , teach them how the CAD [ computer aided design ] system works, the internal networks we've got and then after that if they're up to it we can give them some small drawing alterations to do

**Reference 3 - 1.27% Coverage**

### **APPENDIX F.3. NVivo9 Exercise – sample output – employers**

as I said the length of the placement's the key thing. We're not going to start wasting ( though possibly that's the wrong word ) . we're not going to put a day's worth of time or possibly more running through a project and trying to get them to do a significant amount of work, because they're only here for ten days..

#### **Reference 4 - 1.90% Coverage**

you thought ten days .. you say it was a bit little or what ? You said earlier on , you had a view of the ten days I thought ?

Its difficult, because we said we'd only take the student for five days because that's what .. that's the period we'd normally take work experience students from schools ... but I said that subject to them being useful and actually finding a benefit from it, if they actually want to stay on I've no objection to it ... if the student stays the full ten days

#### **Reference 5 - 1.93% Coverage**

Anyway, somebody left you feeling positive did they ?

Yes, I think so. We got on very well with the lad we had here last year and oui think it was a period when he did get the opportunity to go out of the office a bit as well and like I say he was here for the full ten days, and I've spoken to the student that's going to be here next year and I've no kind of inclination that he's not going to be here for the ten days, but I just put the same caveat on it that we're promising five and ...

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Employers\\Interview with Employer D1>](#) - § 1 reference coded [1.17% Coverage]

#### **Reference 1 - 1.17% Coverage**

On our sponsored student scheme we mandate they must do 8 weeks. We won't have anybody for less than 8 weeks. Because the effort that we have to put in for them wouldn't be worth it for less. 8 weeks must be a minimum.

[<Internals\\Interviews\\Employers\\Interview with Employer F1 Friday 16th November 2012>](#) - § 3 references coded [3.97% Coverage]

#### **Reference 1 - 1.41% Coverage**

Do you find it awkward, or not awkward, that they're here just two days a week.?

It's very difficult, I mean its particularly difficult ... I mean that was one of the bugbears that really led to her not being ... us not being able to offer any further work experience... because it wasn't always the



### **APPENDIX F.3. NVivo9 Exercise – sample output – employers**

same days in the week [yes ] and that doesn't tie in terribly well with workload and it makes it very difficult to structure any sort of realistic experience or learning.

#### **Reference 2 - 1.58% Coverage**

I think from a work experience point of view I think that two days a week is a waste of time, because it hasn't worked .. it might work for the student but it hasn't worked for the employer.. so I think that if it is going to work it has to be in a block – where we can give some meaningful thought as to, you know, in advance, to put her into a small team on a specific task or project over a set period – even if it is just for four or five weeks. It's much easier to structure that than doing it on a few odd days in a week.

#### **Reference 3 - 0.99% Coverage**

I think six days, personally, it's a joke. I think that anybody who thinks that someone can get work experience ion six days is - it just doesn't work – it takes a day, they've got to go through the health and safety procedures.. they've got to get to know everybody, They've got to be shown around the office . You couldn't ...

## **APPENDIX F.4. – NVivo9 Exercise – Own Analysis of Data - Providers**

<b>Node</b>	<b>Content / description of node</b>	<b>entries</b>	<b>Principal Headings</b>
1	Response to principles of F.D.	8	<b>A</b>
2	Adherence to founding principles of F.D.	7	<b>A</b>
3	Future of the Foundation Degree	15	<b>A</b>
4	Assessment in the classroom	13	<b>B</b>
5	Assessment in the work placement	14	<b>B</b>
6	Relationship between classroom and workplace learning	8	<b>B</b>
7	Importance of hands on experience	29	<b>B</b>
8	Importance of mud	14	<b>B</b>
9	Value of simulated WPL	25	<b>B</b>
10	Management of the Placement	73	<b>B</b>
11	Credit points	3	<b>B</b>
12	Preparation prior to placement	23	<b>B</b>
13	Use of reflective diary / report	11	<b>B</b>
14	Response to placement duration	27	<b>B</b>
15	Programme review process	20	<b>C</b>
16	Factors affecting employer engagement	25	<b>C</b>
17	<b>Assumed</b> Value added placed on WPL by employers	16	<b>C</b>
18	Thoughts about other stakeholders	12	<b>C</b>
19	Role of Liaison Committees etc.	8	<b>C</b>
20	Relationship with Professional Body / Accreditation	34	<b>C</b>
21	University's engagement level	6	<b>D</b>
22	Factors affecting provider engagement	21	<b>D</b>
23	Workplace as a Source of live materials	6	<b>D</b>
24	Size / availability of local sites / offices for WPL	9	<b>D</b>
25	Availability of career structure within employers	21	<b>E</b>
26	Student performance / progression	12	<b>E</b>
27	Supervision	2	<b>E</b>
28	What constitutes Successful placement for the <b>Employer?</b>	4	<b>E</b>
29	What constitutes Successful placement for the <b>Student?</b>	20	<b>E</b>
30	What constitutes Successful placement for the <b>Provider ?</b>	14	<b>E</b>
31	Value added quality of the palcement / WPL	14	<b>E</b>
32	How successful is WPKL /has it been	15	<b>E</b>
33	The training versus education debate	16	<b>E</b>
34	Formation of a Framework	16	<b>F</b>
Total number of entries		<b>561</b>	



## **APPENDIX F.5. – Questionnaires and interview schedules – EARLY DRAFTS**

### **Questionnaire to Employers of Foundation Degree Students**

**EARLY DRAFT**

#### **Background information**

Name of respondent (To be coded) .....

Name of Firm (To be coded) .....

Type of Employer; **Private Practice / Contracting Organisation / Local Authority**

Name of University to which you send Employees / from which you take Placement Students (to be coded)

.....

Programme students/employees are engaged upon ;

No. of Employees / Part Time Students .....

No. of Placement students in a typical year .....

Duration of Placement ..... **Days**

#### **Management of workplace experience**

Do you have dedicated workplace Mentor/ Supervisor

(a) For Employees / Part Time Students **Yes / No**

(b) For Placement Students **Yes / No**

Have such Mentors been specifically trained for this role

(a) In-house **Yes / No**

(b) Through an external course **Yes / No**

Do such Mentors receive a time allowance for this work **Yes / No**

Do such Mentors receive additional remuneration or time off in lieu **Yes / No**

How regularly are reviews conducted with employees / students

(a) Employees / Part Time Students .....

(b) Placement Students .....

#### **Involvement with the Programme / University**

Were you consulted at the outset of the programme **Yes / No**

Did you contribute towards the design of the programme **Yes / No**

Do you contribute to assessment by;

(a) Providing materials for assessment **Yes / No**

(b) Taking part in assessment **Yes / No**

How are you represented at the University;

(a) Submitting reports on students **Yes / No**

(b) Submitting reports on programmes **Yes / No**

(c) Attendance at review meetings etc. **Yes / No**

How much involvement do you wish to have with the University ?

Low **1 2 3 4 5 6** High

How would you rate the involvement which you actually have ?

Low **1 2 3 4 5 6** High

Would you rate the above ? **Too little / About right / Too much**

### **The Value of Learning within the workplace and at University**

What overall rating would you give to the value to your organisation of work place learning

Low **1 2 3 4 5 6** High

What overall rating would you give to the value to your organisation of University learning

Low **1 2 3 4 5 6** High

Would you be willing to be interviewed in connection with your provision/ involvement ?

**Yes / No**

Name of Employer

Coded Ref.....

Name of Interviewee

Coded Ref.....

Position of Interviewee

Coded Ref.....

Programme(s) covered

Coded Ref(s).....

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**Work Place Experience**

**Generally**

Do you have / what is the recommended length of (Days ?) experience for students who come to you on /for workplace experience ?

.....

What do you **HOPE/EXPECT** students will **GAIN** from a period of work place experience ?

Comment ....

How would you rate / describe the **ACTUAL GAIN** achieved

Comment .....

What problems, if any, do you have in providing effective workplace experience ?

Comment ....

Is the work place experience assessed ... if so are you/your staff involved in awarding marks?

Comment ...

Does this feed as a mark into the student's overall mark/ award ?

Yes / No / Unsure

Are there any parts of the training for your profession which you feel are particularly suited to

(a) Classroom delivery ?

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(b) Workplace delivery ?

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**Student Engagement**

Do you take feedback from students regarding the nature / quality of their workplace experience ?

What is your impression of their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with this ?

Comment....

Have they suggested any problems /dissatisfaction with the experience ?

a) Management/supervision by Their University ?

b) Management / supervision by Yourselves ?

Comment ....

Describe the support you give students working within your organisation

Comment ...

Do you allot them a workplace supervisor or Mentor ? How would you describe this person's role and their relationship to the student ?

Comment

Is there specific training lin-house or external ?) for such persons within your organisation ?

Comment

Is the special work of such persons recognised in any way (remuneration/ time in lieu/ workload) )

Comment

Engagement with the Provider (University)

Historically

Generally; On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you describe the volume (frequency) and closeness (quality) of your relationships with the University

.....

Comment (?) ....

To what extent, in what ways and how effectively were you involved in the design of the programme/Module content ?

Comment (?)....

To what extent, in what ways and how effectively have you been involved in its delivery ?

Comment (?) ....

To what extent, in what ways and how effectively have you been involved in its assessment ?

Comment (?) ....

Currently

**Generally;** On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you describe the **volume (frequency)** of your **current** relationships with the University ?

Comment ....

**Generally;** On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you describe the **closeness (quality)** of your **current** relationships

.....

Comment ....

**Generally;** on a scale of 1 to 10 how **satisfied** are you with (a) and/or (b) above ?

.....

Comment .....

**Formal Liaison/participation/ feedback** What vehicles do you have in place for liaison /participation between yourselves and the University ? (Programme Committees/ Annual Programme Review)?

Comment .....

On a scale of 1 to 10 how much do you engage with these ?

.....

What factors do you believe determine your level of engagement ?

Comment ....

Do you feel the need for greater engagement ?

Comment

What might you do to increase this ?

Comment. ...

### **Alternatives to Work Place Learning**

On a scale of 1 to 10 how effective do you feel that classroom exercises can be in simulating workplace experience

.....

Comment ...

### **Relationship with Professional Bodies**

How close a relationship do you have with Professional/ Accrediting bodies (Suggest RICS/CIOB) ?

Comment ....

Is the Foundation Degrees with which you are involved Accredited by either (or another )

Yes / No / Unsure

Can you suggest any ways in which they might help you as regards Employer engagement with the University?

Comment ...

Do you wish for a closer working relationship with one or more Professional Body

Yes/ No

If Yes, what might the Professional Body in question do to improve matters ?

Comment ..

**The future of the Foundation Degree**

What do you see happening to the FD, why, and in what possible timescales ?

Comment ...

If the FD ceases to be, what , if anything, should take its place ?

Comment ...

Thank you for your assistance

**APPENDIX G**  
**FOUNDATION DEGREE**  
**DRAFT STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

**NAME OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION / PROVIDER**

Title of Award .....

Name of Employer .....

Name of Student .....

The following agreement relates to any/all period(s) of workplace learning to be undertaken by students as a requirement of the above Foundation Degree. It is assumed that all parties will comply with the spirit of its recommendations and requirements.

**Provider/Employer Commitments**

**1.** The Provider welcomes as much input to the delivery and assessment of the programme as the employer feels able to give. The relationship between the Provider and the Employer should not be restricted to the period which the Student spends within the workplace but should also encompass contacts beyond this period. Hopefully, it will not be limited to the provision of workplace learning but should involve the provision by Employers, where possible, of learning materials which can be used in the classroom. It should extend also to their involvement in assessment of the Student's work as directed below, and, as much as possible, any review process, as requested by the provider.

**2.** It is agreed by all parties that learning within the workplace is a fundamental element of the curriculum, and every effort will be made by the Employer to expose the Student to those standard professional procedures available within the workplace, depending upon the workload at any time. Certain learning goals are suggested on the attached sheet.

**3.** It is not a normal expectation that the Student will receive payment for work undertaken for the Employer with whom they work during their period of workplace learning though expenses may be refunded. If payment is to be made, or expenses refunded, then the Employer should enter details below

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**4.** Unless notified otherwise, the normal period of workplace learning will be **30 days** (6 working weeks). This will equate to X Credit points within the curriculum. Unless notified otherwise Students will be expected to undertake this during the break between their first



and second years of study. Any variance to either of the above should be detailed below;  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**5.** The Employer is expected to appoint a named individual whose responsibility it will be to Supervise/Mentor the Student during the period of their workplace learning. Such Supervisor/ Mentor will be contacted as noted in section **6**, below and should make every effort to make themselves available. Guidance on Supervision/Mentoring process will be given by the Tutor if requested.

Name of proposed workplace Supervisor/Mentor .....  
.....

**6.** The Provider (Tutor) and Employer (Supervisor/Mentor) are both responsible for establishing and maintaining contact relating to the effective management of the workplace learning. To this end there will be the following specific contact points;

**(a)** Provisional date of pre-placement meeting/contact between the Tutor (see **10** below) provider and Employer to establish possible workload etc.  
.....

**(b)** Provisional date for tutor visit/contact to conduct review of Student performance and learning within the workplace  
.....

**(c)** Provisional date for post-placement meeting / contact between provider and employer to review Student performance overall  
.....

**7.** The Employer will be expected to review the Student's work and any progress with them at regular intervals, and make a general final assessment of the student's performance within the workplace. The mark awarded for this will form a **20%** portion of the student's final mark for the relevant Module. Guidance on assessment procedures will be given by the Tutor if requested.

**8.** The Employer will be invited to attend and participate in the assessment session at which the Student presents and accounts for his/her reflective Diary and/or other materials arising out of their workplace learning. Hopefully Supervisors/Mentors will be able to accept this invitation.

**9. (If applicable)** This Foundation Degree is has been granted Accredited status and both the provider and employer will be expected to recognise this where possible through the design of classroom exercises and /or opportunities workplace learning respectably. A list of appropriate Professional Core Competencies can be made available to the Employer upon request,.

### **Other Commitments**

**10.** The provider (Tutor) undertakes to liaise with all Students and provide effective support with regards to their choice of prospective employer, which may include the provision of names of potential subjects, and assistance with applications etc. according to the Provider's standard practices in this respect.

**11.** Once employment has been secured by a Student, he/she will be allocated a specific named tutor who will make themselves available (via telephone or Email) for the duration of the placement, to provide support to the Student regarding work-related and other matters. The Tutor will also make themselves known to

The named Tutor for the above named Student will be

.....

In all cases this named Tutor, or an appointee, will make at least one visit to the student's place of work, discussing his/her work with the Student and with the Student's workplace Supervisor/Mentor. They will also maintain establish and maintain contact with the workplace supervisor/mentor as appropriate, noted in **5**, above

**12.** The Student agrees to engage fully with his/her period within the workplace. During their attachment to the Employer's organisation they will make every effort to comply with the Employer's requirements, to the best of their ability. The Student will take an active part in his/her own learning, seeking opportunities, as appropriate, to increase their own knowledge and experience in respect of both generic, transferable, and professional skills. They will comply with the Provider's and/or Employer's assessment requirements.

### **Agreement**

We the undersigned agree to perform as stipulated above with the proviso that review and adjustment may be made in response to change in the Employer's commercial circumstances..

For the Provider; ..... Date

.....

For the Employer ; ..... Date

.....

Student ; ..... Date

.....