Do university work-based learning short courses widen access to higher education and powerful knowledge?

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Summary

With Welsh Government and European Structural Fund (ESF) support, Welsh universities have been incentivised to engage regional employers in 'upskilling' working adults and encourage non-traditional routes into higher education. Participating universities have provided short accredited courses through work-based learning projects in subject areas identified as having skills deficits.

Such instrumental curricula brought with them the need for tailored pedagogies and assessment strategies to support the achievement of higher education credits for these non-traditional university students. It is here that the link to the thesis' theoretical framing is established. It draws on sociological curriculum theory that distinguishes and assigns power differentials to curriculum and which cautions against an overemphasis on skills-based knowledge within vocational curriculum. The premise is proposed that the knowledge type inherent to these work-based learning courses is very different to mainstream university curriculum and distances itself from theoretical 'powerful' knowledge (Young 2008) to the point it becomes powerless. Questions of curriculum equity within higher education are thus raised and considered in view of these courses as a recognised form of widening access to higher education activity.

The empirical component of the thesis is qualitative and relates the experiences of work-based learning university lecturers and course participants to curriculum theory and the epistemic access (Morrow 2009) to which course participants were exposed. Twelve semi-structured interviews with university lecturers from three Welsh universities were undertaken along with six focus groups comprising work-based learning course participants.

Findings reveal that characteristics associated with both widening access and powerful knowledge were apparent but inconsistent. For many stakeholders, the raison d'etre of the courses was the tangible 'upskilling' offered. Such views problematised the accredited higher education component of the courses. Conclusions offer that the approach taken by individual course participants and the lecturers' pedagogic practice were key determinants in how courses were delivered, received and the extent to which powerful knowledge could be identified. This individual orientation similarly determined the potential for these courses to be transformative educational experiences.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter contextualises the thesis within its professional field and identifies the issue of inquiry. In doing so, it outlines the drive for universities to play roles in addressing skills deficits through particular manifestations of 'work-based learning'. The chapter concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters.

Skills and the Knowledge Economy

> *there is arguably a broad consensus amongst economists, policy makers and politicians that we have been, and still are, moving increasingly towards a knowledge based economy.*

(Welsh Government 2012:1)

A defining feature of a knowledge economy is the assumption that an increasing integration of global markets, cultures and communications central to the phenomena of globalisation will drive a demand for knowledge workers (Gibbons 2004:96). In its broadest sense, this encapsulates a historical shift from agricultural economies through to industrial ones, to a reliance on individual 'human capital' (Becker 1993). As both a business product and a productive asset (Young et al 2014), this commodification of individuals' skills bases necessarily brings with it the need to ensure workers acquire requisite skills. To ensure such adequately equipped workforces, an expectation has been placed on universities to ensure that curriculum support skills development (Welsh Government 2016c).

An amplified economic imperative is thus evident within relationships between universities and employers. Indeed, 'knowledge capitalism', or 'the shift from brawn to brains' (Deloitte 2015) led Burton-Jones (1999) to assert that 'knowledge capitalism is beginning to challenge money and all other forms of capital' (Burton-Jones 1999:22). It follows that consideration of university curriculum cannot sensibly ignore rhetoric associated with the notions of a knowledge economy and globalisation.

The House of Commons, Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry and subsequent reporting on globalisation and its impact on Wales, cemented the role of universities in increasing the skills-bases of workers. An excerpt from their report reads:

Skills are the key to maintaining levels of employment in Wales. An increase in higher level skills amongst the Welsh population is the only way in which the nation can compete successfully for jobs against other countries, where lower wages are the norm. During this inquiry, we have found evidence of existing skills gaps […] the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments must work with the higher education sector to raise the skills base (House of Commons 2009).

Similarly, within the Welsh Government, the Minister for Education and Skills in his 2016-2017 remit letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) emphasises how increasing jobs and growth remains one of the Government's highest priorities and he reiterates the central role of Universities in 'ensuring a continuing supply of highly skilled graduates' (Welsh Government 2016c).

While such governmental steer seeks to ensure that emergent graduates are suitably skilled, a UK Government commissioned Review aimed at identifying optimal skills mixes for 2020, asserted that 70% of the 2020 working population were already beyond compulsory education (Leitch 2006). Moreover, in Wales, the Welsh Employment Skills Board (WESB) reported that around 80,000 employees across employment sectors were 'not fully proficient in their jobs' (WESB 2011:11). The ramifications of such skills deficits are further compounded as Wales has comparatively high numbers of individuals in the workforce who have few or no qualifications (Office of National Statistics [ONS]:2014). An estimated ten per cent of working age adults are reported as having no qualifications so maintaining for Wales, the mantle of having the highest UK levels of working age adults with no qualifications (Welsh Government 2016b, ONS 2014). A local area analysis of qualifications across England and Wales revealed that local authorities Blaenau Gwent (27.1%) and Merthyr Tydfil (26.2%) had the highest percentage of their populations reporting no qualifications compared to local authorities in the south of England who had the lowest proportions of individuals reporting no qualifications (ONS:2014). It follows that in Wales a higher proportion of adults hold no formal qualifications and a slightly lower proportion are qualified at level 4 (first year degree level) and above when compared to UK averages. Additionally, in Wales, the employed workforce is ageing with more than 40% now aged 45 or over (UKCES 2011:11).

The National Strategic Skills Audit for Wales advocates that the minimum appropriate qualification for those in associate professional and technical roles as CQFW[1] level 3 and those working in managerial and professional jobs as requiring at least a level 4 (first year degree level) qualification (Welsh Government 2013). Concurrently, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has indicated that a quarter of Welsh adults in most occupational groups lacked the minimum appropriate qualifications typically expected for their job roles (ONS 2014).   Skills deficits are similarly acknowledged by the Wales Institute for Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD 2015) and the 2013 Employer Skills survey which evidences that unskilled and lower skilled occupations have more numerous skills gaps than graduate occupations.

While the basic assumptions underlying directives to upskill workforces are clear, drives to ensure both undergraduates and working adults are suitably skilled to meet the perceived demands of a knowledge economy are not without criticism. In a Welsh context, Rees (2012) and Felstead et al (2008) have questioned the relevance of a knowledge economy. Similarly, the danger of assuming causal relationships are highlighted by the research findings of Fryer (2005), Keep & Mayhew (2004), Felstead et al (2008) and Rees (2012), who contest assumptions that investment in skills in itself enhances economic productivity and competiveness. Felstead et al (2008) caution against assuming that knowledge acquired 'off the job' can readily be accommodated within daily working practices and that occupational labels and qualification levels alone cannot be successfully used to calibrate the skills and knowledge of individuals (Felstead et al, 2008:3). Moreover, for Fryer (2005), inequitable access to knowledge and systematic inequalities among the working age population are 'perpetuated, replicated and reinforced' in the workplace and that rhetoric around the coming of the Knowledge Economy 'needs to be matched by practical implementation and real achievements' (Fryer 2005:78).

Keep and Mayhew (2004) argue that the concepts of a 'knowledge driven economy' and a 'learning society' are ill-specified and that it is unclear what policy makers understand by these terms (Keep & Mayhew 2004:2).   Rees (2012) guards against being both presumptuous and complacent, making three salutatory points. Firstly, he purports that there is very little evidence

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[1] The Credit Qualification Framework for Wales

to suggest that the Welsh economy demands particular skills and therefore that 'there is a long way to go before the Welsh economy can meaningfully be described as 'knowledge-based' (Rees 2012:77). Secondly, as highlighted by Keep & Mayhew (2004) above, he warns of the danger in assuming that there is a causal relationship between increasing the supply of skills and economic growth. Thirdly, he cautions against the Welsh Government spending scarce resources to up-skill residents who, unable to find rewarding work, may well move away from Wales (Rees 2012:77).

Implications for Universities

Nevertheless, as gaps between the needs of workforces and existing skills-bases have been identified, so policies and initiatives aimed at 'upskilling' have grown. The roles played by universities can be seen as having two distinct manifestations here. The first is that graduates and post-graduates leave university not only having studied a subject or subjects in some depth but also with the ability to enter job markets 'work ready'. The second involves the delivery of targeted curriculum with an explicit vocational remit. Often badged as 'work-based learning', the curriculum on offer is instrumental in nature driven by an imperative to 'upskill' individuals in specific work-related subjects. The implications for universities of ensuring proficiently skilled graduates and the delivery of vocational curriculum are now considered in turn.

In doing so, it is important to recognise that the use of the phrase 'universities' here as if representing a homogeneous group of institutions set on an equal playing field with comparable missions and priorities is of course a wholly inaccurate one. The reality is that institutional hierarchies are well-entrenched and universities emphasise their own strengths and purpose relative to their positioning (McCaig 2015).

Employability skills

It follows that the roles played by universities are many and varied. Watson (2014) makes ten claims for the purpose of contemporary higher education which range from universities being fundamentally democratic to them as a demonstrable product of a meritocracy and concerned with the process of 'professional acculturation'. Other claims include their roles in personal development, communicating technical knowhow, socialisation, and the transmission of specific subject expertise (Watson 2014:18). Importantly for discussion here, he comments:

*The validity and applicability of such claims will vary over time, by institutional setting, by subject and mode of study, according to the expectations of funders and other stakeholders, and critically in terms of the approach taken by the student himself or herself (*Watson 2014:20*).*

In a contemporary sense, the premise that individuals go to university solely to acquire 'expert' knowledge in chosen subjects is challenged by the expectation that institutions nurture in their students a demonstrable range of what are often referred to as 'transferable' or 'soft' skills. These typically include the ability of graduates to communicate effectively, to be able to work as part of a team and to be assertive and resilient (Archer & Davison 2008). Such 'employability skills' are now expected to be an integral component of the student experience and accommodated within curricula (Matthews 2013). For many largely higher status, research-intensive institutions, expectations that universities play participative roles in 'upskilling' students or employees present ontological challenges fundamentally questioning institutional raisons d'être. For them, their roles as educators and perpetuators of expert knowledge are the primary if not singular imperative. Government policy does not discriminate between 'types' of universities and consequently contemporary debates between the Academy and policy makers on the nature and content of 'mainstream' university curriculum has become increasingly problematic. Drives to ensure students are able to develop employability skills through university curriculum are unpalatable for many academics who feel that the subject of study should remain all-encompassing. For Griffin (1997):

*Knowledge as we know it in the academy is coming to an end...(and this represents) a crisis arguably more serious than those of finance, organisation and structure (*Griffin 1997:3).

A move away from a reliance on historical academic disciplines towards more of what has been described as 'trans-disciplinary' models of knowledge production (Moore 2000:32) compounds debates. Such deliberations are inextricably linked to arguments for and against the commodification and commercialisation of higher education.

Although now dated, an assertion by former chief inspector of Schools, Chris Woodhead, retains salience. In a lecture on lifelong learning given to the Royal Society of Arts in 2000 he advocated that 'some universities at least' should be permitted to indulge in conversation and scholarship that he described as being 'essential to our civilisation' leaving others 'more into globalisation' to educate those for employment and economic good (Woodhead 2000). The

assumptions inherent in Woodhead's address are an issue of much debate. While there remains an entrenched hierarchy within British Higher Education, Woodhead's views are challenged by global, economic and political forces (Freidson 2001) which have contributed to both the massification of higher education and government calls for a workforce capable of meeting the perceived demands of a knowledge economy. It follows that Woodhead's reference to a type of knowledge 'essential to our civilisation' cannot be divorced from contemporary debate around the concept of knowledge, what it is, what it should be and indeed, what is deemed essential. In his reference to scholarship, Woodhead, it is assumed, was alluding here to what Moore and Young (2001) describe as 'neo-conservative traditionalism' that is, the 'type' of knowledge historically associated with pre-1992 universities when a far lower proportion of the population attended university.   A growth in student numbers and an increasing emphasis on the embedding of employability and other transferable skills including for example education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) into undergraduate programmes has contributed to a re-conceptualisation of curriculum content. In response to Woodhead it can equally be argued that these instrumental elements of curriculum delivery cannot only be regarded as 'essential to our civilisation' but that there is a growing imperative to deliver them. Just as rhetoric associated with the notion of a knowledge economy cannot be ignored in policy environs neither can the pressure universities are under to ensure students are educated to meet the perceived demands of modern economies.

Counterarguments to ensuring skills development and 'employability' within university curricula are further thwarted by current metrics used to assess universities' success. By correlating university graduate employment rates with individuals' salaries and equating the highest salaries earned with degree quality, the concomitant discourse of the 'student as customer', brings with it expectations of value for money for both the student experience and subsequent employability prospects.

In Wales an explicit requirement that universities engender such skills in its graduates was asserted by the Minister for Education and Skills in his 2015/2016 remit letter to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), which stated:

> *I recommend that the Council continues to encourage improvement in HEI* [Higher Education Institutions] *employability activity across all academic areas. Employability should become a critical cross-cutting theme that underpins all HEI delivery and that*

is clearly identified within institutions' plans. Employability activity should reflect the quality of employment and earning aspirations of a graduate, and annual revisions of plans should reflect developments in this area. Where wage data is available, institutions should track the earnings achievement rates of graduates and reflect on how this should influence employability activity (Welsh Government 2015).

Such directives specifically evidence how universities are thus incentivised and indeed required to equip graduates with differing types of knowledge i.e. both subject and 'know-how' knowledge.

University 'work-based learning' courses

The second way that universities contribute to skills development is through the delivery by themselves or via franchise arrangements with regional further education colleges, of specific university accredited courses that have an explicit vocational remit. With an unashamed emphasis on 'know-how' knowledge, such 'work-based learning' courses are offered in subjects where skills deficits have been identified. A foundation degree for example equating with the first two years of an undergraduate degree (i.e. CQFW levels 4 & 5) is typically explicitly linked to a profession and 'badged' as work-based learning.

Before progressing discussion further, the use and context of the phrase work-based learning, particularly as it relates to higher education demands clarity here as different organisations and educational institutions use the phrase to represent a multiplicity of approaches (Lemanski, Mewis & Overton 2004:3), resulting in conceptual confusion (Allan 2015:2).

In seeking to provide a definition for work-based learning, Gray (2001) offers three distinct categories as 'learning through work, learning for work and learning at work'. While these groupings are helpful, boundaries, it seems, are unclear and not devoid of the influence of broader societal bias and hierarchies. To exemplify, for some high-status professions, most notably medicine, veterinary medicine and teacher training, learning through working (which can legitimately be described as work-based learning), in the chosen field of study has always been and remains an integral and important component of university education. Such curriculum is rarely, however, considered to exemplify university work-based learning which is allied with vocational education and qualifications such as foundation degrees and shorter continuing professional development courses.

For Boud, Solomon & Symes (2001):

> *work-based learning is the term being used to describe a class of university programmes that bring together universities and work organisations to create new learning opportunities in workplaces* (Boud, Solomon & Symes 2001:4).

Seen as an explicit manifestation of the bringing together of universities and employers in vocationally based higher education programmes, foundation degrees were espoused by the then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, as offering new higher education opportunities… 'oriented strongly to the employability skills, specialist knowledge and broad understanding needed in the new economy' (Blunkett 2000). Regarded as a hybrid of theory and practice, the foundation degree aimed to couple academic rigour with workplace experiences. Although Blunkett asserted that the foundation degree would 'be designed to be highly valued in the labour market and appeal to a wide range of students, including the most-able', foundation degrees have come in practice, to be associated with widening participation activity and as being most suited to the non-traditional learner, rarely classified as the ablest.

Further examples of work-based learning courses include the increasing prominence of shorter university courses that have an instrumental remit and are offered to individuals in their workplaces. It is with such curriculum that this thesis is concerned. Developed for working adults mindful that the personal responsibilities and circumstances of employees are likely to be prohibitive of the pursuit of full-time degree courses, this manifestation of higher education is premised on flexible 'bite-size' accredited learning. To make such courses accessible to those who would benefit from them, they typically have little or no prior educational attainment pre-requisites. They are nonetheless, accredited, thereby earning successful completers higher education credits. The comparative weight of study is much less than that of undergraduate degree programmes and in comparison, to a full-time undergraduate studying over three academic years and accruing 360 higher education credits, 'students' may study a work-based learning short course comprising as few as 5 higher education credits. The subjects on offer through these courses are all work-related and an emphasis is placed not on the pursuit of a formal qualification but on the attainment of skills to enhance working practices.

Using the sociology of education

Within the sociology of education and more specifically, curriculum theory (Young 2013), the type of curriculum to which the work-based learning course participant is facilitated to access

is referred to by theorists as Vocational Education and Training (VET). This in itself may not appear problematic. However, different types of curriculum are allied with the extent to which they provide access to 'powerful knowledge' (Young 2008). Distinct from the 'common sense' knowledge acquired through everyday experience and thus context-specific and limited, powerful knowledge is found in traditional university curriculum areas. Crucially for this research, 'know-how' knowledge implicit to vocational curriculum, is described as providing ring-fenced knowledge and therefore less valuable knowledge (Young 2010b, Muller 2009 and Wheelahan 2015). These limitations relate both to the subjects studied and their associated pedagogic practice. For Wheelahan (2015):

> *Rather than being a mechanism for social inclusion, VET is instead a key way in which social inequality is mediated and reproduced because it excludes students from accessing the theoretical knowledge they need to participate in debates and controversies in society and in their occupational field of practice* (Wheelahan 2015:750).

The theoretical knowledge to which Wheelahan refers exemplifies Young's (2013) 'powerful knowledge'. This sociological concept and curriculum principle argues that an over-emphasis on skills development inherent to vocational education limits students 'to tackling how' questions and not 'what' questions (Young et al 2014).

Furthermore, Young (2013) suggests a mutually dependent dyad of 'powerful knowledge' and 'knowledge of the powerful' and, that powerful knowledge has much overlap with knowledge of the powerful. Using the word knowledge in two very different ways, Young's reference to 'knowledge of the powerful' refers to those with the power to determine curriculum content e.g the government and universities. Powerful knowledge in contrast refers according to Young et al (2014) to:

> *the particular knowledge itself that is included in the curriculum and what it can do for those who have access to it* (Young et al 2014:73).

He provides a list of key constituents of powerful knowledge which should:

- provide reliable and testable explanations of ways of thinking;
- provide a basis for suggesting realistic alternatives;
- be open to challenge;
- be acquired in specialist educational institutions staffed by specialists;

- be often but not always discipline based (Young 2013b: 5).

Powerful knowledge defined as differentiated and specialised knowledge, by its own definition assumes superiority over other forms and hence is 'never distributed to all in an egalitarian manner' (Young 2013b:231). If we accept that some knowledge and by association curriculum, are more powerful than others, it follows that unequal access to knowledge becomes inevitable. Moreover, students engaged with vocational education and training are in danger of being in receipt of 'powerless knowledge' (an oxymoron acknowledged by Young 2013:196). In Young's own words:

> *The extent to which a curriculum is underpinned by 'powerful knowledge' is both*
> *an epistemological and a social justice issue* (Young 2013b: 196).

Professional Issue

Having spent over ten years working as a Psychology lecturer in a low status Welsh university committed to regional regeneration, I became familiar with working with non-traditional university students whose prior educational attainments would not have typically facilitated access to university study. This was not wholly attributable to the fact I worked in a low status institution, but because I worked on the periphery of the university in a department called the Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning. My posts during that time, which ranged from Lecturer and Curriculum Development Officer to the Head of Department, had a specific remit of widening participation to higher education for individuals and groups from the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas of the South Wales valleys.

Working in outreach capacities lecturing staff including myself went out to local community-based venues such as libraries, schools and community centres and delivered short university accredited courses. With group sizes of around 6-10 students, there were no educational pre-requisites for engagement only the willingness to attend the courses each week and undertake the independent study required for successful completion of the course assessment requirements. Each course or 'module' constituted ten higher education credits. Students could choose to study just one course or they could study up to 12 'modules' and achieve a Certificate of Higher Education (Combined open studies). Subjects on offer covered a breadth of Social Science, ICT and English and Cultural studies. No course fees were attached to the provision thanks to Welsh Government 'fee waiver' arrangements. In addition, the university also

covered the costs of childcare while individuals attended courses. The underpinning premise was to reach out to individuals whose life circumstances and prior education experiences and attainments had precluded higher education study. The provision was responsive and flexible allowing individuals to build their confidence, skills and knowledge at a pace that suited individual circumstance. Many students who achieved the Certificate of Higher Education went on to use the award as a stepping stone to gain entry onto full-time undergraduate programmes. If relevant subjects had been studied, this often meant students progressing straight onto to Level 5 as in the second year of degree programmes.

A very strong track record of the successful engagement of non-traditional learners was established. Pedagogic practice was developed which was both supportive and mindful that the vast majority of students engaging with this provision were not doing so with the study skills that a young person having completed A levels would have. Thus, academic skills such as researching and referencing were all embedded within the delivery of courses ensuring that students were equipped to jump through the requisite hoops associated with the achievement of higher education credits. Similarly, summative assessment strategies such as exams and essays with large word counts were avoided as they were deemed to be of limited value and as being a pre-cursor to attrition. Instead, applied teaching and learning strategies that encouraged individuals to draw on their knowledge and experiences and to synthesise them with the theoretical perspectives considered in classes were adopted. Accumulative assessments strategies that students were able to build on each week were often employed to support the retention of students. This could for example involve a portfolio of evidence or a piece of work necessitating a reflective diary as part of course assessment strategies. It could be argued that such pedagogic practice constituted 'spoon feeding' however, in a quality assurance context, the work of students from the Centre compared very favourably with those studying at the same level in different parts of the University. External examiners repeatedly endorsed the work of the Centre and the calibre of student work.

At that time in the broader UK higher education context, a shift in emphasis away from Lifelong Learning towards universities targeting resources more explicitly at economic renewal grew. In practice this meant working less with adult learners in the fields of community and lifelong learning and more with regional Further Education Colleges in the development and delivery of vocational education and training. Regrettably, the Centre was

closed and I became the Director of two large European Social Fund supported work-based learning projects which provided 'bitesize' accredited work-based learning courses with the specific remit of upskilling adults in workplaces.

To some extent, it could be argued that the work I moved to do was still a form of widening access to higher education. The target group were still non-traditional students from Wales' poorest areas and the curriculum on offer provided a non-traditional route into higher education. However, while such work-based learning provision may have been successful in widening *participation in* higher Education simply in terms of the numbers engaged, the extent to which it had a role in increasing social mobility and contributing to social justice is less clear. The quality, quantity, and breadth of curriculum offered being key considerations when comparisons are made with more typical widening access activity as well as other more mainstream university courses.

Seen through the prism of widening access activity it is evident that rather than providing a transparent progression route from, for example, a dedicated 'Access to Higher Education' course leading to an undergraduate degree, or the Certificate of Higher Education with which I had previously been involved, the delivery of these short courses in workplaces had a defined focus on the engagement of individuals with higher education at a low level intensity of study for a short period of time. These courses were by design, instrumental with an expressed focus on 'upskilling' working adults based on the premise of increasing productivity and modernising labour markets. They were thus more readily allied to notions of workplace 'training' than to a consensual understanding of university curriculum and of widening access to higher education activity.

As identified above, in a curriculum theory context, the work-based learning projects with their vocational and limited curriculum would be criticised as providing 'ring-fenced' knowledge (Wheelahan 2010:73) devoid of the characteristics of powerful knowledge. I became interested in the idea that if it is accepted that there are different types of curriculum and knowledge, and some types are of better quality than others, a hierarchy within widening access provision is created and perpetuated. I thus entered the world of the delivery of university work-based learning courses believing that the delivery of isolated 'standalone' courses was limiting and provided a second-rate widening access provision devoid of progression opportunities for

students who by the nature of their full-time employment had been denied opportunities for lifelong learning. That said, this belief was caveated by my experience of working with non-traditional university students and observations that the impact of curriculum and accessibility to theoretical knowledge are dependent as much on pedagogic and assessment approaches as they are on the subject and context of the study undertaken.

During this time, I became increasingly aware of the rise in prominence, largely through governmental steer, of experiential or 'know-how' knowledge and that this had permeated expectations of curriculum content. Clearly more explicit in vocational curriculum education, if taken to its logical conclusion, this drive challenges assumptions that universities are the sacred and discrete repositories and holders of knowledge. Instead, more collaborative practice between academics, employers and students and skills-based approaches to ensure curricula are 'fit for purpose' have gained credence.

While such curriculum may well be fit for purpose as assessed by the criteria of 'up-skilling' students to have the knowledge and skills to undertake professional roles, the question of pertinence here is, at what cost? That is, the extent to which the purpose of higher education as a communicator of theoretical knowledge has been either compromised or significantly altered in such higher education offers.

Addressing this question within the context of short university work-based learning courses is the core of the professional issue with which this research is concerned. In a theoretical context, something of a moving target is apparent as tensions   in defining and conceptualising what knowledge is have resulted in what Wheelahan (2010:5) describes as 'a crisis of curriculum theory'. Something of a paradox is apparent when the escalation of the significance of knowledge inherent to notions of a 'knowledge economy' is coupled with the challenges and debates on what constitutes its very component parts (Wheelahan 2010). These challenges are related to, but not exclusive to, debates around the dumbing down of higher education. Also of relevance to these debates is how universities broaden their demographic reach and the place of vocational learning opportunities within this. It follows that if we are to accept the drive to ensure a populace equipped to meet the perceived demands of a knowledge economy, we must recognise that understanding what this means is constrained by epistemological and educational dilemmas (Alexander 1995).

Cognisant of these tensions, the thesis draws on theories within the sociology of education to consider the relevance of accessibility to different types of knowledge. It does so by acknowledging historical and changing assumptions about what knowledge is, how it is differentiated and accessed. Curriculum theorists, principally Bernstein (2000), Young (2008), Muller (2010) and Wheelahan (2010) all of whom have identified epistemic weaknesses in vocational curricula provide the theoretical framing of the study.

Cursorily it can be assumed that such curriculum as work-based short courses renders the knowledge on offer as 'powerless' (Young 2008). The thesis seeks to explore if such vocational curriculum is necessarily powerless or if it can, and does facilitate access to powerful knowledge. Integral to attempts to address this professional issue are the needs to further understanding of the extent to which such provision is successful in widening access to higher education and the roles of pedagogy and assessment in the route to powerful knowledge.

Empirically then, the challenge has been to utilise curriculum theory to better understand the experiences of academic delivery staff and course participants. The research questions are:

1. How can the sociology of education further an understanding of knowledge and curriculum as they relate to the part-time adult learner in Wales studying University short courses in the workplace?

2. Is such provision successful in widening access to higher education?

3. What are the roles of pedagogy and assessment in the route to powerful knowledge?

A qualitative investigation involved 12 university lecturers from three Welsh universities and 43 work-based learning course participants who studied with two work-based learning projects.

Chapters overview

Thus far, this introductory chapter has served to sketch out the context and professional issue with which the research is concerned as well as starting to identify the theoretical tools that will be utilised to address them. The chapter now concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 places the work firmly within Welsh Government and universities contexts. It considers policies and practices associated with widening access to, and participation in higher education. Grounded in concerns within Wales that the working populace are comparatively low-skilled and with fewer formal qualifications than other United Kingdom peers, a particular focus is put on questions of equity within widening access approaches and more specifically, the relationship between continuing professional development and widening access to higher education.

Chapter 3 seeks to unpack the complicated epistemological and ontological questions for universities and theorists that this subject area reveals and expounds the thesis' theoretical underpinnings. The relationships between knowledge and power influentially deliberated by Bernstein (2000) are drawn upon in conjunction with more recent social realist perspectives including the writings of Young (2008), Wheelahan (2010) and Maton & Moore (2010). Of key consideration is how curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies may proffer routes to powerful knowledge and consequently provide access to what Wheelahan (2010) describes as 'society's conversation'. The chapter concludes by formalising the thesis research questions.

Chapter 4 scopes the study's methodological approach and research design. The scale and aims of the fieldwork are laid out along with a rationale for the chosen methods. In all, 12 academics from three Welsh universities were interviewed, all of whom delivered courses via the ESF supported work-based learning scheme. Six focus groups, with an overall 43 participants, were undertaken with employers and employees who had engaged with the courses.

Chapters 5 & 6 detail the fieldwork's findings. Emergent themes from interviews with academic teaching staff involved in the delivery of short university courses in workplaces are considered alongside the findings from participant focus groups. Emergent themes are identified as lecturer and student expectations; academic administration; pedagogy and knowledge; and progression.

Chapter 7 is a concluding discursive chapter which considers the extent to which research questions have been answered and contextualises conclusions within broader debates around the role of higher education, widening access, curriculum, knowledge and student engagement.

Note

On a point of nomenclature and reflecting the different roles played by individuals undertaking these part-time courses in workplaces the terms 'course participants', 'students' and 'employees' have been used interchangeably as is deemed appropriate throughout the thesis.

It should also be noted that there is no exclusive differentiation between employers and employees in reference to course participants. As Wales is dominated by small to medium enterprises (SME's) and micro-businesses (i.e 0-9 employees), it was not unusual for course participants to be employers and /or managing directors of their companies. In some cases, employers attended courses alongside their employees and in other cases separately. In other scenarios employers did not attend the courses themselves but arranged for their employees to do so.

Chapter 2: Widening Access

For the Welsh Government (2016a) in rhetoric at least, aspirations for a fairer and more prosperous Wales continue to uphold social justice and a buoyant economy as key policy drivers which in turn, can be seen to inform the priorities of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). These drivers are concurrently the twin pillars on which widening access to and participation in higher education are justified. The Minister for Education & Skills has asserted his expectation that the council maintain a strategic focus on widening access to and participation in higher education. He is clear in his hope that the council:

> *continues its strategic approach to encourage and incentivise universities and their partners to raise educational aspirations and achievement among communities that have traditionally been under-represented in higher education*' (Welsh Government 2015).

This thesis has a focus on a specific 'type' of higher education. A type concerning the recruitment and engagement of non-traditional university students on non-traditional university courses largely in non-traditional environments. The extent to which this activity can be understood as widening access to higher education requires clarity on what is understood by the terms 'widening access' and 'widening participation'. This chapter highlights how consensual understandings are problematic. Over-lapping, evolving and sometimes contradictory nomenclature are allied with both expressions. There is nonetheless consistency in the types of approaches employed by universities under the auspices of one or both of these terms. Different approaches do however, facilitate access to different types of knowledge. Some non-traditional students are facilitated to access traditional university programmes of study imbued with what Young et al (2014) describe as powerful knowledge. Others, such as work-based learning course participants are seemingly denied access to powerful knowledge and its perceived benefits. The skills-based nature of the courses deemed a key limiting factor along with pedagogic practices employed. If we accept this differential, and, that higher education curriculum and knowledge is unequal, it follows that different approaches to widening access promulgate unequal access to unequal higher education.

On a point of clarity, from herein, the term widening access will be used when a general reference is required to all the approaches associated with both the terms widening access and widening participation.

That we are now debating differing manifestations of widening access to universities can to a large degree be explained by the significant expansion in the number of British universities in the latter part of the twentieth century. This saw educational institutions previously called Higher Education Colleges or Polytechnics given university status. Attributed to a demand in modern societies for increased post-compulsory education (Trow 1999), this has resulted in a shift from an elite to a mass model of higher education. Described by some as an unmitigated catastrophe (Gombrich 2000), the drive was nonetheless further championed in the new millennium by the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In a speech launching the Labour Party education manifesto in 2001 he declared the aspiration that by 2010 fifty per cent of all young English adults would progress to higher education (Blair 2001). The ambition was based on premises of improving social justice and meeting the perceived economic demand for graduates able to compete in a global market. The expansion thus widened access to university status to educational institutions which had not been previously considered as such.

The rise in the number of universities brought with it an expansion in both the numbers of students and the subjects on offer for study at degree level. For many traditionalists, this represented a 'dumbing down' of higher education not only in the calibre of students but in the staff who were teaching them. The increase in university staff bestowed with the title 'Academic' has sparked much debate. With an emphasis on teaching rather than research in newer post 1992 institutions the status of the traditional academic professional was thought to have been both threatened and undermined by the inclusion of peers with little or no research backgrounds as academics (Cunningham 2008).

The expansion, both of, curriculum and in the breadth of people delivering it, also had ramifications for arguments around what knowledge is and how it is transmitted and these are considered in detail in Chapter 3.

Policy context

The field of widening access to higher education is a highly politicised one and a significant component of government education policy in the United Kingdom and more globally. Patterns of inequalities in accessing learning opportunities relating to socio-economic status, geography and history are readily identifiable and compounded by increased incidences of low incomes, disabilities, lower literacy skills and ex-offenders in these groups. Asserting that 'these inequalities are fact', Gorard et al (2006:7) stress that arguments seeking to identify and breakdown institutional, situational and dispositional barriers to engagement have limited utility without recognition of the long term determinants participation and non-participation. That is, the influence of family, locality and circumstance.

In recognition of pervasive social and economic inequalities and predicated on bringing about individual and cultural change, UK Governments have obliged universities to actively recruit non-traditional students. Concurrently, an economic imperative is encapsulated in the role universities play in developing and delivering curriculum in response identified regional and national skills deficits. From a social justice perspective, making access to higher education 'fairer' is achieved by attempting to remove societal structural obstacles such as by the provision of support for course fees for low-income individuals and families. Equally, interventions addressing dispositional barriers such as low aspirations contribute to a more socially just system. While the two imperatives are distinct, a symbiotic relationship should be acknowledged as better educated and more equal societies almost always do better economically (Pickett & Wilkinson 2010).

HEFCW in their support of widening access acknowledge the importance of both playing a role in improving economic competiveness and serving as a tool for social justice:

> *Widening access to higher education and beyond makes a significant contribution to the society and economy of Wales and supports social justice, social mobility and economic upskilling* (HEFCW 2016).

Across the United Kingdom, different universities inevitably have different priorities and freedoms influencing the extent to which they interpret their roles in contributing to regional and national economies and their approaches to widening access/participation. Cambridge University for example in their expression of the university mission and values espouse '*the*

contribution which the university can make to society through the pursuit, dissemination, and application of knowledge' (Cambridge University 2016). The University of Bolton's mission statement in comparison, asserts their aspiration '*to be a distinctive teaching and research informed university known for the quality of our staff, our facilities and our links to employment sectors*' (University of Bolton 2016). Implicit within the stated missions are associations with differing types of knowledge. As a prestigious research intensive university Cambridge sets its stall clearly emphasising how the knowledge it produces could benefit society at large. Bolton on the other hand espouses the importance of links with employment sectors.

In England the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) is an independent public body tasked with safeguarding and promoting 'fair access' in England. In 2010 they published 'Access Agreements' guidance which universities are required to follow. These agreements articulate to the funding body how universities plan to sustain or improve access and student success for students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. Submission of institutional Access Agreements to the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) is strategically linked to the powers given to universities to set course fees above minimum rates. An equivalent system has been implemented in Wales where universities are required through annual 'Fee plans' to lay out comparable strategies before they are likewise, permitted by HEFCW to have increased autonomy around course fees.

A comparatively recent addition to the requirements on universities to be more inclusive is the demands being made on them not only to improve access but to ensure support services are in place for non-traditional students both during their time at university and post-graduation (WISERD 2015). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) describe such activity as a student 'lifecycle approach' and advocate that universities demonstrate their support for graduating students from disadvantaged backgrounds through 'such measures as internships, help with interview skills or careers elements built into the curricula' (OFFA 2014). There is thus evidence of a new definition of widening access/participation emerging as exemplified below:

> *"widening access" can be seen as removing barriers to entry, and "widening participation" can be seen as supporting the whole student journey from enrolment to future employment and encompasses support for retention, progression and all aspects of the student experience* (Owen, Higgins, Gordon, Land & Rattray 2013:27).

Widening participation by this definition becomes an extension of widening access with a focus on continued support post recruitment.

Further accountability on meeting the needs of a diverse student group is articulated by the Quality Assurance agency (QAA), the independent body established to review the performance of universities and colleges of higher education who assert:

> *The extension of opportunities to participate in higher education to all who can benefit from it is a central theme of current government policy and one which has been embraced by the higher education community. It brings with it a greater responsibility on universities and colleges to ensure that they recognise the wider range of purposes of higher education and the challenges in teaching and learning that these create* (QAA 2008).

It is apparent that the 'wider purposes of higher education' referred to, is a term of some ambiguity in that it can be interpreted in two quite different ways. Firstly, it can be read as having an egalitarian focus on the wider benefits of education in terms of what are considered as individually transformative outcomes and of having a compatibility with social justice principles. On the other hand, the wider purposes of education can be interpreted as recognition of a requirement to up-skill a needy population so improving employability and ability to effectively contribute to the economy. Furthermore, it could be argued that in acknowledging the 'wider purposes of higher education' the inclusion of employability skills into university curriculum is endorsed. The QAA definition gives the green light for differing manifestations of higher education which in turn can create unequal access to higher education.

Practice

Evidence offers that widening access activities are resource heavy with 'hard to measure to results' (Owen, Higgins, Gordon, Land & Rattray 2013:30). A challenge in consideration of the efficacy of widening access activities is a lack of UK research data on patterns of participation, their bases and how to improve them (Gorard et al 2006:2). In Wales, a piece of research undertaken by WISERD similarly concluded that:

> *Evaluating the impacts of widening access initiatives* [undefined] *on patterns of participation in higher education is difficult and limited, given the data that are currently available* (WISERD 2015:3).

WISERD subsequently made recommendations to the Welsh Government on a need for the implementation of measures to assess impact, which HEFCW are now obliged to ensure are undertaken (Welsh Government 2016c).

Despite these challenges in measurement and drives manifested in governmental and institutional policies and priorities, we do know that people in lower socio-economic groups are still disproportionally under-represented in Higher Education (Crawford and Greaves 2015). A UK Government Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) research paper recently concluded that 'those from the highest socio-economic quintile group are around three times more likely to go to university and around seven times more likely to go to a selective institution than those from the lowest socio-economic quintile group (Crawford and Greaves, 2015:9). There is also evidence of an unequal distribution of non-traditional students contingent upon university status. Recent figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reveal Oxford and Cambridge universities among seven Russell Group institutions with a lower proportion of poorer students compared with 10 years ago (Havergal 2016).

Additionally, mature students are less likely to both complete a course of higher education study or get a good degree classification than their under 21-year-old counterparts (NUS 2012). They are, however, more likely to be from non-traditional backgrounds and have additional learning needs (NUS 2012). It is also the case that despite differences in social and economic conditions as well as overarching policy, for Wales, as in England, socio-economic background, ethnicity and levels of educational attainment remain principal determinants of individuals' likelihood to engage with higher education (WISERD 2015:3).

For many universities, widening access activities are channelled through activity such as sponsoring academies, working with schools to identify gifted and talented pupils and providing free conferences for teachers (Russell Group 2013). In Wales, HEFCW supports the 'Reaching Wider' campaign. Launched in 2002, the funding council provides dedicated support to Universities to increase higher education participation from targeted groups and communities in Wales. Involving all Welsh Further and Higher Education institutions, the programme seeks to raise the aspirations of young people living in deprived areas, the bottom quintile of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, looked after children and care leavers. With a principal focus on raising aspirations through the provision of opportunities to inspire young people regardless of background to consider a university education, the emphasis here

is on the inclusion of young people who may not have considered higher learning without such interventions. Non-traditional students are then supported by the Welsh Government to join full-time undergraduate programmes across the UK. Such interventions are based on the premise that such activity raises aspirations and provides tangible routes into higher education for young people who have historically by the nature of their circumstances been excluded from such opportunities. Recognised as providing 'fair access' to higher education, Burke (2008) highlights how such initiatives are able to identify and support 'lost talent'. Of note, the basic assumption underlying the approach is one of accommodating a wider breadth of students within existing norms and structures. No reference is made to the need for any systemic change to address existing structures prohibitive of engagement for non-traditional students and 'institutional reform is all but disregarded' (Jones and Thomas 2005:617).

Practice associated with providing fair access to university programmes is a principal approach adopted by universities. Jones and Thomas (2005) who recognise three main approaches to widening access would include 'fair access' under what they describe as an 'academic' model. The remaining two approaches being 'utilitarian' and 'transformative'.

The utilitarian approach described as the 'double-deficit' model (Jones and Thomas, 2005:618) couples attitudinal factors such as low aspirations with a lack of formal qualifications. It also has an explicit link with the economy in the nature and content of the curriculum offered. It is with this approach that the work-based learning courses central to this thesis are most readily allied. The introduction of foundation degrees is similarly compatible. With lower pre-requisite entry qualifications than traditional under-graduate programmes foundation degrees have made higher education study more accessible and achievable for many people (Higgins, Artess & Johnstone 2010). They have also provided a tangible manifestation of the role of universities in addressing regional skills and knowledge deficits. They do however, as raised in the previous chapter, bring with them perceptions of being of less academic value and quality and such criticism as 'focusing mostly on work and little on learning' (Burke et al 2009:31). The parallels here with arguments that vocational education and training does not facilitate access to powerful knowledge are clear and will be returned to later.

Thirdly, the transformative approach to widening access/participation associates itself with traditional notions of social justice, emphasising that to truly widen access to higher education then the needs of non-traditional and under-represented persons must be accommodated by

significant adaptions to the way universities operate. On a macro level such changes are all-pervasive including institutional governance curriculum, assessment strategies, mode, place and pace of delivery. Critical of the academic and utilitarian approaches Jones and Thomas (2005) argue:

> *higher education should be changed to permit it to both gauge and meet the needs of under-represented groups. Rather than being predicated on deficit models of potential entrants and positioning students as lacking aspirations, information or academic preparation, transformation requires serious and far-reaching structural change* (Jones and Thomas 2005:617).

The transformative model's call for a shift in pedagogical approaches (Thomas 2005) is deemed necessary to meet the needs of students who are by the nature of their engagement, lacking the academic study skills of traditional university students. It argues that institutional expectations within formal and traditional academic assessment strategies are deemed to disadvantage widening access students. In comparison to post A-level school leavers who through their tertiary education experiences will be familiar with such tasks as researching and essay writing, individuals entering university via non-traditional routes may lack these skills sets. Similarly, the value of assessment approaches inherent to examinations have been questioned and instead teaching methods such as 'problem-based learning' and accumulative evidence-based portfolios as course assessment strategies have been introduced. Such approaches are deemed not only to be more accessible to non-traditional university students but also more appropriate tools for assessing the learning of adults.

On a more micro level, the transformative approach is manifested by universities actively recruiting cohorts of non-traditional students from hard to reach communities. This is a demonstrable commitment to social justice for individuals who for whatever reason would be unable to access higher education without it. Of note, is that such students do not typically undertake mainstream university undergraduate programmes. Instead it is often the case that these students are placed at the periphery of institutions, in 'Centres' or 'Departments' (Thompson 2000). Considered as 'other' and 'not the same' as mainstream students, Morley (2003) purports that universities have strategically developed policies to ensure that new and different spaces are created for non-traditional students to guard against them potentially contaminating university standards. Additionally, whether out of necessity to ensure viable student numbers or for other endeavours associated with principles of social justice, it is newer

universities which have been at the forefront of meeting goals allied to this transformative approach of widening access (Thompson 2000).

That said, a reduced emphasis on this strand of widening access is demonstrable in the vernacular used within funding agreements (McCaig 2015). Echoing my personal professional experiences, 'outreach' work focusing on engaging individuals under the auspices of lifelong learning has been replaced with a focus on emphasising how universities can meet the needs of local employers through vocational curriculum.

Jones and Thomas' theoretical strands prove useful in exemplifying different manifestations and principles associated with widening access and participation. That said, it is important to highlight that in practice, the approaches are rarely exclusive of the other strands/models. There is no reason why any single institution or qualification could not incorporate different aspects of the three.

Evolution

Attributable to changes in governmental priorities (Stuart 2012), expense and difficulties in measuring success (WISERD 2015), a shift is evident in the way that universities have both marketed and manifested widening access activities. An investigation was undertaken by McCaig (2015) who in the context of the rapid marketisation of the sector and fee regime changes, undertook a critical discourse analysis of twenty English university Access Agreements. He compared the priorities expressed in 2006-2007   with the same institutions agreements in 2012-2013.

Importantly, within this time period two governmental initiatives called 'Aim Higher' and 'Lifelong Learning Networks' associated respectively with the academic and transformative models of widening access and participation were abolished. Concurrently, an increase in what is described by Gerwitz and Ball (2000) as 'new managerialism' has grown. That is, increased measures for accountability and audit have been placed on universities which has impacted on the day-to-day work of the academic, the curriculum they deliver and the way they deliver it. This can be exemplified by requirements for the traditional academic lecturer to be ever mindful of their institution's positioning in university league tables and national student survey results. Further audit and accountability pressures come from the ever-pressing need to evidence and quantify the retention, attainment and employability of their students.

A stark reality is that widening access is costly (WISERD 2015). It is also the case that such students are likely to study part-time and not complete their course (Bekhrandia 2003) so compromising universities' 'bottom lines' which are to prioritise the supply of successful graduates. The need to ensure competiveness in a complex market that uses a breadth of measures including value for money, research activity, graduate employability, degree classifications and student satisfaction reports can be seen to take precedence over the costly recruitment and nurturing of hard to reach non-traditional students. The market thereby determining that the better equipped students are upon entry, the better placed they are to deal with the demands of academic rigour. Additionally, such students in turn, are more likely to contribute positively in terms of the metrics used to assess universities' efficacy.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, McCaig's findings clearly demonstrated different approaches taken by pre and post 1992 institutions. They also highlighted demonstrable shifts in emphases in both groups. Post 1992 university discourses moving from a position in 2006/7 he describes as being from 'inclusivity to employability' and from 'widening participation to fair access' (McCaig 2015:7&12). Differences in the more prestigious pre-1992 universities earlier and later Access Agreements evidenced what is described as 'discourse inflation' and:

> *an embrace for the first time, of a track record of success in widening participation* (McCaig 2015:17).

A position then somewhat counter-balanced with the finding:

> T*he main concern of pre-1992's in later agreements was maintaining excellence through the inviolability of high entry grades* (McCaig 2015:17).

In contrast for post 1992 universities, he concluded they:

> *are able to emphasise their proximity to the needs of the labour market and this encompasses flexibility in delivery and the provision of sub-degree and bespoke professional qualifications, often (though not exclusively) with a particular relevance to local employment needs* (McCaig, 2015:7).

The status then, of universities, their strategic priorities and a marked change of emphasis and definition (Stuart 2005, McCaig, 2015) over the last generation are all contributory factors to how different universities demonstrate their required commitment to reaching out to non-traditional students. It is also evident that a student considered non-traditional by one university may be regarded as more mainstream by another. On a further point of nomenclature, the terms

'widening access' and 'widening participation' are being used both interchangeably and to mean different things. At the time of writing in mid-2016, the use of the term 'widening access' as opposed to 'widening participation' is dominant in policy, practice and rhetoric. There is however, no clear consensual definition of either term. In a general sense, it is apparent that there has been a shift from the predominance of use of the term 'widening access' around the start of the century to 'widening participation' and back again. While this is a reflection of dominant policy and practice at the time, there remains, however, considerable difference in how universities, stakeholders and commentators use the terms.

To exemplify, the University of Edinburgh scopes out a range of what they call 'widening participation' activity on their website on a page entitled 'widening access'. Readily aligned with the fair access approach, they list a breadth of activities targeting adults in work, care leavers, adults seeking to study traditional 'Access' to higher education courses as well as initiatives aimed at raising the aspirations of young people in schools (University of Edinburgh 2016).

Cardiff University similarly demonstrate a commitment to reaching out to all age groups though their website which asserts:

> *The process of widening access involves activities that encourage and support people who have the ability, motivation and potential to succeed at university, but who may not have considered it an option in life. We mainly focus on adults learning either in the community or FE colleges who are currently under-represented at university. In collaboration with Community First Partnerships[2], other organisations and learning providers, we aim to help people realise their potential as they consider progression into and success at Cardiff University'* (Cardiff University 2016).

Similarly, New College at Oxford University on their website purport:

> '*New College is committed to admitting the very best academic applicants, regardless of their social, ethnic, regional or educational background'*. And that their Access and Admissions Co-ordinator '*works with students, parents and teachers to encourage bright students from all backgrounds to apply to the University of Oxford'*. (Oxford University 2016).

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[2] Community First partnerships form the Welsh Government's Community-focussed tackling poverty programme.

Jones (2008) uses the phrase 'divergent interpretations' to describe how some universities and stakeholders   use the phrases widening access and widening participation synonymously while others have overlapping and even contradictory definitions (Jones 2008:1).   From his perspective, a move from the use of the term widening access to the use of the term widening participation was a progressive one. He suggests that the latter eclipsed the former in the late 1990's following the Kennedy Report 'Learning Works', in 1997. Rather than being aimed at increasing the numbers of people attending university. i.e. those who were qualified or near qualified to do so but did not, 'the idea of widening participation was aimed to end the numbers game, and to re-orientate [Further Education] colleges towards reaching out to those who for whatever reason were disinclined to undertake formal study' (Jones 2008:3).

This heterogeneity in how individual universities approach the inclusion of non-traditional university students and the hierarchical nature of institutions are central to debates about the power of the type of knowledge students are given access to. While universities have become increasingly defined in terms of their role in economic development (Berdahl 2008:48), historical legacies and a hierarchical infrastructure has maintained. In general terms we can assume that the more prestigious a university is, the more research-based and selective it is. In turn, lower status post 1992 institutions are more teaching led and have lower entry requirements. Broadly speaking, approaches to widening access to and participation in higher education from under-represented individuals and groups are typically similarly determined by institutional status and priorities. That said, one seemingly consistent theme is that the vast majority of university activity in this area, regardless of institutional status facilitates access to undergraduate rather than post-graduate provision (Stuart 2012).

There is little argument that universities will adopt widening access approaches that are compatible with their respective institutional priority and mission. This assumption is supported by McCaig (2015) who argues that high status institutions promoted fair access approaches in order to avoid any potential dumbing down of the calibre of their students. For him fair access:

> *supports pre-1992 institutions' interests in selecting only the best candidates from national and international pools of talent, the cherishing of academic autonomy and a reputation for research excellence* (McCaig, 2015:5).

Accepting that the terms widening access and widening participation are used interchangeably, a candid account compatible with McCaig's assertion is expressed by a pre-1992 University Academic Registrar in the quotation below. As part of an interview for a piece of research on the changing context of university knowledge s/he said:

> *The short answer for us is that we don't want widening participation. The only way that we would widen the participation is if we creamed off the absolutely top of that group of people* (Academic Registrar pre-1992 cited in Deem, Hillyard and Reed 2007:59).

This view should not of course be seen as representative of pre-1992 institutions but it does serve to highlight how different institutions approach the demands made of them in this policy area.

Widening access through vocational work-based learning courses

To address the presumption that economic competiveness and future Welsh prosperity required a deepening of the existing workforce's skills base, the Welsh Government confirmed the 'Higher Skills Wales' work-based learning initiative. Using European Social Fund (ESF) monies, the programme provided subsidies for universities to work with private and third employment sectors to 'upskill' employees. Welsh universities were supported in delivering a wide breadth of curriculum in subject areas that Sector Skills Councils and other stakeholders deemed to be required to increase skills. Accredited short courses were delivered via nineteen time-limited and target-driven work-based learning (WBL) projects. Each project was managed by individual Welsh Universities and had ownership of particular subject areas. E.g Leadership and Management, ICT, Health and Safety. Each project had its own targets to meet around the number of employers assisted, number of students/employees recruited and the amount of higher education credit awarded. As ESF funding was used, the provision was limited to defined convergence areas, which were those that had been designated as Europe's poorest regions whose economies lag behind the rest of the European Union. The initiative was promoted to employers and potential participants as '*allowing you access to a University education in a bite-size and concise format that is relevant to you and the business you work for*' (Higher Skills Wales 2015).

The WBL scheme had two key objectives which were to:

- stimulate demand for learning and skills development which will have a direct impact on the performance of a particular business, and in turn, make a contribution to the economic success of Wales;

- Encourage non-traditional progression routes into further and higher learning, life-long learning and work-based learning.

(Higher Skills Wales 2015)

Eligible employers and/or employees could access up to 60 subsidised higher education credits within individual work-based learning projects run by participant Welsh Universities. The courses offered were within the Credit Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) levels 4 to 7. Studying at level four equates to first year undergraduate degree level education and level 7 with Master's degree level work. Course fees were subsidised through the European Union state aid allocations.

With no formal pre-educational attainment requirements so ensuring that low or a lack of prior qualifications were not a barrier to engagement, the only pre-requisites were that individuals were employed in the private or third sector and were given time release from work to attend the courses. Subjects on offer targeted identified skills deficits such as those in Information Technology (IT) and Leadership and Management related subjects.

The underlying precept is the role that higher education can or does play in 'upskilling' an adult workforce whose members have either comparatively low formal qualifications or are not adequately qualified or skilled to meet the perceived demands of a global economy. An important element of this provision is that the pace, place and mode of delivery were very flexible and contingent upon the wants and needs of employers and employees. The provision was thus far more accommodating of individual circumstances than typical full-time undergraduate courses. Elements of both utilitarian and transformative models of widening access/participation are evident within the rationale that underpins them and the flexibility with which they were delivered.

Summary

Higher education institutions facilitate routes to different types of higher education at both inter and intra-university levels. Manifestations of widening access activity are broad and inevitably linked to overall institutional strategic priorities. Concurrently, for some lower

status universities, often with broad social and regional regenerative remits, widening access activity is a key element of student recruitment (WISERD 2015). Individuals with prior educational records that would not permit entry to more prestigious institutions and / or programmes of study are actively recruited to such universities which have teaching rather than research intensive focus. Research undertaken by Mc Caig (2015) evidences that sectoral diversity and institutional differentiation and status will determine discourses. He also identifies that different institutions will use their position to best market themselves writing:

> *'Prestige is, by its very nature, is restricted to a few institutions, but many others can make use of an order of discourse that celebrates other qualities such as a reputation for meeting the needs of a diverse student body, serving the needs of local employers, or by focusing on opportunities for locally based under-represented groups. These institutions aim to position themselves in widening participation or social justice terms in the way businesses attempt to market themselves as more socially responsible or 'greener' than the competition* (Mc Caig 2015:4).

Questions of parity in both the curriculum and knowledge are raised by the apparent breadth of curriculum and approaches to widening access. For Bamber et al (2009) universities' conceptions of equity reflect their ideological positions. This heterogeneity is problematic for those seeking equity. A decline in activities associated with the transformative approach in increasing the participation of 'hard to reach' groups and individuals has been replaced with the dominance of both the academic and utilitarian modes. These two approaches provide distinct routes into higher education study for two separate potential cohorts of students.

At the risk of tautology, the issue of 'access' to widening access is relevant here. The use of higher education to upskill working adults through the such initiatives as the work-based learning programme provides a route to higher education study that requires no educational attainment pre-requisites. While participation in higher education is demonstrable, and therefore a legitimate claim can be made in this area, little emphasis is placed on the role of such provision in facilitating progression opportunities or accessing the structures and social capital that underpin the academic model. Instead, access to curriculum is limited and the explicit aim of these courses is to 'upskill'. Students entering university through the fair access route by comparison, are required to have achieved tertiary education grades commensurate with the requirements of the institution and course they wish to attend. These two routes are seemingly critical determinants of the type of knowledge made accessible to students.

In terms of the powers associated with curriculum and knowledge, work-based learning curriculum is deemed to be of lesser value and quality than other more traditional university curriculum. The curriculum content of foundation degrees and vocational courses more generally, are criticised as compounding differences between students studying them and those studying 'proper' degrees (Wheelahan 2015). The qualifications are seen by some as a way of educating those who, for the sake of the economy, require educating / upskilling. Links to historical legacies associated with the 'sanctity' of some kinds of knowledge are evident if not explicit within these assumptions.

The utilitarian approach to widening access is inherent to vocational higher education curriculum. Of significance for this research is evidence that characteristics and outcomes associated with the transformative approach are not lost. For example, the potential at least for a merging of utilitarian and transformative approaches can been seen in the promotion of the work-based learning courses to employees in areas of recognised high social and economic deprivation. Granted, it is not an explicitly philanthropic endeavour driven by a desire to invoke what Freire (1970) described as '*conscientization*'. That is, with the aim of raising awareness of social and political contradictions and equipping individuals with the ability to alter societal power relationships. The potential to use higher education as an emancipatory tool for individuals is not in any way emphasised. Instead such provision is deemed a logical response to changing and perceived societal and economic needs, and the curriculum on offer is instrumental to serving these changing needs (Stuart 2000:32). These courses do nonetheless provide a route into higher learning for people whose prior educational attainments would normally prohibit this. There is no *necessary* relationship between these courses and the transformative model of widening access. There is however an empirical question as to how far this connection exists.

The extent to which the work-based learning courses constitute widening access activity is then one of interpretation. While they do provide a tangible route into higher education it is to a less valuable curriculum offer. That said, for many people the academic mode of widening access is likely to be inaccessible. This raises the question of whether a weaker higher education offer is preferable to no offer at all? A critical consideration in seeking to answer this question centres on clarifying the 'type' of knowledge these work-based learning courses impart. Hence

an understanding of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment strategies as well as the expectations and experiences of the course participants is required.

The following chapter considers how the sociology of education and more specifically, curriculum theory provides the conceptual tools to further an understanding of the relationship between these work-based learning courses and powerful knowledge. Chapter 4 then outlines how the empirical element of the thesis applies these tools to the qualitative data garnered through interviews with academic staff involved in the delivery of these courses and the course participants who undertook them.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framing

Perceptions of what constitutes knowledge are inextricably linked to historical and cultural legacies and deeply entrenched hierarchies play a central role in influencing pedagogy and what Bernstein terms 'official knowledge'.   As outlined in Chapter 1, understanding has historically been polarised between 'know-how' or instrumental / vocational knowledge and neo-conservative / traditional 'official' knowledge. The latter affording higher status as well being the conceptual home in which the notion of powerful knowledge can most readily be accommodated.

Thus far, this thesis has identified the professional issue with which this research is concerned. That is, how the nature of the curriculum integral to specific work-based learning courses relates to power differentials deemed within 'types' of knowledge and curriculum. It has also sought to locate this vocational curriculum offer within the context of widening access to higher education policy and practice.

Using curriculum theory within the sociology of education, this chapter considers how knowledge and curriculum have historically been defined. It does so with the remit of establishing how conceptual tools can be applied to the professional issues at the core of this thesis. The work of principal theorists, Bernstein (2000), Young (2008) Wheelahan (2010) Beck (2013) and Muller (2009) are expounded upon and consideration given to how the 'Social Realism' school of thought could be applied.

Epistemic Access

The notion of epistemic access coined by Morrow (2009) is defined as 'a banner to signal intent to move beyond physical or formal access to meaningful access to the 'goods' of the university' (Muller 2014:255). For Morrow (2009):

> To learn how to become a participant in an academic practice is to learn the intrinsic disciplines and constitutive standards of the practice' (Morrow, 2009:77).

It is here that a parallel can be drawn with Young's notion of powerful knowledge in that both recognise the unique position of higher education knowledge and the issues associated with its access. Beck (2013) identifies three tensions in the promotion of Morrow's (2009) conception of 'epistemic access'. The first tension is the prolonged *initiation* (Beck's emphasis) required for successful access to traditional notions of academic knowledge. He exemplifies this by suggesting that 'students with less cultural and economic capital are rightly seen to need longer and more intensive study in their future specialisms than their more socially advantaged peers' (Beck 2013:188). As raised in the previous chapter, this tension incentivises certain universities keen to maintain and enhance league table positioning, to engage in only academic models of widening access.

Beck's second tension is that of the weight of challenges facing universities. Bernstein (2000) writes of a growing pathology in educational institutions that he calls a 'pedagogic schizoid position', where individuals and institutions are required to manage the competing demands of traditional practices and modern day expectations. Universities are doubtless in a difficult position. As highlighted by Watson (2014) 'what governments say they want from higher education systems represents almost the opposite of what the international league tables they also exhort us to climb actually measure (Watson 2014:xxxiv). For Beck these often competing challenges are the 'chronic source of problems that are endemic to education systems in industrial and post-industrial societies' (Beck 2013:189). He also offers that ironically this includes widening access policies.

The third tension is essentially cultural and is manifested in an inherent desirability for: 'conjoining esoteric knowledge and expertise with an ideal of personal accomplishment that is central to how such cultural and social ascendency is sustained' (Beck, 2013:189). That is the propensity for societies to seek to maintain hierarchies that exclude others from access.

While useful in contextualising some of the challenges facing universities, for Young (2013a), Beck's tensions over-emphasise social relations to the detriment of the consideration of the epistemic relations of knowledge. In response to Beck and cautioning against what he sees as mis-placed focus Young asserts:

> *The tension I am concerned with arises from the problem of 'massifying' an elite system and from unresolved questions as to whether this involves (a) extending elite knowledge*

to the mass, (b) replacing the concept of knowledge associated with elite forms of education, or (c) developing a diversified system of education suited to the needs and interests of different groups in society (Young, 2013b:196).

In a comparable vein, Wheelahan (2010) argues that inequalities in epistemic access present for those with little or no access, a fundamental barrier to 'society's conversation'. She reinforces the need for sociologists to further engage with theories of knowledge that enable access to powerful knowledge writing:

> *Theorising the nature of knowledge is thus a key task of the sociology of education, because this provides an understanding of the way it should be constructed in curriculum so that there is equitable access to it* (Wheelahan 2010:17).

On acceptance that different types of curriculum facilitate access to a spectrum ranging between powerless and powerful knowledge, we concurrently acknowledge that different routes to higher education facilitate access to different types of knowledge. For the work-based learner entering higher education for the first time a potential 'double whammy' is apparent. That is, that the powerless knowledge seemingly endemic to the short work-based learning courses facilitates access to further powerless curriculum in the form of foundation degrees or other vocational education and training. The need then to better understand how or if this is the case is an important one.

Distinguishing between types of knowledge

Historically, universities were evident in major cities as far back as the 12th century. Dominated by the Dominicans of the Catholic church and based on a compatible model to monasteries, academics as we would recognise them today were denoted as the 'Clerisy'. Over time medieval universities went on to organise knowledge structures more formally and by doing so, two 'fault lines' were created that for Muller (2009:206) are still with us today. The first fault line was in the differentiation between 'liberal arts' and 'mechanical or practically useful knowledge'. At that time, the liberal arts were grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy. This group of subjects were deemed superior over mechanical or practically useful knowledge.

The second fault line was the subsequent dividing into two of the liberal arts into what were known as the Trivium and Quadrivium. The Trivium grouped grammar, logic and rhetoric together, and the Quadrivium incorporated arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music. In

hierarchical terms the Trivium gained precedence over the Quadrivium. It was deemed to provide a forum for the fusion of Greek abstract thought with Christianity or the 'World with the Word' (Muller 2009). This represented for Bernstein (2000) the 'first moment of pedagogic classification' (Bernstein, 2000:8). The notion of pedagogic classification, a tenet Bernstein asserts that he took from Durkheim, (Bernstein 2000:99) is central to his 'pedagogic device'. This is a conceptual tool whereby societally constructed pedagogic coding determines the way in which knowledge is classified and framed. The pedagogic device provides a theoretical framework for engaging with factors that determine our consensual understanding of what constitutes knowledge and who constructs and maintains it (Ivinson, 2010). For Bernstein knowledge can be strongly or weakly classified as determined by the influence of the most powerful societal stakeholders. In a modern day context, struggles over the pedagogic device are evident between the holders of official curriculum such as governments on one hand and universities and researchers on the other (Morais and Neves 2001). Bernstein differentiates between the 'Official Re-contextualising Field' (ORF) and the 'Pedagogic Re-contextualising Field' (PRF). The ORF is state-constructed and maintained and the PRF is practitioner-based and manifested in the pedagogies of schools, colleges and universities. Power relations are key. In a higher education context, institutional hierarchies and broader societal inequalities are principal manifestations of the interplay between the two concepts.

Crucially, as expressed by Wheelahan (2005):

> *The way in which knowledge is classified expresses power because it defines 'what matters' and the way in which it is defined, and, who has access to it* (Wheelahan, 2005:2).

To return to the historical context, there has been a significant shift in the organisation of knowledge from medieval to modern times. The intellectual movement embodied in the Age of Enlightenment was closely associated with a scientific revolution that transformed views of both society and nature. Muller (2009) asserts that the cultural shock accompanying these changes should not be underestimated and the consequences of which remain evident in tensions between the Humanities and Science today. He refers to 'undimmed ferocity' and 'ageless antagonism' between those who upheld the prominence of the literary elite and those for whom science and the development of a scientific culture was the role of universities to nurture.

Cognisant of the historical and cultural relativity of the position, we see in modern universities how scientific productivity is a fundamental measure of both institutional status and quality. This position has for Muller (2009), resulted in 'academic drift elsewhere' and affirms his reference to the fault lines created in medieval times remaining germane. Not only are they manifested in tensions between the Humanities and Sciences but within determinations of what knowledge is and by association what curriculum should be.

Seeking to better establish distinctions between types of knowledge is integral to furthering understanding of if, and how, some curricula are more powerful than others. Writing over a century ago, French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1857-1917) is attributed as being one of the first thinkers to recognise a differentiation between what he referred to as 'foundations of knowledge' and 'practical knowledge' (Young 2008:164). He purported a separation between 'sacred' and 'profane' knowledge and believed that religion represented the paradigmatic form of what we now associate with neo-conservative or traditional definitions of knowledge. Thus sacred knowledge included abstract and theoretical knowledge and in a societal sense, provided a framework for the development of collective societal representations. It also provided a vehicle for that society to reflect back on itself (Young & Muller 2010:19). The everyday and more mundane knowledge necessary for effectively functioning within that societal framework became known as 'profane' knowledge (Durkheim 1967:476).

This separation in types of knowledge is broadly mirrored across theorists grounded in philosophical, psychological and sociological traditions. Philosophically, Kant, Nietzsche and Marx all held that knowledge could not be wholly grounded in external reality but was in part, the product of human thought (Burr, 2003:12). Marxist notions of the 'hidden curriculum' and 'false consciousness' both exemplify how what constitutes knowledge is both malleable and multi-layered. It follows that our official understanding of what knowledge is (or should be) is socially constructed and maintained. Importantly however, it would be folly to assume that the constructed nature of knowledge precludes knowledge types that are independent of context. Young (2008) argues that by relativising the very conditions for knowledge, it is denied any 'intrinsic autonomy' and thus the possibility of categories of knowledge over and above experience. He makes the point that to take this approach to its logical conclusion 'equating knowledge with the experience of knowers means that research can lead only to non-generalizable findings' (Young 2008:27). Additionally, and of relevance to this research, is

the suggestion that this ultimately becomes a question of social justice. Arguing that postmodernist relativist accounts of knowledge are both limited and problematic, Moore and Young (2001) take the view that postmodern arguments:

> *become forms of attack and offence between oppressors and oppressed (or rather those claiming to defend their interests). At the same time by privileging the exclusiveness of particular experiences, they deny to oppressed communities the possibility of knowledge that goes beyond their experience and might play a part in enabling them to overcome their oppression* (Moore & Young 2001:22).

Moore and Young maintain that while postmodern assertions have offered relativist critiques of both traditional and instrumental views, the perspective can be criticised as having no theory of knowledge. Concurrently, the authors recognise that relativist arguments have been successful in exposing power relations within curriculum policy (Moore & Young, 2001). In this respect, parallels can be drawn with the work of Basil Bernstein (2000).

Moore & Young (2010) go on to argue that any social theory of knowledge should and must allow for the incorporation of objective knowledge that transcends the historical context of its production (Moore & Young 2010:22). A critical distinction is again apparent between the knowledge we acquire through formal education and that which is acquired through everyday life.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) distinguished between 'theoretical /scientific' concepts and 'every day or spontaneous' concepts (Derry 2008). Vygotsky's work which focused on cognitive development in children is of particular interest to curriculum theorists. With an emphasis on the relationship between language and thought, his work extended consideration to the working relationship between the two knowledge types he had identified. He held that learning incorporates an intrinsic dialogic element thus raising the integral role of pedagogy as a complex two-way process in knowledge acquisition. This further articulation of 'types' of knowledge underlines the importance of pedagogy in curriculum. Young and Muller (2013) describe Vygotsky's dialogic process as:

> *Initially, the learner's everyday concepts are extended and transformed by pedagogy through engaging with the theoretical concepts of the curriculum. The process is then reversed; learners draw on their newly acquired theoretical concepts to re-engage with and transform their everyday concepts (*Young & Muller 2013:235).

Vygotsky did not concur with Durkheim in his belief that religion was a structural precursor for science. He instead assumed a learned and social basis for knowledge (Young 2008). Nonetheless. the importance for curriculum theorists of the work of both Durkheim and Vygotsky is that they both offer a social theory of knowledge. As Young (2008) observes they both lead us the question of 'what is worthwhile knowledge?' (Young 2008:80).

Bernstein (2000) significantly contributes to debate here. Within his pedagogic device, he differentiated between 'horizontal' (common sense) and 'vertical' (specialist and explicit) discourses of knowledge structure (Bernstein, 2000:157). He makes the differentiation between 'singulars' and the 'regionalisation of knowledge' (Bernstein 2000:9). Singulars are described as discrete discourses and identities that emerged throughout the nineteenth century. We more readily identify singulars as subject areas or disciplines, for example, chemistry, psychology and sociology. Importantly, Bernstein emphasised the fundamental importance of singulars to the production of knowledge in the intellectual field. A central facet of singulars is the maintenance of clear boundaries between themselves and other singulars. He ascribes the term 'insulation' to describe this conception. Essentially, the insulation serves to protect each singulars integrity and ensures a strong identity.

Whereas singulars only address themselves, the regionalisation of knowledge occurs when these differing discourses merge under a broader umbrella which he suggests are illustrated in the disciplines medicine, information sciences or architecture. He writes:

> *Regions are the interface between the field of the production of knowledge and any field of practice and, therefore, the regionalisation of knowledge has many implications. This is a change in the classification of knowledge* (Bernstein 2000:9).

For Bernstein, the classification of knowledge is a critical concept in relation to both the production and legitimisation of knowledge (Penny 1997). Within the context of this thesis we could understand regions as being represented by the 'umbrella' subject areas of 'Leadership and Management' or 'Professional Practice'. For Ivinson et al (2011), 'new' regions such as these would be considered as epistemically weaker than the original regions Bernstein identified.

Inherent to classifications are power relations where aspects of the pedagogic device are described as sitting on a spectrum from strong to weak. Bernstein (2000) uses the concept of 'framing' to describe the power distributions embedded within pedagogic relations or more simply 'who controls what' (Bernstein 2000:12). Described as 'linking questions about knowledge to questions about knowers' (Ivinson et al 2010:11), Bernstein identifies five variables, influencing the extent to which the transmitter has power. They are described as the selection of communication, its sequencing (what comes first, what comes second), its pacing (the rate of expected acquisition), the criteria, and finally, the control over the social base which makes this transmission possible (Bernstein, 2000:13). On a micro-level we can see the transmitter as the work-based learning lecturer hence, highlighting the importance and relevance of *how* courses are delivered.

Where framing is strong, the transmitter has robust control over the variables identified above. Bernstein then suggests that where framing is weak the acquirer has more *apparent* control (original emphasis) over communication and its social base (Bernstein 2000:13). What we can read from this, therefore, is the strength and influence of the transmitter regardless of how strong the framing is. Moreover, Bernstein suggests that rules of social order which he refers to as the 'regulative discourse' and the discursive order called the 'instructional discourse' are regulated by the strength of framing. Implicit to the rules of social order are the hierarchical practices and expectations within pedagogic relations. The rules of discursive order specifically refer to selection, sequencing, pacing and criteria (Bernstein 2000:13). Significantly he emphasises that 'the instructional discourse is always embedded in the regulative discourse, and the regulative discourse is the dominant discourse' (Bernstein 2000:13).

But what *is* knowledge?
Epistemological ambiguities have emerged as learning has been increasingly linked to productive or economic activity (Lave, 1991). A further complication for theorists bringing with it both curriculum and pedagogic ramifications is evident in the work of Freire (1970), Mezirow et al (1990) and Kolb (1984) who have all emphasised the importance of experience and reflection in learning.

Drawing on Bernstein's notion of the power of the regulative discourse and the gravity that any official conceptualisation of knowledge holds, it is not without irony that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) makes references to 'knowledge' forty-five times in its framework for higher education qualifications without once defining it (QAA 2008). Similarly, Government policy documents have been equally ambiguous and have avoided providing definitions (Moore & Young 2001:444).   This can either be seen as a tacit endorsement of systemic inequities or further exemplification of how ambiguity in a theoretical realm has consequences in policy and practice.

That said, it is clear that two distinct types of knowledge represented by the terms 'traditional / theoretical' and 'know-how / everyday' have consistently emerged. In turn, these approaches or competing ideologies align with types of curriculum. The traditional imperative or what Moore & Young (2010) refer to as 'neo-conservative traditionalism' (Maton & Moore 2010:16) eschews embedded contextual understandings of what knowledge is and how it is created, in favour of a belief in knowledge as a set of essential and impermeable truths. Of crucial pertinence here is that the relevance of inequalities around access to such knowledge, and any potential influence of economic and / or political pressures are disregarded (Young 2008:90). This notion of 'curriculum as fact' (Young 1998:23) sees the principal role of curriculum as the transmission of '*timeless truths through contemplative processes*' (Moore and Young 2001:447) engendering reverence for these truths as it does so.

The acquisition of this type of knowledge is limited to those given access. More specifically, those who enter higher education through traditional and the academic model of widening access routes. For Bernstein (2000), it is the distributive rules inherent to his concept of the pedagogic device that mediate such access. Societal restrictions on accessibility thus serving to create and maintain the notion of 'powerful knowledge' (Young 2010b).

Deriving from a different ideological base has emerged 'new vocationalism' or the 'technical-instrumentalist' approach. Elements of this approach are apparent within contemporary mainstream curriculum and are overtly present within vocational education and training. Primarily concerned with the needs of the economy, the question of how education contributes to the formation of human capital to assist national competitiveness is central. For Marginson (1997):

The education citizen imagined in government was an <u>economic </u>citizen

(Marginson 1997a:152 in Wheelahan 2010:102).

The market can thus be seen as transcending traditional neo-conservative models of knowledge, professions and occupations with an economic imperative to ensure that knowledge and curriculum are appropriately tailored to its needs. For Wheelahan (2010), in consideration of this perspective, 'the principle for selecting knowledge is primarily instrumental and knowledge is valued in so far as it serves instrumental ends' (Wheelahan 2010:102).

Muller's writing below (2009) articulates the processes and assumptions associated with each knowledge type:

> *Scientific knowledge grows by the evolution of evermore abstract and general propositions; this is its epistemic destiny, so to speak. Applied knowledge grows through an accretion of practical solutions to particular problems. Of course, it can be, and is, retrospectively rationalised in terms of its scientific generalisability. But its rasion d'etre is procedures that work: science's is principles that are true* (Muller 2009:208).

The ramifications of vocational curriculum having an exclusive focus on applied knowledge are expounded by Wheelahan (2010b):

> [vocational education] *excludes the working class and other disadvantaged social groups from access to powerful knowledge, because it denies students access to the <u>structuring principles of disciplinary knowledge</u>* (Wheelahan 2010b:93).

While this is an important issue of social justice, applied and skills-based knowledge is increasingly desirable as evident in vocational curriculum and the demand for employability skills in mainstream university courses. The boundaries between vocational and mainstream higher education curriculum have been blurred by government drives to integrate 'know-how' skills, historically the preserve of vocational curriculum into under-graduate curriculum. These factors have been central to pedagogic and curriculum shifts away from traditional considerations of knowledge as somehow absolute and impermeable. There are then, consequences it seems, of being denied access to either instrumental or specialist knowledge.

In recognition of their respective strengths Young (2008) and other 'Social Realists' have attempted to locate a new understanding within the common ground between the types. For Young (2008), neither the neo-conservative nor the technical-instrumentalist approaches to

curriculum and knowledge answer the question about what knowledge *is* and he argues that this remains largely unanswered. For him, resolution of the matter is required before theorists are able to establish the necessary conditions for the acquisition of theoretical concepts.

Social Realism

The 'curriculum of the past' (Moore 2000) inherent to the neo-conservative traditional approach is criticised as previously raised for taking no account of the changing social context within which it is located. Correspondingly, Relativists are condemned for an over reliance on social relations, to the detriment of a recognition of knowledge existing outside cultural and historical legacies. Both neo-conservative and technical-instrumentalist models of knowledge put under the scrutiny of relativist, constructivist arguments clearly identify knowledge as a product of social practices. Different types of knowledge being reduced to different social practices and thus the practices of 'knowledge producers' are deemed commensurable with other social actors. Any hierarchical perceptions are thus contextualised and relativised to the social and cultural environs in which they were created and are maintained. Wheelahan (2010) explains:

> *There is no fundamental distinction between theoretical and everyday knowledge because both are the product of social practices...The consequence is that knowledge does not have transcendent features beyond the social context in which it was produced and the social practices used to produce it* (Wheelahan 2010:14).

An emphasis on the differentiation of knowledge, while recognising the criticality of the social context, is central to the 'social realism' approach (Young 2008, Maton & Moore 2010, Wheelahan 2010). Providing a vehicle for understanding and furthering debate, Wheelahan offers that:

> *social realism is social in arguing that all knowledge is socially produced by communities of knowledge producers, while it is realist in arguing that knowledge is all about an objective world, one that exists independently of our social constructions of it* (Wheelahan 2010:7).

Advocating an understanding of knowledge as 'the historically located collective achievement of human creativity' (Moore & Young 2010:33), proponents of Social Realism offer a conceptual framework which provides a tool for bringing knowledge back into debates about curriculum within the sociology of education. For Young (2008) what is required is a

'curriculum of the future' *and* that Social Realism provides a way of promoting high quality learning (Young 2008:90).

Proffering a route for the development of sociological thought, Young (2008) suggests four dimensions along which the conflicts between neo-conservative and instrumentalism can be measured. They are:

- *from insulation to connectivity between disciplines and subjects, and between knowledge and its application;*
- *from the separation of general and vocational knowledge and learning to their integration;*
- *from linear sequencing to modular choice as curriculum principles;*
- *from hierarchical to facilitative or collaborative approaches to pedagogy.*

(Young 2008:33)

Such a coming together is based on the premise that vocational curriculum has the capacity to adapt to accommodate the characteristics associated with powerful knowledge. For Wheelahan (2010), there exists a space where this could occur:

> *a richer notion of vocational knowledge is that it comprises complex and difficult bodies of knowledge that individuals acquire in the process of becoming a member of a community of practice, which they in turn then use as a tool to transform practice and create new knowledge* (Wheelahan 2010:104).

The importance of pedagogic practice cannot be over-estimated here both in relation to the successful incorporation of theoretical knowledge and to its application.

Pedagogy

If we accept Young's assertion that:

> *We intuitively feel that some knowledges are 'better'—epistemically, morally or aesthetically—than others, and that they represent criteria about what is true, what is beautiful and how we should treat our fellow human beings,* (Young 2013b:230)

there are complicated arguments to have, pertaining as they do to curriculum and pedagogy as well as overarching institutional and governmental priorities.

While, in general terms, the relevance of pedagogy is key, it is of particular pertinence to the work-based learners with which this research is concerned. They differ from our expectations of traditional university students in a number of fundamental ways. They are for example:

1. working adults;
2. recruited onto courses under the auspices of being 'upskilled';
3. doing so on the premise that the knowledge they receive will enable greater personal efficacy and prove economically beneficial for their employers/their own company;

The fact that these course participants are engaging with university curriculum is secondary to the above. Furthermore, they may have no formal qualifications, and thus the pursuit of a university degree is not the primary motive of engagement.

Pedagogic practice for the teaching of adults and particularly those with limited prior educational experiences is well-documented as it is on work-based learning (Kettle 2013, Wheelahan 2010, Case 2011, and Lester and Costley 2010). There are echoes here to the debates on knowledge types above. In contrast to traditional 'empty vessel' metaphors sometimes used to describe the transmission of knowledge from the educator to student, an emphasis within work-based learning is instead placed on the integration of individual course participants' prior knowledge and experiences with the course content. We have seen that theoretically at least these approaches can result in a weakening of epistemic relations resulting in at the very least to limited access to powerful knowledge.

To further develop theory in this realm, Moore (2000) advocates that:

> *greater clarity about what knowledge is to be acquired by students on vocational programmes is crucial to wider debates about more effective vocational education and any possibilities of a move towards parity of esteem with general education* (Moore 2000:150).

Rather than seeing skills acquisition and powerful knowledge at polar ends of a 'knowledge spectrum', there is arguably, a place for discussion on the skill sets attained upon the acquisition of powerful knowledge. Moreover, of the power inherent to those skills. If the cultural capital associated with curriculum and knowledge through studying a certain qualification at a certain institution can for the sake of argument here, be stripped back, the question remains of what the acquirer (student/course participant) is equipped to do after their educative experience (curriculum and pedagogy) that they were

unable to do before. From this we can deduce a skillset integral to powerful knowledge. Over and above subject-specific knowledge, this could for example include such attributes as the ability to research, to reflect or think critically. These skills are arguably inseparable from three out of five of Young' key constituents of powerful knowledge in that they provide the individual with reliable and testable explanations of ways of thinking; a basis for suggesting realistic alternatives; and are open to challenge (see page 9).

This is not however, as straightforward as it may first seem in that Young's two other constituents of powerful knowledge are that it is 'acquired in specialist institutions staffed by specialists' and that it 'be often, but not always discipline based' (Young 2013b:5). We have seen that for Bernstein and the other curriculum theorists, that the closer curriculum is to its theoretical base then the closer the relationship with powerful knowledge. While mindful of Young's cautioning that the socially of knowledge can be rhetorically and irresponsibly (Young, 2008:17), a challenge is thus presented in seeking to apply his notion of powerful knowledge which is both conceptual and acceptant of privileged accessibility to a broader curriculum field that may be far removed from disciplinary bases. Nevertheless, if we some accept some leeway in Young's determination that powerful knowledge be acquired in specialist institutions staffed by specialists by accepting that the specialisms to which he refers can be manifested in curriculum and pedagogy then the scope for accessibility to powerful knowledge is greatly enhanced. Instead then of using Young's arguments to protect the isolation of powerful knowledge it can be used as a mechanism to widen access to powerful knowledge.

Thus far, consideration of the experiences and type of knowledge to which the work-based learners who are the focus of this thesis, have access to, has been both conjectural and theoretical. What follows in Chapter 4 is an explanation of the methodological approach taken to gain insight into the experiences of lecturers and course participants.

Chapter 4:   Methodological Approach and Research Design

Rationale

I have been aware from my own involvement as a professional in the field, that staff delivering work-based learning courses and the course participants themselves had a breadth of interpretations around what they were doing and why. Hence, at an early stage of the planning of my methodological approach, I was clear that it should include engagement with professionals involved in the development and delivery of the courses, as well as those studying them.

That this should be a predominantly qualitative enquiry aimed at garnering the perspectives and experiences of those involved was a premise I had assumed at an early stage of planning. I also anticipated that there would be a quantitative element in the form of a questionnaire to a comparably large number of course participants. However, as is explained below, this did not happen. Primary data collection was drawn from semi-structured interviews with university lecturers involved in the delivery of work-based learning courses and focus groups comprising course participants who had engaged with or were at that time engaged on a course.

As a professional in the field, my familiarity with the subject area ensured that I was conversant with the vocabulary and professional jargon used by the lecturers as well as the issues they raised. For the focus group participants, I was likewise an insider as I understood the contexts in which the students'/course participants' were engaging with this type of higher education and some of issues they faced. I was aware of how potentially problematic my position as a senior manager working on both projects could be seen in relation to my position as a researcher. These and related issues are explored in more detail later in the chapter as ethical considerations.

In consideration of the overarching thesis research questions, the fieldwork was intended to have a primary focus on the latter two questions. That is, the extent to which the provision constitutes widening access (Research question 2), and the roles of curriculum and pedagogy in the route to powerful knowledge (Research question 3).

Conscious that I was tasked with synthesising the theoretical perspectives explored in my literature review (later transposed into Chapter 3) with my research findings, I initially felt my approach was taking something of a gamble. That is, that I was relying on the emergence and development of theory from the descriptive interviewee and focus group participant responses. Moreover, I was aware that until I was in a position to analyse my data, I was unsure about how or if this could be achieved.   Cognisant of qualitative research relying on the collation of the views of participants (Creswell, 2008:64), I was concerned about the danger of accumulating data that was unfit for purpose. I was thus very conscious of seeking to ensure the pertinence of the questions asked in both the interviews and focus groups to enable me to draw out appropriate views relevant to my research questions.

Additionally, by selecting different research methods for the two participant groups, I inevitably broadened the methodological variables I needed to consider. Theoretically, in terms of ease of data collection and analysis, it may have been better to have utilised only one approach.   However, further consideration of the situation reconciled my view that the approaches I had identified were the best fit with what I was seeking to achieve. For example, having confirmed semi-structured interviews as the best method for researching the views of academics, and ruling out a questionnaire for course participants, I didn't deem it feasible in a practical sense to attempt to undertake a large number of individual semi-structured interviews with course participants. Moreover, qualitatively, I felt that course participants would feel more at ease in a group discussion where they could choose when and whether to acquiesce to more verbal others and /or express their own viewpoints. Hence, I concluded that as well as being more time-efficient, the focus group context was less threatening and therefore likely to encourage more individuals to agree to take part. The risk I took in relation to the validity of the data was the weight of social influence. While self-disclosure is an intention of both interviews and questionnaires (Krueger & Casey 2014), Smithson (2000) identifies a propensity for focus groups to reproduce normative discourses to the detriment of the airing of more controversial positions (Smithson 2000:104). A presumption explaining this phenomena is that focus group members may be more pre-occupied by imagining the views that the other participants may construct of them, so thwarting expressions of what they truly believe. The interactions of focus group members is for Kitzinger (1995) part of the research method (Kitzinger 1995:229), however, Duggleby (2005), argues that such

interactions are an underused source of data. While some observations are made later in the chapter on the make-up, power relations and dynamics within the different focus groups and indeed the interviews, this has not been a central component of my data collection and analysis. Instead I have focused on what I saw as the commonalties between the two approaches in that they were that were conversational and, I hoped, informal in tone. Open questioning encouraged the airing of opinions in what I sought to be comfortable and permissive environments.

During planning, in an attempt to both contextualise the fieldwork within the overall thesis and clarify what I was seeking the fieldwork to achieve within it, I undertook an exercise of cross referencing the research questions with my thesis outline and chapters. While doing so, I identified the anticipated methods for addressing each question and its relevance and placement within the overall thesis. This proved an invaluable exercise in honing the questions I planned to ask in the focus groups and interviews. Through doing so, it soon became apparent that my initial drafting of questions lacked focus. A number of the questions were evidently tangential to the research questions and more readily allied to what I could then see as transient interests deriving from my reading at that time. This honing process also served to confirm for me, the purpose and relevance of the fieldwork component of the research in relation to the thesis' theoretical underpinnings which was an issue that I was struggling with at that time. For example, while I was confident that the courses could safely be branded as instrumental and utilitarian I was less so on how to demonstrate a 'real-life' relationship (if any) with the characteristics of powerful knowledge. My own experiences had taught me that the outcomes for a breadth of course participants had been significant both in terms of economic impact and in a personal development sense. Hence I hypothesised which aspects of the courses contributed to their success from both lecturer and course participant senses. Mindful of ensuring compatibility with the over-arching research questions, I then shaped my interview and focus group questions around those assumptions. While, I hoped, incorporating enough flexibility to draw out the unplanned and unanticipated.

Pilot Study

Piloting both the focus groups and the interviews proved hugely beneficial, both challenging and endorsing different prior assumptions. Guided by Hennink's (2014) citing of Fern (1982)

'*that a single focus group discussion can generate around seventy per cent of the same issues as a series of in-depth interviews with the same number of people*' (Fern 1982 in Hennink 2014:2), I had initially decided to run focus groups to identify emergent themes that I had then anticipated would shape a questionnaire. I then planned to seek completion of the questionnaire by 50 individuals engaged on the work-based learning programme. However, my experiences of implementing the focus group resulted in my abandonment of the questionnaire. I had originally wanted to undertake the questionnaire as a method of reaching a broader cohort of course participants than was realistically practical through focus groups. It soon became apparent that the very qualitative nature of the responses I received in the pilot focus group and crucially the quality of those responses would be nigh on impossible to replicate through a questionnaire. Upon further consideration of what I wanted the questionnaires to do, I concluded I was not seeking straightforward quantitative data that the use of questionnaires can most effectively amass. Instead, I was seeking the kind of responses I was getting in the focus groups. I was also concerned about the suitability of the questions I wanted to ask for a questionnaire format. Added to this were fears over the quality, reliability and validity of responses that can accompany such small scale questionnaires (Bryman 2008). I thus decided to abandon the implementation of a questionnaire in favour of increasing the number of focus groups thus concentrating on interviews and focus groups as my chosen methods.

Upon implementation of the pilot focus group questions, the expectations I had of them were brought into sharp focus and were subsequently revised accordingly. During discussion it soon became apparent that at least three of the questions had far more overlap than I had noticed and hence I omitted to ask all the questions that I had planned (see appendix 4). It also became glaringly obvious to me that I had been optimistic of what I was expecting to get from the focus group participants in relation to the notion of powerful knowledge. In my original scoping of how research questions would be addressed within the overall thesis, I had identified the sub-question:

> *Do such widening access learners feel they have developed any of the skills associated with powerful knowledge by their short-course engagement with higher education in the workplace?*

I had also identified that the student focus groups would be a means for addressing this question. In reality, when it came to implementation, both the question and how I was seeking to answer it were problematic. It was soon evident that I had been wholly unrealistic in my assumptions. Having no possession of a tangible definition of powerful knowledge that I could use and share, made this question seemingly nebulous even to me. Hence, I concluded that it was not a question that I could look to the focus groups to answer. The sub-question was thus reworded to '*Is there any evidence that students have developed any of the skills associated with powerful knowledge by their short-course engagement with higher education in the workplace*?' and that this has been considered through evaluation of focus group transcripts. In short, having undertaken the pilot study, I realised that the findings of the focus groups were not likely to have a great bearing in terms of personal reflections on the notion of powerful knowledge. They would instead serve to open up consideration of fundamental questions about what powerful knowledge *is* and its relationship with student experiences.

In comparison to the focus groups, changes to the questions following the pilot interview were negligible and constituted a re-ordering of the sequence in which questions were asked rather than a fundamental rethink of what I was trying to do.

It followed that twelve semi-structured interviews with academic staff teaching on the work-based learning programme were undertaken with staff working on two work-based learning projects, involving three Welsh Universities. Six focus groups were concurrently undertaken with a total of 43 course participants deriving from both projects. To maintain anonymity, the Universities are referred to as Universities A, B & C and the specific Projects as X and Y. Project Y was a Pan-Wales initiative and hence involves all three Universities and Project X was solely run by University B.

Universities involved and work-based learning projects

Bearing the hallmarks of a red brick institution, University A was established in 1884 and at the time of writing had around 11,000 students, seventy-five per cent of whom were studying at undergraduate level. Universities A and B are members of the Saint David's Day Group which comprises Welsh research intensive universities and has a remit for forging closer links with key industry sectors. University B has over 29,000 students & University C has 11,300

students. 82% of the student cohorts in Universities B & C are undergraduates and both were created through university mergers. Former manifestations of the institutions did not gain university status until 1992 (The Complete University Guide 2015).

Under the ESF criteria, eligible individuals were able to study up to 60 higher education credits with any one work-based learning project. They were also permitted to move from project to project studying up to 60 credits with each.

Project X commenced in September 2010 and provided short, accredited courses in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) related subjects at CQFW (Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales) Level 4. It had an expressed focus on meeting the perceived needs of the 'Digital Economy'. Courses were demand-led using an established 'bank' of validated 20 credit modules which were offered to employers and employees. The most sought after subject areas included 'Office Applications', 'Spreadsheets', 'Databases', 'Web Development', 'Computerised Accounting' and 'Social Media'.

Project Y was a pan-Wales project constituting a collaboration between all three Universities. Its curriculum offers focussed on leadership and management related courses. Working with both businesses and individuals, courses were offered at CQFW Levels 4 – 7. A breadth of subject areas was offered under the auspices of the leadership and management umbrella. Popular courses included 'High Performance Leadership', 'Developing the professional', 'Mindfulness' 'Customer Service Excellence' and 'Employment law'.

It is immediately apparent that the instrumental curriculum offers within both projects would for Bernstein (2000) et al constitute 'new regions' distanced from the theoretical disciplines from which they derived, and which are thus problematic in terms of the quality of knowledge with which they are imbued.

The majority of delivery across both projects and the three universities was off campus centred around two delivery models namely 'in-house' and 'open'. Open courses were timetabled and promoted for delivery in local venues such as regional Business Innovation Centres. They were open for attendance by eligible employers and employees working in the private or third

employment sectors. Open courses constituted around 30% of the provision of both projects. Typically, the open courses brought together individuals whose organisations were too small to identify a viable 'in-house' cohort in the subject area of interest. Courses were thus promoted to small to medium enterprises and microbusinesses. It was thus the case that such groups comprised a breadth of professionals from a range of private and third sector organisations. Focus Groups 1 and 2 were course participants who had attended open courses. Taking into account the geographical location and the nature and size of typical Welsh businesses the 'open' course model is effective when there is less formal employer involvement in the provision of courses. Attendance was largely driven by the initiative of individual learners as a route for continuing professional development activity. The open course model also presented opportunities for individuals from a range of organisations to come together to pursue a common goal. Pedagogically, this proved to be an excellent tool in providing opportunities for peer learning as individuals came together to share practice and experiences.

The in-house model, was manifested when a group of six or more individuals from the same organisation came together to form a cohort and classes were delivered usually in the same workplace as the course participants were based. All attendees worked for the same employer, though could be undertaking different roles with different levels of responsibility as was the case in focus group 3. Focus groups 4, 5 & 6 in comparison comprised post-holders with the same job titles. Cohorts typically comprised 8 to 15 students and this model formed the mainstay of the provision for both projects. An emphasis on flexibility in working around the wants and needs of employers and employees was a key aspect of delivery. Courses could, for example, be delivered in a block period over one week, or over a number of agreed half or full day sessions within a scheduled block of weeks.

Focus groups

A total of six focus groups were undertaken. Two of the groups were from Project X and constituted 'open' classes. The remaining comprised 'in-house' course participants from Project Y. Group participants were employed in a breadth of organisations from sole traders through to small to medium enterprises (SME's), and multi-national companies spanning private and third employment sectors. All participants were studying or had studied 20 credit courses at CQFW level 4.

Focus Group summary

No.	Open / in-house	No. in group and gender profile	Project	Course	Pen Picture
1 PILOT	Open	6 4 Female 2 Male	X	Social Media	Participants derived from a combination of micro-businesses third sector organisations and healthcare. Job roles ranged from managing directors, middle managers, third sector project workers and administrators.
2	Open	6 3 Female 3 Male	X	Web Design	Participants derived from a combination of micro-businesses third sector organisations. Job roles ranged from managing directors, an architect, middle managers, and third sector project workers.
3	In house	9 5 Female 4 Male	Y	Performance Management	Independent Solicitors. Course participants included solicitors, the office manager, receptionist, and administrators.
4	In house	8 2 Female 6 Male	Y	High Performance Leadership	International steel manufacturer. Course participants were all middle managers with responsibilities for the line management of steel workers.
5	In house	6 3 Female 3 Male	Y	High Performance Leadership	International Tele-Sales Company. Course participants all had the role of assistant team leaders.
6	In house	8 3 Female 5 Male	Y	High Performance Leadership	Same international Tele-Sales Company as Group 5. Course participants all had the role of team leader.
Total		**43**			

When planning the focus groups, I had originally anticipated that they would last for around 90 minutes. However, after discussing this with relevant staff who were assisting me in organising the groups, it was deemed that this length of time would be problematic. This was attributable to the fact that these students were provided with time release from their employer in order to attend the course(s). As courses were subsidised by the European Social Fund, this time release served as a form of employer contribution to course fees. Defined as 'participant wages in kind', the employer by continuing to pay their employees while they attended courses during their working hours were deemed to be contributing to the project costs by a form of match funding.   It followed that my potential focus group participants only came together for the classes and were scheduled to be working before and after the classes. This made the 'tagging on' of a focus group before or after a class potentially problematic. In all but one group it eventuated that the academic delivery staff and the group participants generously surrendered some class time as well as their coffee break time in order to partake in the focus groups. This meant I had around 45 minutes for each group. While this was a concern at the time, the reality was that I did not feel rushed and that this was long enough. The exception to this was Group 4 who were not an established single cohort but instead invitations to attend the group were sent to around 50 employees in this large international steel company who had previously studied Project Y courses in their workplace. The Focus Group thus comprised of those who had accepted the invitation and who had studied different Leadership and Management related courses.

Interviews and pen portraits

A total of 12 interviews with lecturers from 3 Welsh Universities were undertaken. All taught short university courses within the work-based learning programme. They did so in a range of capacities including the incorporation of this work alongside other university teaching commitments, as part of a dedicated full time work-based learning academic role or as part-time hourly paid lecturers.

In order to add weight/credibility to fieldwork and questions, it was important for me to interview a range of academics from different universities and subject areas. Of the twelve lecturers I spoke to, three of the interviewees worked in either full or part-time capacities for Project Y in University A. Five of the interviewees worked in University B, three of them

working full-time for Project X and of the other two work for Project Y, one did so in a full-time capacity and one in a part-time capacity. Four interviews were undertaken with lecturers working for University C on Project Y. One of these worked full-time for the project and the others part time. Subject expertise included Mindfulness, Marketing, Graphic Design, Social Media, Professional Practice for the Creative Industries, High Performance leadership, Coaching and Mentoring.

An interview schedule (see Appendix 2) was prepared which sketched out the interview questions and topics of conversation. Mindful of both reflexivity in the research process and the power relationships integral to interviewing (Burman 2003:51), I was keen that interviewees were aware that rather than gathering information to test a hypothesis, the interviews would be essentially exploratory in nature aimed at gathering information on their experiences and perspectives on the delivery of short courses within the work-based learning programme (Cassell 2015).

Pen Portraits

		University	Project
	Pilot Interview		
1	**Lecturer Tim** was a full-time Lecturer working on the work-based learning initiative. He had worked in higher education teaching for 12 years delivering in on and off-campus settings to community and work-based learners. His subject specialism was ICT and more specifically graphic design and social media.	B	X
2	**Lecturer Simon** was a full-time Lecturer working on the work-based learning initiative. He had worked in higher education teaching for 13 years delivering in on and off-campus settings to community and work-based learners at under and post-graduate levels. Simon delivered a range of courses around his subject specialism in ICT and more specifically databases and spreadsheets.	B	X

3	**Lecturer Lowri** had been involved in the design and delivery of higher education work-based learning since 2006. She was a Senior Lecturer and with a research interest in what employers want from universities. Her teaching on work-based learning courses includes professional and reflective practice.	B	X
4	**Lecturer Keith** was a full-time Lecturer who for half of his full-time contract worked for Project Y. His higher education teaching had a focus on vocational curriculum including foundation degrees and 'bitesize' courses both in on and off campus environs. Lecturer Keith taught a range of the work-based learning courses and his subject areas were grounded in business studies and more specifically Leadership and Management.	B	Y
5	**Lecturer Leo** was a full-time Lecturer who had worked in higher education for 5 years. Delivering in both on and off-campus environs, he taught full-time under and post-graduate students as well as work-based learners. Lecturer Leo taught a range of work-based learning courses and his subject area was Business Studies and more specifically Human Resource Management and High Performance Leadership.	B	Y
6	**Lecturer Sian** was a Lead Tutor with full-time responsibility for Project Y in her University. With a background in training and development, she has a PhD in Coaching and Mentoring and her expertise also included the recognition and accreditation of prior learning. The specific course she taught for her work-based learning project was entitled Workplace Coaching.	C	Y
7	**Lecturer Natalie** worked in an hourly paid Lecturer capacity as a 'Work-Based Learning Fellow'. With strong links to private and third employment sectors, she also ran her own training company specialising in 'management development'. She delivered a range of work-based learning courses in Human Resources, Management and Development, Marketing and Coaching.	C	Y
8	**Lecturer Iona** worked for two days a week as a 'Work-Based Learning Fellow'. She also worked as a freelancer in workforce training and development. Her subject expertise was Mindfulness	C	Y

	in the Workplace. She also taught Leadership and Health and Safety courses both with an emphasis on Mindfulness.		
9.	**Lecturer Caroline** worked in an hourly paid Lecturer as a 'Work-Based Learning Fellow'. Describing herself as a 'Support Tutor', she worked with work-based learning students who were pursuing the recognition of prior learning routes. She had a background in the hotel and catering industry and her subject expertise was in professional practice and work-related learning.	C	Y
10	**Lecturer Tracey** was a full-time Academic Leader / Manager whose post was dedicated to the work-based learning project. Her role was to develop, monitor and moderate the project's courses, some of which she also taught. Her background included 13 years in the finance sector and her subject specialism was Leadership and Management.	A	Y
11	**Lecturer Tanya** was a full-time Lecturer based in the Business School of University A. With an academic and professional background in sales and marketing, her research interests included social marketing and consumer responses to marketing communications. Tanya's contribution to the work-based learning provision involved teaching a course entitled 'Integrating Marketing Communications'.	A	Y
12	**Lecturer Non** worked in an hourly paid Lecturer. She was a freelance artist and 'Art Facilitator' who devised and delivered art workshops and professional development training. Her work-based learning courses were entitled 'Professional Practice for the Creative Industries' and 'Artist Facilitator Skills'.	A	Y

Data Analysis

In an attempt to avoid selective and superficial analysis (Bloor et al 2001:59), all focus groups and interview recordings have been fully transcribed. The scripts are stored on Cardiff University's server in line with School Research Ethics Committee stipulations.

Following the transcribing of the audio recording, my next step was to assign a line number to each page of transcripts of both the interviews and focus groups. Described as 'line by line' coding (Charmaz, 2014:125), this exercise allowed me to commence the coding processes which served as a useful tool for referencing direct quotations as will be evident in the forthcoming chapters.

The open coding process involved my identifying and starting to categorise phenomena I found in the focus group and interview transcripts. Immediately, I was able to observe the data breaking up into component parts and it became apparent that there was consistency across both the interviews and focus groups which would allow me to identify emergent themes common to both. Perspectives on the nature and value of the course assessment strategies are a case in point. I was then able to decide that the thematic analysis I would undertake would involve consideration of the interviews and focus groups together and not as separate entities.

That said, data emergent from the focus groups was not as efficacious as that drawn from the interviews with the lecturers on answering research question 3 on the roles of curriculum and pedagogy and the route to powerful knowledge. To a large degree this is attributable to the questions asked to the lecturers being more targeted at this research question. As discussed, earlier in this chapter, the pilot study focus group revealed that I may have been overly ambitious in seeking to demonstrate evidence to support this research question through explicit questioning on the subject to the focus group participants. Instead, evidence from the focus groups in support of this research question, is arguably more interpretive than the data drawn from the interviews with lecturers in relation to research question 3 at least.

The coding process of emergent themes served to identify tacit assumptions in the data such as those held by lecturers on their perspectives on where the work-based learning courses sat in relation to widening participation, supporting regional businesses and providing progression routes into further higher education learning. Described as a 'basic frame of generic

relationships' (Borgatti 2016:1), a pertinent example of this emergent process are factors associated with course participants' perceptions of themselves as university students highlighted in the following chapter.

Ethical considerations

In accordance with Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences protocols, an Ethical Approval Form was submitted and approved by the School Research Ethics Committee. The nature of fieldwork did not involve any individuals or groups deemed vulnerable and there was no realistic risk of participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort. Nor indeed was it deemed that there was any realistic risk of any participants experiencing a detriment to their interests as a result of participation. In accordance with ethical guidelines, consent to partake in both the focus groups and interviews was gained from all focus group participants and interviewees. A 'Prospective Participation Information Sheet' (appendix 1) was given to each participant and it was reinforced that participation was voluntary and that all participants were free to withdraw at any time. Participants were similarly reassured that data generated would be anonymised and stored securely on the University's server.

Something of an ethical dilemma was presented by my own role as researcher. I have been conscious of my role as a professional in the field and perhaps of greatest relevance is that at the time of the fieldwork I was the Director of both the work-based learning projects X and Y. I was also the direct line manager of two of the lecturers interviewed and the Head of Department for a further 3 interviewees. I had no line management responsibility for the staff in other universities but did have overall responsibility for the project on which they were working. The extent to which this has impacted upon the research findings is difficult to assess. I am hopeful that my approach as a senior member of staff was such that my colleagues would feel free to decline my invitation to partake in this research. No colleagues did decline to be interviewed and the extent to which they felt obliged to co-operate given their relative position to me in the workplace has not been explored and I can only comment on it as a variable for consideration in assessment of the validity and reliability of the research. That said, scrutiny of the interview transcripts and the fieldwork findings and quotes utilised within Chapters 5 &

6 reveal the high level of professionalism, expertise and candidness with which colleagues responded to my questions.

A related concern was that in anticipation of undertaking research with university academic staff and as an 'insider' myself, I have been conscious that there are likely to be both explicit and implicit references to expectations placed on individuals to respond to internally (institutional) and externally (broader Higher Education policy from the Government and Funding bodies) driven agendas within interview responses. I am not devaluing any such references or insinuating that they are not relevant but I am recognising the potential for bias because of my own closeness to the subject. Saltmarsh et al (2011) in consideration of the complexities for those researching in higher education writes:

> *researching university policy and practice can present complex challenges to researchers and research participants, each of whom are simultaneously subject to, and implicated in, the ongoing re/production of the conditions and practices that formulate the object of higher education inquiries* (Saltmarsh et al, 2011:49).

I have thus been conscious that this is something I should be mindful of not over emphasising the relevance/importance of such issues and to maintain a focus on addressing my expressed research questions.

Evaluation

In consideration of the success or otherwise of my fieldwork, I have been mindful of how this may be best assessed. Roulston (2010) asks by what criteria might the quality of qualitative interviews be judged? (Roulston 2010:200). She comments 'there is no consistency in the terms used in relation to the assessment of 'quality' of qualitative interview research. For example, Rubin and Rubin (2005) use the terms 'credibility' and 'thoroughness' Kvale (2006) discusses validity and Mishler (1986) cites the four R's [representativeness, reactivity, reliability, replicability] (Roulston 2010:201) as quality measures.

Conscious that the use of objectivity, validity and reliability as quality measures more readily allied to a more experimental approach were problematic for this qualitative research, I have

sought to ensure the employment of appropriate tools of analysis. That said, I have been mindful that they can play an important role. For Hennink (2014):

> the *concepts* [original emphasis] *of validity and reliability remain important for assessing qualitative research, but require a different application to embrace the interpretative paradigm and qualitative research* (Hennink 2014:175).

For Guest et al (2012) validity in qualitative research should assess 'the credibility and accuracy of process and outcomes associated with a research study (Guest et al 2012:84).

My thinking has been guided by Roulston's (2010) four inter-related facets of research, namely 'whether:

(1) the use of interview data is an appropriate means to inform the research questions posed:

(2) the interaction facilitated by interviewers within the actual interview generated 'quality' data – for example, interviewers asked questions in effective ways to elicit the data required to respond to research questions, and both speakers adequately understood one another's intended meanings:

(3) 'quality' has been addressed in research design, the conduct of the research project, and the analysis, interpretation and representation of research findings; and

(4) the methods and strategies used to demonstrate the quality of interpretations and representations of data are consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the study' (Roulston 2010:202).

I do believe that the data I acquired through the interviews and focus groups were an appropriate means to address the research questions I was seeking to express through this empirical element of the thesis.

Heedful of Rice's assertion nearly eighty-five years ago that 'data obtained from an interview are as likely to embody the preconceived ideas of the interviewer as the attitudes of the subjects interviewed (Rice 1931:561 cited in Krueger & Casey 2009:2 in Hennink 2014:.4), I have been conscious to ensure the pertinence of the interview questions. Working with three different universities and across two different work-based learning projects has been to some degree reassuring around the reliability of the questions asked to the academic staff I have interviewed.

Equally, I also recognise that weaknesses in the questions could be consistent across the breadth of my interviewees.

Across the interviews I was very pleased with the interactions and rapports established between myself and the interviewees. Cognisant of the power relations inherent to the research interview, (Vähäsantanen and Saarinen 2012), and the implicit acceptance that the conversation would be guided by my research interests (Kvale 2006), I believe that my own communication skills and those of my interviewees were conducive to successful interactions and that a safe and trusted environment was created with all the interviewees.

Prior to the interviews my familiarity with individual interviewees ranged from not having previously met them before the interview, knowing them as colleagues from other universities and, for those who worked for the same university as me, we were used to working together on a daily basis in support of the delivery of the work-based learning projects. The extent to which this may have influenced my research findings is not something I have considered in any depth other than I am conscious that if I had adopted other qualitative analysis tools such as discourse or conversation analysis, then it is likely to have more prominence than the acknowledgement I have given it here. The extent to which I have been negligent by not pursuing this matter further here I am unsure of. I have concluded that the nature and the professional doctorate's remit to explore professional issues in one's own area of expertise, deems the issue something of an occupational hazard. Such an assumption is not intended to dismiss its relevance. By way of this evaluation, I note its identification, my reasoning for doing so and for not investigating further.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and the interview schedule was adhered to consistently (see appendices 2 & 3). At no time during any of the interviews did I sense any difficulties in the interviewees understanding my intended meanings within my questioning. In fact, it was often the case that as interviewees were answering my questions I was internally delighted at the salience of their responses in relation to my research questions.

My initial feeling was that the focus groups did not achieve the same degree of a direct match with my research questions attributable, I assumed to my inexperience in devising and implementing focus groups. That said, in no way did I think they were unsuccessful, more that

I had somehow been off target with my questions in relation to what I wanted to achieve. I subsequently felt a qualitative difference in the data I had gained by the two research methods. However, by undertaking the processes of coding and identifying themes it soon became apparent to me that the focus group data was invaluable and did indeed answer the research questions I had sought to address. Although the questions asked to the interviewees and focus groups were different (see appendices 3 & 4), the findings correlated very well. It was also the case that the focus group data identified new and unanticipated phenomena such as the participants' perceptions of themselves as university students (Chapter 5).

Focus group analysis concentrated on identifying and understanding the substantive issues in the data with less emphasis on seeking to take a conversation analytic approach (such as adopted by Myers and Macnaghten 1999) or a focus on group dynamics (such as Kitzinger and Farquhar 1999). That said, I do recognise that the group dynamics were influential. In focus group 3 it was soon apparent that there was a hierarchy of staff in the group. The student cohort comprised individuals from the same firm including comparatively low status administrators, middle managers, the firms Director, herself a Solicitor as well as other solicitors. While this was a pleasing demonstration of the business's commitment to staff development across the staff team, when I asked questions it was the more senior staff who took the lead in answering the questions and that more junior staff deferred to them. It also emerged through discussion that the staff had all been 'encouraged' to go on the course (performance management) by the firm's Director and hence they were not all there out of choice. I suspected that a similar 'choice' was in play in relation to engaging with the Focus Group. While all requisite steps were taken by me as the researcher to ensure that all participants were aware that they were free not to participate, I did get the impression that the company Director who was also a member of the focus group had told them all to attend. In no way was this a blatantly problematic issue and the extent to which this may have affected the responses of individuals within the group is hard to say. It is nonetheless worth highlighting that the fact that this group comprised persons of both superordinate and subordinate statuses may well have created an environment where members were reluctant to raise and/or discuss certain issues (Bloor et al 2001:51).

A confounding variable, worthy of noting here draws on the work of Foucault (Bloor and McIntosh 1989) who recognised concealment as a tangible technique of sub-ordinate resistance to coercion. That is that some of the group members may have intentionally not fully answered my questions as a form of protest at feeling obliged by their boss to be part of the group. The extent to which this has been a factor in relation to the information proffered through responses to my focus group or indeed interview questions would be very difficult if not impossible to assess and the time required and participant's willingness to further engage would doubtless prove prohibitive of further exploration.

For Hennink (2014) 'the essential purpose of focus group research is to identify a range of perspectives on a research topic, and to gain an understanding of the issues from the perspective of the participants themselves (Hennink 2014:2). I do feel this was achieved and that a sound variation of perspectives on my research topic were evident. I was also able to generate a wide range of data very quickly.

It was interesting to see and hear the level of group interaction within the focus groups as participants queried and clarified responses to each other rather than just to me. As highlighted by Morgan (1996) such interaction offers valuable data on the extent of consensus and diversity amongst participants' (Morgan 1996:139). This can be exemplified by the breadth of responses to my questioning on how participants felt about completing the course assessment requirements and the attainment of higher education credits. For some participants, neither the assessment element of the course nor its potential of the awarding of higher education credits were deemed to be of value. Instead, their primary focus and motivation was the acquisition of skills. For others the fact that the course brought with it the opportunity of credit attainment and the building of a progression route into further higher education study was a key motivator. These differences of views were for the most part evident within and across focus groups. There was only one group (6) who had a consensus view that the skills acquired were of greater value than any that may be acquired through completion of the course assessment strategy or the acquisition of higher education credits.

Bloor et al (2001) purport that pre-existing groups being used as focus groups have both epistemological and practical advantages and I would say that my experiences support this

assertion, at least in relation to the type of information I was seeking. I can only surmise, but feel that if the focus group participants were strangers they may have been less reluctant to answer the questions which although not overly personal, did necessitate the revealing of personal circumstance and motivation. After some initial uncertainty, the focus groups soon settled into amiable discussion to which all group members contributed. As advocated by Hennink (2014:5), it did seem that more spontaneous contributions came from the participants than perhaps would have been gained from more traditional one to one interviewing and that this could be attributable to focus groups having more of an alliance with everyday social interactions (Hennink 2014:5).

 On reflection, the extent to which I achieved best practice in the implementation of the course participant focus groups is questionable. I certainly tried to encourage an open and frank atmosphere but do feel that my presence was more controlling than facilitating. This may have been attributable to the fact that the focus groups comprised students who by the nature of their engagement on the courses had been conditioned into the lecturer and student power balance through attendance of the classes. Although work-based learning lecturers adopt a far more facilitative and less formal approach to the delivery of the courses (as expounded upon in Chapter 6), the courses were ultimately led by the academic lecturer. My arrival to talk to the groups in the same environment as where teaching had taken place and the participants being aware of my role as another academic/member of staff 'from the University' doubtless contributed to the maintenance of perceived power balances.

In conclusion, I offer that the research design developed has sought to integrate the components of the study in a logical way to address my research questions. Constraints that may impact upon quality include the time available to me, my interviewees and the employees who comprised the focus groups. I also feel that I learned a huge amount about managing the intricacies of both focus groups and interviewees as I implemented them and thus any future investigations would benefit from a more robust approach. That said, given the parameters outlined above, my practice has been honest and transparent and my interpretations presented in the following chapters are representative of the research findings. My aim has been to ensure the interpretations and representations of data are consistent with the study's theoretical underpinnings.

From herein, the lecturers interviewed are referenced using their pseudonyms followed by the interview transcript line number. For example: (Lecturer Simon:44). The first time an excerpt from a transcript is used, the lecturer's university and project is also referenced.

Focus group participants are referenced to the number of the focus group they attended followed by their gender (F for female and M for male). Each male or female has then been assigned a number which is followed the transcript line number. For example, the reference: (Focus group participant, Grp2:M4:767) is decoded as Focus Group participant from Focus Group 2, Male no.4, transcript line 767.

Chapter 5: Fieldwork findings; expectations and university administration

The nature of these courses as university accredited work-based learning brought with them the need for tailored pedagogies to support achievement. How approaches differed from traditional university teaching methods was a recurrent issue raised by the lecturers interviewed. Comparisons were also made with traditional workforce development activity with many participants reporting they had been expecting something more akin to traditional notions of training. Lecturers also reported that they played brokering roles in managing the ramifications of divergences in course participant, employer and university expectations. The ESF money that funded the provision brought with it a range of expectations and project outcomes that participating universities were contracted to fulfil. These included a value for money calculation per higher education credit achieved. Hence, the more course participants who achieved higher education, the greater the value for money calculations and ability of the projects to meet their targets. For the range of stakeholders, achievement related to more than just the successful completion of the course. For many, it was solely manifested in the acquisition of new job-related skills. For others the opportunity of   earning higher education credits through the successful completion of the courses' assessment strategies was seen as an achievement goal. As was, for some of this group, the use of the credits achieved as stepping stones onto further higher education study.

This chapter and the one that follows, draws on the fieldwork findings to highlight how traditional didactic teaching models and summative end of course assessments were deemed inappropriate for these work-based learning students. Instead, more collaborative teaching methods and accumulative assessment strategies were adopted.

Broadly but not exclusively, the emergent themes within the fieldwork findings were around:

- expectations; i.e. those of course participants and lecturers on the nature of the courses and how these could be seen on a spectrum that ranged from those allied to traditional notions of workplace training at one end to more formal university academic courses at the other.

- university administration; this included how the experiences of administration processes impacted on the course participant 'student' experience as well as the curriculum available to lecturers.
- progression; i.e. the extent to which course participants used these courses as a stepping stone to further higher education study.
- pedagogy and knowledge. i.e. how the courses were delivered, the nature of the assessment strategies employed, and how these related to the debates highlighted in Chapter 3 and more specifically, Young's notion of powerful knowledge.

This chapter expounds findings on the first three themes. Lecturer and student expectations are explained and a link established between individuals' expectations of the courses and how they were both taught and received. This is followed by consideration of the role played by academic administration systems in shaping the course participant student experience. Finally, in relation to the extent to which these courses served to widen access, the chapter concludes in consideration of findings on progression opportunities onto further higher learning.

Chapter 6 then goes on to consider in more detail the pedagogic approaches employed and the relationship between the course participant experience and the types of knowledge raised in Chapter 3.

Expectations of lecturers

For Hager (2000), making better judgements represents the paradigmatic aim of work-based learning. From this we can infer the importance of nurturing in students the ability to move from the specific work/subject context to the building of broader meta-cognitive skills associated with powerful knowledge. Establishing the extent to which these work-based learning courses achieved this goal is key to this investigation. In seeking to assess it, a clear relationship has emerged between the basic assumptions held by lecturers on the nature of the courses, and the extent to which their pedagogic practice can be allied to the pursuit of powerful knowledge.

The lecturers interviewed differed significantly in their beliefs around what the courses were there to do. Avis' (2009) assertion that work-based learning faces two contradictory directions could go some way in explaining such divergences. He writes:

> *Discussions of workplace learning face in two contradictory directions, one towards inclusion and notions of fairness and equal opportunity, and the other towards a version of the knowledge/information society. The latter is deemed to be the basis upon which the necessity for work-based learning resides* (Avis 2009:8).

In addition to these positions being clear in the views of the lecturers interviewed, they are also evident in the overall aims of the work-based learning programme outlined in Chapter 2 (page 29). Fieldwork findings clearly demonstrate lecturers dealing with the tensions that managing these two aspirations brought. There is also evidence that rather than seeing contradictory directions, that in practice, some of the lecturers actively sought for them to complement each other. This position can be seen as being on something of a continuum within lecturers' responses from not attempting to synthesise the two at all to very much doing so.

As this provision targeted some of Wales' comparatively low skilled and low qualified working populace, the potential for it to serve as a vehicle for widening access was for some lecturers, an important one. Acceptant of the employer-driven agenda on which the provision was founded and which is criticised as restricting curriculum and disempowering individuals (Lester and Costley 2010), the transformative potential is clearly for some, an implicit raison d'être of the projects. For others, it is at best, a welcome additional outcome with upskilling considered the provisions' principal aim.

A strategic economic development imperative was clearly at the forefront of some of the lecturers' thinking. For example, the potential impact that these courses could have on the productivity of regional businesses and the national economy was at the forefront of lecturer Tanya's view on the value of the provision. Specifically, she referred to what she saw as a responsibility for universities to contribute to Welsh economic renewal. She said:

> *I think universities have to focus more, research is important, and students who pay fees are of course very important but sometimes I feel like we are a Business school, but what do we do for the local economy? Nothing. So, I'm proud to be*

> *working on this because I can say I am working in a Business School but I am*
> *also helping small businesses as well*
>
> <div align="right">(Lecturer Tanya, University A, Project Y:466).</div>

Whether intentional or not, the use of the word 'but' in the last sentence is an interesting one. That Tanya said '*I am working in a Business School but I am also helping small businesses as well*' suggests her implicit belief that the curriculum within the business school is separate and very different to 'helping small businesses'. To extend these assumptions further we can then infer that the knowledge type held within the university Business School is perceived by Tanya as being some distance from her work with local businesses. It can equally be inferred from this excerpt that Tanya supports the premise of these courses being utilised in both utilitarian and transformative capacities.

Lecturer Tim, who delivered courses on the use of social media when asked about his perceptions of the course, said that he thought that the purpose of the courses was to 'allow businesses within the region to be able to engage with the digital economy in a far more informed strategic way' (Lecturer, Tim, University B, Project X:585). The potential benefits to individuals then very much a secondary consequence of the economic imperative.

That these courses were very different from the delivery of traditional and mainstream university curriculum and were linked to an economic imperative was repeatedly raised by the lecturers interviewed and focus group participants alike. Lecturer Non placed an emphasis on a responsibility for educators to be mindful of how engagement with the courses should result in increased organisational productivity and profit, saying:

> *Traditionally university education as far as I understand it, is subject orientated and if*
> *you like has an education for education's sake methodology behind it, whereas the work*
> *based learning must have practical applications in the work place which must have*
> *behind them a commercial application. So, you must be bearing in mind all the time*
> *how do these ideas or how do these things you work on translate into making money*
> (Lecturer Non, University A, Project Y:6).

Interestingly, Non is not negating the 'education for education's sake' methodology, indeed she recognises it as integral to university study. What she is saying is that in order for these courses to meet the needs of participants that they should have a tangible business benefit. The potential is thus implied that 'official' or neo-conservative types of knowledge should merge with more 'know-how' or instrumental knowledge types. Non was clearly seeking to couple both knowledge types in order to provide what she saw as a fit for purpose curriculum offer for these work-based learners.

With a focus on the more instrumental and business-orientated drive underpinning engagement, lecturer Tanya, emphasised the practical skills and knowledge and potential positive impact on business productivity that the courses could bring. She said:

> *My personal experience is that the people that come on the course are not too interested in theories, they want practical guidance and tips. They are happy to look at cases and examples and it is not that they are against listening to the theory but they are more interested in how it could be practically implemented into their business and help them market their business better and how they can grow their business and be better. A lot of them some of them say because the course work for mine is developing an IMC* [Integrated Marketing Communications] *plan and they really want to develop that plan and coming on the course helps them focus, it gives them a deadline, obviously it's a course deadline for the assignment and they are saying, I've been thinking of doing this plan for ages, but everything else takes priority and I just never get around to it, I've got all these ideas and now this course is helping me focus and regroup my ideas, it actually gets something on paper. So they find it valuable, but I don't think they are doing it for the credits as much, they are doing it more for the practical hints and tips that they might get out of it and the actual document that they have been forced to do because of the course* (Lecturer Tanya:92).

Similarly, Human Resources (HR) Lecturer Natalie talked about how course participants joined her courses to learn specific detail on how to improve practice rather than achieve credits or a qualification. She said:

> *A lot of the HR students that I have in, they are people who have suddenly found themselves having to take on responsibility for HR in their organisations. They've never done it before, and they've gone to their employer or their manager or they may be the business owner and they've said well we need to know something about this, we are frightened because of the legislation and all the rest of it and we need to do a course so*

*we need to learn. So their motivation is to learn rather than to achieve (*Lecturer Natalie, University C, Project Y:261*).*

In a similar vein, Lecturer Leo with reference to the delivery of a course on employment law said:

> t*hey* [course participants] *are coming in literally for the information, they are coming in to make sure that they are doing things right. The qualification is irrelevant* (Lecturer Leo, University B, Project Y:115).

Leo's quote highlights an area that will be returned to later in the findings, which is that in some cases there was a clear relationship between the course subject and the propensity of both lecturers and course participants to ally course content with characteristics of powerful knowledge and vice versa.

The clearly utilitarian positions thus far espoused are very much counterbalanced by the views of different lecturers. Interestingly, Simon an ICT lecturer from the same project as Tim expounded the transformative potential of the courses. He held the broader meta-cognitive skills that higher education seeks to nurture as paramount to course delivery. He said:

> *the primary purpose of all higher education is to develop individual autonomy and to shift a person from thinking based on what they have been told and questioning and analysing and being critical of the information that has been provided to them. So it is almost as if the subject is the second most important part of the course. It's important that there is some shift in the learners between the start and end of their first module in my opinion where they come in expecting to be told exactly what to do and they leave the course being in charge of their own skills and making the decisions for themselves. I think that is the most crucial element of what we teach* (Lecturer Simon, University B, Project X:295).

In a comparable vein, for lecturer Iona, enabling individuals 'to make more skillful choices' was central to her role (Lecturer Iona, University C, Project Y:449). Similarly, for lecturer Lowri, the ramifications of the engagement with these courses for the employer/business were secondary to the benefits that they could bring individuals. She said:

> *For me the purpose of what we teach is all about a person's continuing professional development. Ultimately I think it's more about the individual [..] the sort of business*

benefits of what we do are almost a by-product of the individual's own development. So for me, it's really about enhancing a person's career prospects, increasing confidence and really sort of empowering that individual within the work place and then the benefits to the employer are almost secondary, a secondary consequence of that (Lecturer Lowri, University B, Project X:469).

Lecturers Caroline and Natalie, also alluded to the transformative potential of the courses. Natalie said:

As a tutor my purpose would be to enhance people's knowledge, understanding and skills and also perhaps to inspire them to go on to further learning (Lecturer Natalie:729).

(Note the apparent hesitancy of Natalie in consideration of the courses as providing routes to further higher learning opportunities).

And Caroline:

For me, it is to enable individuals to achieve what they are quite capable of achieving and to break through barriers that they thought were there and which aren't really. It's to enhance the life for individuals (Lecturer Caroline, University C, Project Y:356).

Different perspectives were evident across all the fieldwork findings. In recognition of the breadth of rationales and expectations, Lecturer Keith highlighted how the role of individual agency and motivation should be acknowledged and incorporated into teaching and learning approaches. He said:

People come on courses for a number of reasons, they might have been sent by their managers, they might have got an interest themselves, etc. etc. So, the amount of what they get out of the course differs on how much they put in, definitely. I am a firm believer in that. So, I think the type of modules I have taught, like Leadership, Performance Management, Organisation, Management, etc. are about changing, for me anyway, about changing people's perspectives rather than training them to do something. For me it's just getting them to think differently and I think surely that's what academia is about (Lecturer Keith, University B, Project Y:204).

Although not explicit, within Keith's words and reference to 'what academia is all about' is an implicit reference to the power of curriculum and his role as an educator rather than a trainer.

For lecturers, balancing the challenges of the competing expectations of course participants, employers, the projects' host universities and funders was an ongoing issue. In practice it seemed that lecturers moulded university curriculum to meet the needs of a diverse student group who were often unclear about what they had signed up for (or in some cases been signed up to).

There was a repeated theme that the academic nature of the courses was 'in a way secondary – a spin off' (Lecturer Caroline:106) to the skills that could be acquired. There was concurrently however, an acceptance for many of the lecturers that this was par for the course and did not detract from the value of courses in providing higher level learning. This suggested an instrumental merging of theoretical with know-how knowledge in the pursuit of higher learning over and above upskilling.

A seeming lack of clarity at the point of university employer initial engagement was apparent with employers unclear on the offer provided by the work-based learning projects. It was not unusual for employers and course participants to see the courses and the access to subject experts they brought, as vehicles to address specific issues in their businesses and organisations. On this issue and the different wants and needs of work-based learning students compared to conventional, campus-based learners, lecturer Leo said:

> *On campus it is more learning for the sake of learning, but they* [typical campus-based undergraduate students] *don't know what the problems are yet. So they are not honing in on a problem saying I want tools to deal with that problem. Whereas just the other day at* [Company name] *these guys wanted tools and methods to deal with this kind of employee or that kind of employee…So they are coming along and they see us as being more fix-it people as opposed to educationalists* (Lecturer Leo:18).

In a comparable vein, lecturer Lowri, acknowledged that course participants' motivations for attendance may often be the pursuit of solutions to workplace issues. She went on to discuss how the fact that these courses were accredited higher education learning could be problematic as course participants had not expected a university course assessment. Lowri offered a rationale for seeking to use assessment strategies that have utility and best facilitate the attainment of higher education credits. She said:

I think there is then a tension between people coming to us to develop the skills that they need in the work place and whether or not they want to actually submit an assignment or whether or not they want [higher education] *credits for that. I think what is key is the assessment strategy so that what you are offering them is an assignment which is relevant because otherwise it just becomes a paper exercise that you need them to submit an assignment because you need to award credits, so it's got to be about what is relevant to them (*Lecturer Lowri:56*).*

To some extent, there was a feeling from the lecturers interviewed that course participants needed to be duped into enrolling on the courses for fear that if they were fully cognisant that these were accredited university courses they would not do so. For lecturer Leo, this impacted negatively on the teaching and learning experience. He said:

We need to think….well who do we target? what with? And; why do we want them on our course? On this job, I have never apologised so much for what I do. 'Oh, sorry but there is an assessment, I'm sorry it is going to take x amount of weeks, I'm sorry you are going to have to do a bit of extra work'. I have never had to apologise so much…The moment you start apologising, you have to ask is that the right person for the course (Lecturer Leo:707).

In an attempt to avoid such misunderstandings, lecturer Natalie spoke about the importance of transparency at the outset of courses to ensure that participants were clear they were not on a typical 'training course' but an accredited university short course (Lecturer Natalie:71).

Tim similarly spoke of the need to reinforce with students that this is a university course.

I try whenever possible to clarify and solidify that I am not a Trainer, I am an Academic, I am a Lecturer, I am teaching at Level 4 and Level 4 means that it's not just about learning the practical side, although we do work to cover that, it's about them being able then to use this and take this forward (Lecturer, Tim:184).

Expectations of course participants and employers

Course participant expectations on how the courses should be delivered was as an issue for Iona, who taught a popular 'Mindfulness in the Workplace' course. She spoke of how using an internet 'TED' (A website hosting short talks / lectures from individuals deemed to have relevant expertise) Talk as a teaching tool was criticised by her students. She said:

> [I had a] *group of four from a hard core corporate setting whose expectations were of a training event. For example, I show a leading neuro-scientific researcher giving a short eight-minute TED talk about her research into Mindfulness - It's a good way for them to see how this develops. Normally people find that really interesting. They find that a researcher's insight paves the way for their understanding, especially if they are writing at Level 7. But this group said no, you should only show talks, if they are 'wow'. That was the only time I have had an expectation of everything has to be 'wow', which I think is a training kind of approach, they are used to a slick training approach, whereas this is another learning environment* (Lecturer Iona:51).

In a comparable vein, and with some sympathy to the complaining students above and an eye on retaining students throughout the duration of the course, Simon spoke of the need for courses:

> *to be very interesting and potentially entertaining because the students haven't paid and haven't committed any great length of time to the course and so it is very easy for them to drop out* (Lecturer, Simon:15).

It is important to recognise that from the perspective of employers and course participants, these courses were marketed to them as a vehicle for upskilling in specific subject areas e.g. ICT and Leadership and Management. It is then no surprise that some had expectations that they would be engaging with something akin to traditional notions of workplace training courses. The reality that as accredited university learning, a commitment to engaging with the course assessment requirements and the need for independent study that allied it, was, it seems presented as a secondary consideration. For the lecturers delivering the courses a balance needed to be struck that recognised the different expectations of this student group. Lecturer Natalie said:

> *When you are looking at work based learners their expectations and the purpose for them, from their point of view might be quite different to that* [of mainstream students]. *They don't see formal education in the same way. They are coming in with a whole range of experiences, so […] we've got to look at redefining what we are trying to do with them* (Lecturer Natalie:753).

In a seeming rejection of theoretical knowledge, a question asked by some course participants as relayed by lecturers, was that of 'what can the university do for us?' This was particularly evident from those involved with Project Y. As this project had a focus on the development of

leadership and management skills, the comparative isolation of university lecturers from the reality of leading and managing 'real world' businesses was perceived as problematic. Lecturer Leo said:

> *They are expecting us to be either a training outfit or a dusty old academic who couldn't possibly know anything about their job but will profess to know everything* (Lecturer Leo:245).

This for Leo, reinforced the need for tailored pedagogic approaches:

> *If you are going to do it, do it properly. Don't just pick up a dusty old academic, plonk him down in a different room with the same materials and expect to switch those people on* (Lecturer Leo:48).

Focus group participants' held similar views. One said:

> *This course would not have worked with a Professor academic type. Sitting in structured lectures with a complete academic - it never ever worked and you'd just be every five minutes nodding off. There is a place for that, don't get me wrong, but with the group of people that work here, this worked much better. It was just about right and fitted with what we wanted - it had to be tailored to suit. That was the most important thing* (Focus group participant, Grp4, M6:426).

And another:

> *I work in an office environment, but I come from a manufacturing background - a lot of our people are from manufacturing and engineering. We are not a corporation where we sit in offices in silence, and I think if we work on text books stuff say, then people would switch off because I've been there and I have switched off*
> (Focus group participant, Grp4, M6:89).

With no cash cost to companies for employers and their staff to engage with these professional development opportunities, it could reasonably be assumed that this would have been an incentive for engagement. While that could well have been the crux on which decisions to engage with the provision were based, lecturer Sian raised the view that for some employers and course participants '*'funded' means bad value*' (Lecturer Sian, University C, Project Y:332). Because no financial investment was required by participating companies, the 'training' offered was deemed to be of less value than if they had purchased the expertise from

a commercial training provider. On this issue, Lecturer Non speaks about a 'double edged sword' with a more positive element being the increased access to learning that free provision brings. She said:

> *The fact that these were fully funded courses has led to two things, one is that some people have taken them up who haven't valued them properly because they haven't bought into them financially so they have kind of used them as a social situation which has been distracting to other learners who are there very seriously. The other thing is that it has enabled people who do need the courses and value them greatly, to participate when in normal circumstances they could not afford to give themselves that time out and that training, so I think there is a double edged sword there. Pedagogic value to the students is enormous and the fact that we allow access to people who otherwise couldn't afford it is really important* (Lecturer Non:275).

The points raised by Non highlight the potential for these courses to play a role in widening access to higher education and the promotion of the well-documented wider benefits of learning (Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning 2006). A breadth of roles and organisations from which course participants derived contributed to a range of motivations for engagement. Some course participants elected individually to enhance their skills and knowledge in a specific subject to support the needs of their business whereas others were encouraged to attend the courses by their employers. A further variant on the 'type' of course participant was if they had accessed the courses as sole traders, employers and/or employees across small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and micro-businesses or third sector organisations. This was reflected in the range of expectations on the value and purpose of these courses. Some of the expectations from lecturers and course participants were at odds with the parameters and measures of success prescribed by the provision's funding body, the European Social Fund. For example, one employer rather than facilitating the delivery of courses to their employees in a general workforce development sense, had attempted to use the opportunity of 'free' Leadership and Management Courses to engage university lecturers in addressing specific internecine issues he was experiencing in his organisation.

In addition to this differentiation in how participants came to be involved in the courses and their associated expectations of them, the actual subject of the course studied had a link with perceptions of the courses. It was evident that those studying ICT courses such as 'Social

Media' and 'Spreadsheets' had a far more instrumental view of the courses than those studying other more practice-based courses such as 'Professional Practice in the Creative Industries' and 'Leadership & Management'.

One focus group participant engaged on a Social Media course commented:

> *I think the key for all of this and for everybody, the success of small businesses, whether it is one person or a 100 people is about upskilling, and, I think that for South Wales, that has got be a real focus. If we upskill ourselves we become more efficient and more productive and that means we will be better as a region* (Focus group participant, Grp2,M2: 110).

The parameters then for this course participant are clear and to some extent make redundant arguments that uphold powerful knowledge as a curriculum principle, certainly in relation to these courses at least. It reiterates the importance of clarifying the grey area occupied by upskilling and higher education within these courses and ultimately questions the use of higher education in this way.

Workplace training 'versus' university work-based learning

This use of accredited higher education as a tool for upskilling adults in workplaces has presented challenges for universities, employers and employees alike. A common theme was that many course participants reported that they had initially either assumed or been led to believe that these courses were 'free training' provided by universities. The emphasis here being on the word 'training' rather than 'free'.

The notion that employers were receiving training brought with it its own pre-conceptions. Lecturer Leo, discussed how course participants' prior experiences of poor training courses had impacted negatively on some of his students' expectations when attending his courses. He said:

> *We are seen as Trainers. One of our biggest problems quite frankly is the negativity we get off participants because they have been forced on all these training things is that their expectations are what you do is training. So, they think at best they are going to manage to shoe horn out of you an answer to a problem, but worst and probably more commonly they completely shut down for the first session anyway because they think it*

> *is more crap… you've got to overcome all those significant barriers before you even get underway* (Lecturer Leo:213).

As a consequence of assuming the courses constituted a variant of workplace training there was often an initial lack of understanding of the higher education credits that accompanied the courses and the expectations for independent study.   It was thus not unusual for employers, on the presumption that these courses were 'free training', to sign their staff up   and not provide any support or workload alleviation for course participants to undertake assessment tasks. For lecturers tasked with ensuring course participants completed the courses and submitted course work, this was a significant issue.   A consequent assumption that these were typical training courses was that there was no expectation of, or commitment to, independent study outside of the time spent attending the course. Lecturer Lowri differentiated between course participants who had been 'sent' on the courses by their employers which sometimes happened within the 'in-house' model of delivery and those who attended as individuals suggesting that the former were far more likely to complete the course assessment requirements than the latter. She said:

> *I think where we are really targeting work force development* (open courses) *they want to do the course - they want to do the submission; they've got the support from the manager. Very often the manager then is giving them time release* [to attend the courses], *and also more often than not giving them time release to do independent study in the work place as well. So, it is recognised at the outset that they've engaged in a higher education module of study, they are not just doing training in the work place* (Lecturer Lowri:49).

For lecturer Sian it has been equally important to communicate to course participants the amount of time they should realistically expect in order to successfully complete the course. She said:

> *We have to say - do you know what - you need to find now quite a fair old chunk of space to study and reflect and think and write and all the rest of it.* [Here] *the term 'work based learning' is quite misleading* (Lecturer Sian:320).

From student/course participant perspectives, that these courses were different from traditional notions of training was welcomed. Comments included:

> *Compared to training courses, some of which have been horrendous, this feels at a much higher level but an understandable level. I done a previous course which was*

absolutely invaluable because it was delivered at the right level. There was a lot of practical input, but you also had the theory behind it all as well. You knew you were being supported both ways (Focus group participant, Grp 1,F1:49).

On a training course you just think oh no not training again, I can't be bothered. I didn't see this as training, I wanted to come (Focus group participant, Grp 5,F3:386).

For many course participants, the associated requirement for independent study that allies a higher education course was reported in numerous cases as being unanticipated, unwanted and problematic. An unambiguous interest in the potential for skills acquisition that engagement with these work-based learning projects could bring was the overwhelming motive for employer and employee engagement. Any accompanying higher education credits or the potential to pursue further higher education learning such as a full under or post graduate award were at best secondary and at worst, unwanted.

Such views were largely mirrored by focus group participants encapsulated in the one quote below:

My main motivation for coming on the course was to learn how to set up a social media pages for my organisation and I have done so and am in the process of developing them. I have already achieved my goal for the course even though we are only half way through the course (Focus group participant, Grp 1,F1:11).

Another that:

The online marketing and social media marketing has had a direct effect on the way I run my business to the point that in fact, I got an order only today as a direct result of changing as a direct result of things I had learned on the course. So it has had that much of a fundamental effect (Focus group participant:. Grp2, M2:16).

Comparable views were expressed by focus group participants when asked about undertaking the courses assessment in order to achieve higher education credits:

It really is no interest to me because it is my own business. Because, I am not likely to be going after a piece of paper or looking for a job. Do I need it? Do I think it is relevant? Well yes, I suppose it is useful but I don't see it being much of a benefit at the end of the day (Focus group participant, Grp 1, M2:148).

Another focus group participant similarly commented:

> *I just work for a small business so I just need the knowledge from the course to be able to achieve what I want to achieve within my business* (Focus group participant, Grp 2, F1:62).

Others said:

> *For me I have done an MA and an MSC so the attraction for me was not the credits but the actual content of the course* (Focus group participant. Grp 1,F1:119).

> *You talk about credits: I am assuming there is something at the end of this? From my point of view, this does not interest me. The benefit is what I can learn here that I can take back (*Focus group participant, Grp 1, M2:121*).*

Moreover, the fact that these courses were accredited university learning were explicitly deemed to be a disincentive by one focus group member from an international steel manufacturer. She had the dual role of being a course participant and encouraging colleagues within her organisation to undertake the work-based learning courses on offer.   She said:

> *I purposely didn't emphasise the university bit or the credits bit because I thought it would put people off... Because if you looked at a lot of leaders in our organisation, they haven't necessarily – they don't necessarily want to go on and do a degree or a formal qualification and for those that haven't got any qualifications I think it would have been quite daunting for them to think I am now going to become a university student and therefore it's going to be difficult. That's people's perspective of it, university means it's going to be difficult because I've not done anything since I left school twenty/ thirty years ago. I didn't elaborate on it – that they could get twenty credits (*Focus group participant, Grp 4, F4:606*).*

Something of an elephant in the room was created by the use of higher education in this way. For many of the lecturers and most notably Simon and Lowri, the courses offered a vehicle for the promotion of higher learning. However, in order to ensure course participants were not deterred, this potential was shrouded in approaches that would appeal and resonate with course participants' pre-conceptions. As these were typically utilitarian and limited assumptions on what they had enrolled on and why, the challenge for lecturers was a complicated one. It became one of ensuring that the subject-related skills, which were the primary motive for engagement of many course participants, were effectively combined with both theoretical knowledge that differentiated these courses from mainstream 'training' and the study skills that many course participants lacked into these short-course deliveries. Lecturer Tim encapsulates

the challenges with reference to a short course he delivered in social media. For him, the fact that these university courses had no prior educational attainment pre-requisites was problematic. He said:

> *My job is then, to teach regardless of their academic ability. Social media is a very large topic area, someone comes, and they may want to do something very specific. Now I will always endeavour to have a look at something if someone wants to look at that, but if it is not part of the course outline or learning outcomes then it is an additional thing which I don't necessarily have the time for - my task is to get them through the learning requirements of the module, to get them to succeed in the learning outcomes and to get them to submit an assessment which meets the criteria of the assessment. There's a conflict there between what I am expected to do as an academic and what the students expect of me as a teacher* (Lecturer Tim:154).

University administration systems and processes

Working on the periphery of universities, delivering courses significantly distanced from the core activities of the institutions for whom they work, lecturers reported significant hurdles to overcome in terms of influencing university systems and processes to accommodate these work-based learning short courses. For example, all course participants were required to enrol as university students and as the majority of course participants never visited a university campus, this needed to be achieved remotely. They also needed to be enrolled at unconventional times during the academic year. This was problematic for University B where on-line enrolment 'windows' were restricted to dates in September and January when mainstream courses commenced. Similarly, lecturer Sian from University C reported:

> *I just think they don't know quite what to do with it* [Project name]. *We don't fit into the academic model, our students don't start in September and finish in the summer. We work through the summer, it's odd and we have fought incredibly hard to get it established* (Lecturer Sian:220).

In consideration of the comparatively low student numbers and credits studied, the accommodation of this provision within structural and procedural systems has doubtless been driven by an imperative that it demonstrates a commitment to employer engagement and

business-facing activity. These are activities which Welsh universities are encouraged by the Welsh Government and Funding Council to demonstrate their commitment to. The experiences of the work-based learning projects are mirrored in the findings of a report on broader UK higher education management of work-based learning which concluded that such initiatives were 'punching above their weight' in terms of influencing practice across higher education institutions (Tallantyre 2010:6). Interestingly, and for further consideration in Chapter 6, the report concludes that:

> *the impact of work-based learning systems upon institutions had often been much greater than the relative size of schemes would suggest in stimulating innovations such as modularisation, credit, flexible delivery, accreditation for prior experiential learning (APEL), etc* (Tallantyre 2010:6*).*

The accommodation of the needs of these work-based learning students into university administration systems was largely in process while this research was being undertaken. Hence, experientially, both lecturers and students were disadvantaged in comparison to students and staff engaged with the universities core provision. While there is no immediately evident connection between the ramifications of these administrative hurdles and the thesis' research questions, a link becomes apparent manifested in the course participant student experience.

For course participants whose courses were delivered in short time blocks such as over three days, the consequences of a lack of supporting administrative systems were most significant. In all three universities, the costs of not being able to successfully enrol as university students meant a denial in access to institutional virtual learning environments such as 'Moodle' or 'Blackboard'. While lecturers adopted 'work around' approaches to ensure course participants were adequately supported in terms of access to learning resources, the notion of these university students as 'other' is compounded and course participants' student experiences were significantly limited.

This was a source of much frustration for course participants and staff. One focus group participant, a sole trader, spoke about the time he had taken out of his business in attempting to deal with difficulties in accessing university services. Speaking about attempting to submit his assignment for assessment, he said:

*It got to the point whereby on one course when we got to the end of the class and had to submit our assignment, three quarters of the class could not submit how the university wanted them to which was through a portal. The only way we could do it was by email because stuff hadn't gone through and we hadn't been properly registered and were not classed as students. I actually lost an hour and a half of my time trying to sort out the mess trying to get logged on and registered. It was so cumbersome I just said I am not going to do that anymore (*Focus group participant, Grp:2, M1:32*).*

Such issues were experienced across the projects and universities. One focus group member, who was accessing work-based learning provision from two universities, reported that:

In fairness, I am also a student in [another participating University] *and I cannot even access anything. I can't even log in to the point where I have now given in trying to use 'Athens' and things like that and I would rather just try and do it myself on Google* (Focus group participant, Grp 4, M6:290).

Other comments included:

I had just actually given up with trying to use the University resources so I haven't even bothered to try (Focus group participant, Grp 4, M5:308).

To some extent [Tutor name] *is working outside the system there just to make sure that you have the stuff because sometimes if you wait for the University to do it you come to the end of your course and we've got our assignments in in the next three weeks and we still haven't been able to log on* (Focus group participant, Grp 5, M3:259).

I have given up with that. I've got a lot of printed material or saved material from doing another course so it was quite good for me really to be able to expand on what I had already been doing with my Masters that was about Leadership, but I'd already been looking (Focus group participant. Grp 4, M4:304).

Impact of administration experiences on course participant student identity

Findings revealed that the ramifications of uncooperative university administration were more than a sense of frustration at time having been wasted and were linked to perceptions of a 'non-student' identity. It is perhaps no surprise that as course participants were geographically distanced from university campuses and the services and opportunities they bring and hindered

by unaccommodating administration systems and processes, that any sense of identity as students was limited.

On this issue, one focus group participant said:

> *There is no engagement apart from the course. There is nothing to say we are a student. It takes such a long time. In fact, I tried to become a student on the last two courses but by the time they nearly had the paperwork sorted, I had finished the course*

(Focus group participant, Grp2, M3:29).

In one of the universities involved, and in line with all other students, work-based learning students received a University identification (ID) card when their enrolments had been processed. However, as cards were only valid for the duration of the course and given the delays and problems with work-based learners' enrolments, it was often the case that by the time work-based learners received their cards, they had become invalid.

This may sound inconsequential but having a student ID card had a clear link with the extent to which course participants saw themselves as university students. Although a minority view, sentiments are encapsulated in the responses below:

> *Because I have my card, I do feel like an adult student*

(Focus group participant, Grp, 6,F3:364).

In addition:

> *When you look at the card and your picture is on it you know you are a student*
> (Focus group participant, Grp 6, F2:370).

Conversely, some of the focus group participants were clear that they had no desire to feel like university students:

> *I don't think it's a bad thing that we don't feel like university students*
> (Focus group participant, Grp 6, F1:390).

> *I just think that would be something else I would have to do*
> (Focus group participant Grp 6, M2:395).

We are not students, that's our bottom line isn't it, we are workers
(Focus group participant Grp 3, M3:204).

It just feels like a negative thing, perhaps I don't want to feel like a student - I manage a team and I didn't go to university for a reason so I don't want to feel like a university student - I want to feel like a manager (Focus group participant. Grp 6, M2:398).

You don't have time to think like a university student, you are so busy doing your own job as well [as the course] (Focus group participant Grp 4, F1:247).

Despite the fact that they were studying university courses with student identification cards to confirm their enrolment, it was the majority view of focus group participants that they neither felt nor wanted to feel like university students.

No members of the focus groups had utilised any of the broader student services available to them, such as Student Services, Disability and Dyslexia Services, Learning Resource Centres, or Careers guidance despite their eligibility to do so.   Moreover, when asked if they had accessed any of the universities campuses, the responses below encapsulate commonly held views of the focus group participants:

We haven't been there – we haven't needed to go there - the university has come to us – it is a different approach (Focus group participant Grp 3, F5:194).

When I went to university that was my main focus, I was in university to get my degree, but here, the main focus is doing your job and then this is something that we do on a Tuesday morning, it's not the main thing going on, it's just something during the working day that, do you know what I mean, we are not focusing on being students, we come into work and then doing that whilst we are at work (Focus group participant Grp 3, F1:246).

*If we had to say travel to Cardiff, go into a student classroom, and do this it would feel more like university. Like now, when we do finish this we will go back to work after lunch - it is fresh in our minds we are straight back into work (*Focus group participant Grp 5,F2:213).

University administration and curriculum

A challenge for lecturers across the work-based learning projects and universities was the pertinence of university validated course (also referred to as modules) descriptors and assessment requirements to the perceived needs of employers and employees. Taking existing modules 'off the shelf' was rarely fit for purpose and often lecturers reported that fundamental changes to teaching, learning and assessment strategies were required to meet the needs of work-based learners.

For Tracey, this need was recognised by the Academic Registry department of her university who she reported had been very co-operative in changing its systems and processes to accommodate the needs of the project. She said that this has been done in recognition that:

> *if you have to put on a course for a company, you've got to go to that business, get that descriptor written, get it into Academic Registry and they've got to turn it round* (Lecturer Tracey, University A, Project Y:699).

It was not always possible for work-based learning project staff to make changes to curriculum and assessment processes hence lecturers had no choice but to give work-based learning students assessment strategies that they did not believe were fit for purpose for these cohorts. Restrictions were usually based on the timeframes required to alter course descriptor documents proving prohibitive. Further hindering was encountered whereby one of the universities involved had imposed a block on staff making any changes to existing validated curriculum as the institution managed the demands of a merger of two universities into one. This timing coincided with the work-based learning projects for which it was responsible being at the peak of their obligations to fulfil project targets. This created an immediate conflict for the work-based learning lecturers who espoused to provide an 'employer responsive' curriculum offer. It resulted in them having to fit the square peg of previously validated module descriptors into the round hole of meeting employer and course participants' wants and needs.

Where the work-based learning projects were able to validate specific work-based learning courses, the requirements of some institutional quality assurance protocols were deemed to hinder any flexibility within them. Lecturer Leo articulated the challenge of being required to meet the specific learning outcomes contained within module descriptors in these work-based learning contexts. He said:

> *We don't know what our students want from us until we meet them, but we are forecasting by putting these* [course] *descriptors together. With assessments we've got more freedom there if only we had the imagination at inception to make it possible* (Lecturer Leo:299).

As conduits between employers and the university, lecturers repeatedly offered examples of how bridges needed to be built between the two. For example, lecturer Tracey spoke of the need to 'translate' between the languages used by employers, employees, and that used by the university. She said:

> *So they know it is a validated course, they know it's got learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are still written in a very academic way in order to get them through academic registering and that can sometimes be an issue. Some people say 'actually this is a bit patronising' so then I just explain university speak here, and they say well can't you just rewrite it in a different way and I say well I suppose we could, maybe we could, but if an external examiner is looking at this they'll want to see that we have communicated according to the validated descriptor so there is a compromise to make, but when talking to you we will speak to you in a way that is more relevant to you, it's just some of the published things we have to give to you come from the university so it's to do with compliance, to do with regulations, and you have to accept that, it's written by the university, the policy guidelines, marking guidelines, feedback, grievance procedure, all of that is written by the university and is standard for every student gets that* (Lecturer Tracey 238).

A need for university staff working with employers on work-based learning initiatives to speak or at least understand the different languages spoken by employers and universities is well documented (Boud 2003 and Lemanski et al 2011). What is also of relevance here is the perception offered by the lecturer that the quality assurance mechanisms in place were a hindrance. Although perfectly understandable in the circumstances, Tracey is seemingly apologising here. Of key relevance is why she seemingly felt the need to do so. We can conclude that had she explained that such protocols were in place to ensure parity and quality in learning experiences, this may have been a disincentive for course participants. Her response seems to be a further example of how the courses are distanced from the powerful knowledge characteristics associated with mainstream higher education and promoted as 'other'.

Progression

The efficacy of these courses in facilitating progression routes onto further university courses is mixed. Courses were predominantly delivered at CQFW Level 4 and all the focus group participants had studied or were studying level 4 courses. For individuals without A levels or equivalent entry qualifications, the higher education credits achieved through these courses had the potential to provide a stepping stone for entry onto full university programmes.

A number of the lecturers interviewed identified the notion of horizontal progression. That is, the completion of numerous work-based learning courses at the same level. Lecturer Tracey estimated that a third of her students had done more than one work-based learning course. Horizontal progression was effective in both building individuals' skills and knowledge in a number of subject areas and in consolidating academic study skills.

A further aspect of progression was highlighted by lecturer Caroline who identified that some participants initially joined a course at their employer's behest but go on to develop a personal interest in continuing to pursue further higher education. Some focus group participants similarly identified this phenomenon. A number of course participants identified that they were using the provision of these courses quite strategically in order to accrue higher education credits for further study. Some of the lecturers interviewed provided examples of how engagement with these courses had directly influenced progression onto undergraduate programmes of study. Lecturer Tracey gave examples of course participants progressing onto full-time Business degrees at the university where she was based. In terms of measuring the impact of these courses on influencing individuals to continue with higher learning, Tracey also highlighted how some individuals may go on to study more formally months or even years after engagement with these work-based learning courses and that this influence was almost impossible to measure.

For the vast majority of course participants these courses were engaged with on the premises on which they had been 'sold'. That is, as a route to upskilling in a specific area beneficial to their businesses or jobs. In the same way, that the achievement of higher education credits was deemed a secondary aspect of the courses, so too it seems were the progression opportunities.

Moreover, the question of why would individuals want to pursue a more formal university course was a key one. For one focus group participant:

> *It is important to realise that one size doesn't fit all. Everybody in this business doesn't necessarily want or need a degree; you've got people at all different levels of the organisation at all different times in their career. Somebody might have been here for thirty years and not be interested in a degree at all, whereas you could have somebody who has been in the business for five years and their aspirations will be different and you can support that and you can support that at different levels. Some people that have been here for thirty years might want a degree but not everybody will and likewise new people in the business they might already have a degree and so they are not interested in doing it (*Focus group participant, Grp4, F2:790).

Another spoke of how the weekly engagement with the course had been the catalyst for her to engage in further learning. She said:

> *I actually do feel like I want do carry on learning… and I think this has kind of inspired me about how much I like learning about different things and as stupid as it sounds, I have always wanted to learn Welsh so I have actually been thinking about going to Night School or something to learn Welsh but this has put that kind of boost back in me to encourage me whereas going back about ten years ago, how enthusiastic I was about things, but I kind of went down the wrong path etc. and now I kind of feel like I should go back to what I really enjoy* (Focus group participant, Grp6, F2:420).

A view echoed by another group member who said:

> *I agree. When I left school one of my biggest regrets is I walked out of a cooking class and went into Graphics. I got an E in Graphics, but I reckon if I had stayed in the cooking class, I would have nailed it and as a result of coming here, I have been looking into the local College to do cooking* (Focus group participant, Grp6, M1:431).

Another that:

> *I never would have thought of doing a degree or anything but by doing this course a bit at a time I do now think it is achievable* (Focus group participant, Grp 1, F2:105).

A further course participant was using the course(s) quite strategically to allow her to gain a full degree:

> *I did my foundation degree but didn't manage to get any further. Not for want of trying but you don't always get the support of employers or they don't recognise what you have done. This is why I am here today to make sure I get my credits so I can transfer it all across. To me, I am two thirds of the way through my degree. As a single parent working, I couldn't do it any other way* (Focus group participant, Grp1, F4:99).

There was a consensus from the interviewees that both they themselves as lecturers and the broader universities within which they work could have done much more to build progression routes from these courses into wider university curriculum.

There were also structural barriers to further engagement. The flexibility inherent to this work-based learning provision was simply not mirrored in university on-campus provision making access problematic for working adults. For example, many of the courses that could have provided progression opportunities were run in full-time modes on main university campuses during working hours with little or no flexibility. Lecturer Non made the point that progression will only occur if opportunities are appropriate for working adults. On the same issue lecturer Caroline made the point that universities could potentially offer 'super programmes' but unless they ran at a time and pace suitable to meet the needs of working adults then they would not be able to attend (Lecturer Caroline:331). For Simon, time and the need to travel were prohibitive of continued engagement with higher education at the end of these courses. He said:

> *One of the reasons why our work place courses are so popular is if a class takes three hours the member of staff is away from their desk for three hours. If the member of staff had to travel to a campus that would become a day, so the employers see that as a very significant difference* (Simon:272).

A view mirrored by Leo who said:

> *The main barrier for all these people that we engage with is time. I don't know what we can do there. The only thing we can do is give them more of what we are currently doing* (Lecturer Leo:595). Of relevance, he also said: '*we have to make ourselves fit with them as opposed to them fitting with us*' (Lecturer Leo:621).

Lecturer Tanya encapsulates a common view across the interviewees:

the [work-based learning] *programme is very flexible, its only four full days. If someone has to miss a morning or even one day, then I am happy to meet with them for an hour or two to just run over some of the ideas and so on. But if they said to me right I want to do a full Business and Marketing degree, well for starters it is full time only, there's the fees involved and if they are running their own business it is just not possible, even our Masters course is not even part time, so we just don't cater* (Lecturer Tanya:330).

For such reasons, Lecturer Tanya was clear that she did not encourage the pursuit of progression opportunities.

On the same issue, lecturer Natalie asked:

What about those individuals who want to go on? I remember having one student, she was so enthusiastic, she was on the HR course and she was going, 'right when I finish this one now I'm going to do 'Mindfulness' and then I'm going to this and I want to do that' and I'm saying 'there's funding for 60 credits and that's about as much as we can do under this programme'. 'Right well' she said 'I'm going to get the 60 credits and then I'm going to see what else I can do beyond that even if I have to go back to my employer and ask them to pay for me to do it'. Now there are those people like that - she did actually go on and do the courses, but she couldn't afford to pay for the learning herself (Lecturer Natalie: 563).

Interviewees' responses to the question of the efficacy of these courses serving as a tool for widening access were mixed. Lecturer Leo was clear that his role is to upskill individuals in a specific subject rather than provide progression opportunities and/or promote higher education learning. He did nonetheless acknowledge '*a responsibility to help facilitate peoples*' progression should that be their choice' (Lecturer Leo: 573). Simon was of the view that any role the courses had in widening access was a happy by-product on the primary objective to upskill.

In contrast, Lecturer Lowri had the widening access potential of the courses far more at the forefront of her thinking. She said:

By offering something, which is relevant to people who are working, you are offering them an opportunity to engage with a widening participation agenda that they otherwise wouldn't do because they are working. Work based learning offers an inroad for people who are working to engage with HE who otherwise wouldn't because

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they wouldn't have the time release, they wouldn't have the funding they wouldn't have the support. It is then often then a springboard to further learning once they start (Lecturer Lowri: 408).

For lecturer Natalie, the introduction to academia provided by the work-based learning courses has been enormously beneficial and had inspired individuals to go on to higher learning. Conversely, Lecturer Tanya questioned whether encouraging further higher education study was a good thing. She said:

I think they [work-based learning students] *are more interested in short snappy useful courses as opposed to you know thinking about a three-year long term degree when they actually have so much to do in terms of their own business* (Lecturer Tanya:270).

Tanya's view is mirrored below in the view of a focus group participant who had attended a course on Social Media. He said:

I am from the service industry and the Facebook element of the course has enhanced what we already had there and I hope this would be beneficial to the business...still open minded about it. At the end of the day if it benefits the business then it benefits local employers. At the end of the day from the way I look at it, it is about keeping the people I employ in a job

(Focus group participant, Grp 1, M1:15).

Summary

Fieldwork findings have thus far exposed that using higher education in this way has presented challenges for lecturers, employers, course participants and university administration systems alike. Across stakeholders there were wide-ranging expectations and basic assumptions on the nature of the courses. While a breadth of stakeholder expectations can be attributed to differing vantage points, there were also detectable, fundamental misperceptions on the part of employers and course participants. That is, that they had a lack of clarity at the outset that these were accredited university courses requiring independent study. Instead, there were clear perceptions that these were courses akin to typical workplace training and indeed that this was a message they had been 'sold'. Fundamentally, if this message was deemed a necessary one

for universities to use in order to get people to enroll on the courses, it is difficult to avoid the question of why use higher education in this way?

Operationally, it was very apparent that due to the time-limited and target-driven nature of the work-based learning projects, that the lecturers felt pressured by expectations from within their own institutions to ensure targets were met. Approaches to assessment and how courses were delivered evidence how incentives for course participants to remain engaged on the courses were created and were over and above the 'upskilling' imperative.

Lecturers reported they also needed to manage tensions around the extent to which curriculum and pedagogies should be employer-driven, and to which they should invest in the individual course participant as a university learner. Lecturer Sian was both candid and pragmatic in her identification of a tension between seeking to empower individuals and meeting overarching project targets. She said:

> *the temptation is to get the bums on seats - we are trying, I know I am trying to help somebody discover their potential and what they can do and what they can learn and that's the joy for me, this job, but that doesn't necessarily meet targets and trying to manage that has been difficult. But, at the end of the day I am employed full-time by* [Project Y]. *I am expected to meet these targets and so I have had to have that mode of thought. It has been interesting because it's going against my own personal ethos and ethical direction. It's a tough one but at the end of the day* [Project Y] *pays me* (Lecturer Sian:478).

We can infer from Sian's words here that she feels more could have been done to support individual learning journeys and the promotion of further higher learning but the pressure to meet project targets proved prohibitive. It is important to note here that any efforts to facilitate the transformative potential of these courses should not be regarded as an indulgence or worthy endeavour 'over and above'. It would, in fact, have been wholly in-keeping with the expressed aim of the over-arching work-based programme to 'encourage non-traditional routes into higher education' (Higher Skills Wales 2015). In practice it appears that higher education credit accrual was a higher priority than that of progression. Lecturers thus focused on recruiting new

students to undertake their existing courses and ensure the flow of credits rather than working with individuals to identify and facilitate progression opportunities.

To some extent, the fact that these were funded courses whose efficacy needed to be quantified by the meeting of targets, complicates consideration of how lecturers teaching and learning strategies, intentionally or otherwise, facilitated access to powerful knowledge. As the following chapter reveals, approaches to teaching and learning were clearly a manifestation of managing these variables. Hence, any pedagogic practice identified as facilitating access to characteristics associated with powerful knowledge will have done so within the parameters of the work-based learning projects. That is, they cannot be seen in isolation or separated from the pressures on lecturers to encourage retention and attainment. Chapter 6 now expounds on pedagogic practice and types of knowledge as expressed by lecturers and experienced by course participants.

Chapter 6: Findings; pedagogy and knowledge.

This chapter further expounds the research findings focusing on pedagogy and its relationship to debates on knowledge outlined in Chapter 3. In doing so, the issues of academic skills, flexibility in the modes of course delivery, teaching and assessment methods are considered. The chapter concludes with discussion on the perspectives of the knowledge acquired through engagement on the courses.

The interviews revealed that lecturers' teaching and learning methods were justified to varying degrees in seeking to ensure:

- course participants remained engaged and completed assessment requirements;
- business needs were met;
- assessment strategies had utility that could be seen to have an immediate benefit;
- the promotion of deep as opposed to surface learning.

Different weightings were placed on each variable by individual lecturers and they did not all make reference to all four. There was some evidence that lecturers' positions correlated with their colleagues working for the same university. For example, all the interviewees from University C held that it was important that they as lecturers had personal industry experience and that this gave them credibility to course participants. Of relevance is a correlation between this position and the pedagogic approaches of lecturers from University C being predominantly driven by an aim of meeting business needs over and above a focus on the individual learner. Lecturers from Universities A & B on the whole had a more personalised focus and did not speak of a need for academic lecturing staff to have personal professional experience of working in the field of their subject area. The view that lecturers should have industry experience exemplifies a real-world manifestation of the debates introduced in Chapter 3 on the perceived importance of subject-knowledge versus know-how knowledge in vocational curricula. Arguably, if taken to its logical conclusion, the assumptions of the lecturers from University C are in greater danger of isolating individuals from powerful knowledge than their counterparts in the other two universities.

Findings also revealed that the pedagogical consequences of the pressure on universities to ensure course completion to meet project targets are explicit and constant. In practice, for many course participants, the 'requirement' that they complete and submit a formal academic piece of work for assessment by university lecturers was simply not something they had anticipated, wanted or for some that they actually did. It follows that the more relevant and useful the lecturers could make the course assessment strategies then the greater the likelihood of engagement. It is also apparent that the experience of having engaged with the process of completing the courses' assessment requirements was for many students a significant and positive learning experience. Others who had not, were seemingly content with the knowledge acquired during the course and had no aspirations for the achievement of higher education credits.

Academic skills

Further pedagogic considerations for lecturers were manifested in the fact that many course participants engaging with the courses had little or no experience of post-compulsory education. Lecturers thus needed to ensure individuals had adequate academic study skills to successfully complete course assessment requirements. For example, understanding how to structure an essay or report or how to research and reference sources of information. Moreover, as the courses were short, this needed to be achievable within the parameters of the time available in sessions and the study time that could reasonably be expected of individuals to undertake independently. Lecturers reported that this was achieved through the embedding of exercises to develop study skills within course delivery. That is, the inclusion of formative assessments such as research or referencing exercises within sessions. This enabled lecturers to judge individuals' academic skills and provide feedback.

The non-traditional nature of these courses meant that without support, many of the course participants lacked the academic skills for successful completion of course assessment requirements. That this work-based learning provision comprised short 'standalone' or 'bitesize' courses, a related concern for the academic delivery staff was the extent to which it was reasonable to expect such students to demonstrate an equitable level of academic skills to those of a mainstream student studying a full degree.

Lecturer Natalie in particular cautioned against being idealistic on the matter arguing that expectations should correlate with a recognition of the type of higher education being undertaken. She said:

> *I think you've got to be realistic about your expectations for these people, sometimes when you are marking them* [assignments], *you are thinking, well there's not much critical thinking going on here. Well, for goodness sake, I have had them for three days and been teaching them something that is very practical* (Lecturer Natalie 473).

Lecturer Tim had a comparable view:

> *When I look at the academic rigour that is required, a lot of it refers to things like referencing, or reflective practice. As an under-graduate, you are nurtured into understanding those concepts. If you are doing a five week course on a specific subject then this* [study skills] *is an additionality to the learning that you've come on to do […]and I think our students neglect to want to engage with that process* (Lecturer Tim:59).

Lecturer Tracey spoke of the need for reaching a sense of compromise with course participants by ensuring that they understood the courses would bring both work-based skills / knowledge *and* requisite academic study skills to successfully complete a university course. She said:

> *We've only had the odd person who wasn't happy to compromise and I had one person quite verbal in the classroom that was trying to get everyone else in the class to say they didn't want to do referencing, saying we don't need to learn about it. She was actually quite vocal and they all just ignored her and a couple of them came to me afterwards and said can we just apologise because we understood what you were saying and the relevance and we were happy to accept it. We were not happy that she was trying to make the whole class turn against you. But then, that's fine, it was her view and I understood it. She has a Doctorate already. She was doing a Marketing course and she has done four courses I think, she gets a lot out of them, but she didn't agree with having to do anything that was remotely academic, saying it's not relevant to businesses* (Lecturer Tracey:263).

For the course participant Tracey refers to, the associated academic skills accompanying these courses was unwelcome. Understandably perhaps, as she was reportedly already well-qualified and, it can be assumed, her personal circumstances had previously provided her with access to powerful knowledge. For some others who it is similarly assumed had not, a

comparable reluctance to undertake assessment requirements was reported. While the lecturers ensured that course delivery incorporated the building of skills adequate to successfully complete assessments, for some the lack of familiarity with what was required proved prohibitive of engagement. It can also be assumed that some a lack of confidence and reluctance to engage with the elements of self-disclosure inherent to submitting work for assessment may have been barriers. Exemplified here by one focus member who said:

> *I think that until the point of where the words 'assessment' or 'presentation' were used, I think everybody was very open minded and there were no barriers. I do think that as soon as the words were used all these barriers started to come up... It shouldn't be about putting it on a piece of paper to go on and mark me and tell me that I can't write,* [while] *every day I am living it and I'm doing it positively* (Focus group participant, Grp6, F2:560).

Others questioned the relevancy of undertaking the course assessment saying:

> *I feel that I have already learned loads, so the results of this doesn't really matter to me* (Focus group participant, Grp6, F3:537).

And another:

> *Its more about the experience - it has changed the way I think rather than having a piece of paper that says oh you've done this or that … Its more about that what I do on a daily basis* (Focus group participant, Grp6, M3:554).

These views were particularly focused in focus group 6, the participants of whom had undertaken a Leadership and Management course. One male participant commented:

> *This course has had a massive impact on what has happened on my team and it's helped how I do different stuff, but I could think of nothing worse to be honest, than writing a two thousand word essay* (Focus group participant, Grp6, M1:571).

Assessment

In addition to the integration of study skills into course deliveries to support attainment, a second way of addressing the issue of a lack of academic study skills was the use of non-

traditional and more accessible assessment methods. Summative assessment strategies such as essays or reports with submission dates after the course had ended were largely deemed inappropriate by lecturers. Experience had taught them that submission rates plummeted when used particularly for those less experienced in university study. Hence, approaches that had less of reliance on traditional study skills were common. This typically included the use of individual or group presentations and a requirement that participants build accumulative portfolios of evidence that could be worked on during the sessions.

While such approaches to assessment can readily be seem as fit for purpose for these work-based learning students and indeed non-traditional university students per se (Thomas 2005), they are criticised as weakening epistemic relations (Morrow 2009) between the student and the theoretical knowledge. A parallel here can be seen in the caution that Bernstein (2000) advised in the move from singulars to regions. Case (2011) similarly warns:

> *a dangerous misconception of many progressive education agendas has been that the way to make academic knowledge more accessible is to dissolve the boundaries that exist in traditional curricula* (Case 2011:13).

It became increasingly apparent that some of the approaches commonplace within the pedagogic practice of the lecturers, prioritised skills development to the detriment of the acquisition of knowledge. For Wheelahan (2015), this is explained by the expectation that vocational curriculum equips individuals with job-related skills superseding any role it should have in communicating theoretical knowledge. She said:

> *The key curricula questions – what should we teach and why? – have been reduced to the skills needed to get a job and for work. Knowledge, where it exists, has been subordinated to and tied to skills..[…] As the importance of vocational education and training has grown in policy, the loss of knowledge as the object of VET curriculum has become more pronounced* (Wheelahan 2015:751).

Hence, while extrinsically beneficial for the individuals and businesses for which they work, for those who uphold powerful knowledge as a curriculum principle, the use of such non-traditional assessment methods is problematic and to be avoided. However, as will be uncovered over this chapter, many of the students who engaged with what we can assume were epistemically weak assessment teaching and learning strategies, had seemingly powerful

experiences in doing so. Experiences that are attributable to the curriculum and pedagogy they experienced.

Accommodated within the need for tailored pedagogies that would support the needs of these atypical university students was the identified need for course assessment requirements   to be both accessible and relevant to course participants. Approaches described as assessment strategies *for* rather than *of* learning and were apparent across the three universities and two work-based learning projects.   Examples include the requirement that students produce a formal Business or Marketing Plan (Lecturer Tracey:536, Lecturer Tanya:127) for the organisations for which they work and /or own. The underlying premise being that the exercise had both utility in its ultimate final production and also that the process of undertaking the task consolidated learning and built knowledge and understanding.

Lecturers Tracey and Simon spoke of the value of ensuring that assessment strategies allowed participants to build portfolio content through the accumulation of pieces of work throughout the course. Simon whose emphasis here is on ensuring students completed course assessment strategies said:

> *portfolio work tends to get a very high level of submission because the students are compiling the portfolio in between classes and during classes* (Simon:96)

For Lecturer Tracey, portfolios also provided a vehicle for synthesising theory and practice:

> *In every course you are building your assignment as you are going through the course, so if you are doing Integrated Marketing Communications* [as a course], *you do a Marketing Communications plan. Each session is teaching you the backbone of each topic each week, putting the models in, the theory. We look at the plans and you develop that as you go along as well. So you can be discussing your branding one week, what you do off line and on line another week so then you are already leading with the ideas of what you want to put in your assessment* (Lecturer Tracey:331).

For Lecturer Lowri, it was assessment strategies that differentiated these courses from the traditional workplace training. She also alluded to how these courses could at the very least provide a vehicle towards powerful knowledge. She said:

> *In order for them to achieve deep learning, rather than just a short training episode, then they need to submit, they need to complete something, an assessment strategy*

which actually relates to their work practices so that its beneficial. To some extent we are in competition with private training providers who are offering similar types of courses but whereas they offer very short sharp bursts of training over say a half-day session that isn't what we are about. We are about offering a learning package that isn't offering specific skills or training in one particular software package but it's about offering them generic higher level skills of using those subject areas, for example computerised accounting so they are looking at the skills, the generic skills of computerised accounting rather than specific training in Sage (Lecturer Lowri:56).

Many of the lecturers delivered courses which had originally been designed for campus-based students. Arguing that the wide breadth of student prior experiences necessitated a need for different approaches to assessment, Lecturer Keith reported that a lack of flexibility within prescribed assessment strategies of courses which were taken 'off the shelf' was limiting. He said:

I think it's good to have a number of types of assessment that you can use. For example, I'm going to be teaching Strategy to [a company] *and* [as determined by the course descriptor] *they've got to do a 2500-word essay - there's no flexibility there. It would have been really nice to have done say a 1500-word essay and a presentation or something, you know, just to break it up. Flexibility for the Lecturer, I think that's a good thing because you don't really know what group you are going to have until day one sometimes. You just walk in you might have students who can't even open a Word document and then you go to* [company name] *and they are all really keen, the majority have got degrees already, does that make sense? Because they are coming from a different place. So that flexibility on assessment I think is really important (*Lecturer Keith:482*).*

There were repeated examples of where lecturers had attempted through their assessment strategies to utilise higher learning teaching and learning strategies and meet more surface-based business needs. Lecturer Natalie for example spoke of her 'HR for non-HR professionals' course's assessment requirements saying:

Our assessment strategy is very practical so they have two pieces of work, they have to go away and do a personal development plan linked to what they need to learn for HR, so it's very applied. The second part of the assignment is for them to look at what goes on in their own work place and make recommendations for improvement so again the assessment is based on something that is extremely relevant to their work, their business so they can see the benefit of doing it (Lecturer Natalie:169).

In a similar vein, ICT Lecturer Simon exemplified how he aimed to ensure that the course assessment requirements met the needs of individuals and businesses:

> *If possible, we allow each student to develop the contents of their assessment relevant to their work place, so for example, in a web design course, the students would be guided to design the website for their company or part of the website for their company. And, this means that in doing that they would be problem solving for themselves, they'll be exploring they'll be putting elements of the course which were taught separately but they'll be putting them together combining them in new ways, possibly ways nobody has ever combined before to achieve the solution they need, so it really does bring the level of their learning up into that range of creativity* (Lecturer Simon:122).

The rationale is clear for such utilitarian assessment strategies being perceived as having value for course participants, and that this in turn would facilitate project submission and attainment rates. For the majority of lecturers, the utility of the course assessment strategies was grounded not just in engaging participants in university study but by an economic imperative to enable more productive individuals. Interviewee Lecturer Tracey was clear that business needs were at the forefront of her thinking when setting course assessments. She said:

> *So the driver for all the assessments is what is relevant, because it's got to attract them in the first place so if it's not a relevant assessment they are going to think why am I going to come and write an essay at the end* (Lecturer Tracey:387).

From a student perspective, the importance course participants placed on completing the course assessments varied considerably across and within the focus groups and within the interviews. Lecturer Tim, who taught ICT related courses including social media and graphic design offered that his students often do not see any value or potential return in engaging with the course assessment requirements saying:

> *A lot of the courses that I teach are highly skilled based, so once the students seem to get the skills they think 'well I've got what I've come for'. So, I am trying to get them to do the assessment when its additional work on top of what they are doing in their jobs. I try to align the assessment outcomes to be something that is a business output as well, but again it depends whether they have that requirement of that business output at that time when they are doing the course which it may not be – I have lots of correspondence – emails with people thanking me for the course and saying they have learned loads and they can really take this forward now, but they are not going to do*

the assessment because it isn't important for them – you know it's not relevant to them (Lecturer Tim:224).

Similarly, Lecturer Iona reported that the majority of her work-based learning students did not want to complete the course assessment requirements. She also felt that the two written assignments required to successfully complete her 'Mindfulness' course were a deterrent, and that a change to a presentation as an assessment tool would have been beneficial. She also highlighted how those who had done the assignments had positive experiences in doing so. She said:

> *when people have done them* [the course assignments] *they say it has been worth going through that process because it has embedded their learning, but I think if we talking about getting more people through, maybe a different assessment strategy would work'* (Lecturer Iona:147).

Lecturer Leo stressed the importance of being careful that the vocabulary used did not put course participants off from engaging with assessments saying:

> *I don't talk about assignments or assessments, I talk about projects as daft as that may sound, a project or an action plan or something like that, something that they can envisage being on the lower shelf, a more reachable shelf in their office as opposed to something that will be relegated to the dusty unreachable top shelf which an essay would be* (Lecturer Leo:147).

Iona and Leo's comments here exemplify a dilemma that the curriculum theory raises for such work-based provision. Assuming that the traditional assignment assessment requirement will bring with it greater higher learning attributes associated with powerful knowledge than the epistemically weaker presentation assessment method (Case 2011, Bernstein 2000), a powerless curriculum is in danger of being offered by making the change Iona advocates. However, Iona also makes the important point that the change is likely to make course participants more receptive to engaging with an assessment process that, although epistemically weaker, is nonetheless likely to have more educative influence than to not have done so at all.

It can be assumed that for Iona, the time taken to jump through the requisite institutional quality assurance hoops to re-validate courses was prohibitive within the timeframe of the projects.

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That said, where time allowed, it did happen. For example, Lecturer Tanya altered her courses assessment requirements away from an examination that had   been set for mainstream undergraduates undertaking the same course. She saw this move requiring course participants to create a   marketing plan as more meaningful saying:

> *I adapted my Marketing Communication module which I delivered to second year under-graduate students to make it more business orientated and obviously made structural changes so that I could deliver it intensely over a four full day period.. In developing the course, I completely scrapped the exam because I thought it was pointless for business people to go and sit and exam or a test.*   (Lecturer Tanya:127).

She also said:

> *I've done exams myself, you revise for three days solid and it is completely surface learning because after the exam is done and dusted, it goes from your short term memory, the knowledge. Some things might stick, but ultimately the actual planning stuff is the most appropriate and attractive* (Lecturer Tanya:187).

A similar view was expressed by a focus group participant who said:

> *Over the years I have done lots of training in and out of university, I don't mind an assessment but not when it is timed to see what you can do in 3 hrs. So these kind of assessments, you can take them home and work on them at your own speed until you get it and I think that it more worthwhile. At the end of the day it is a proof that you have attained a certain standard* (Focus group participant, Grp2, M1:101).

Describing his experience of completing the course assessment requirements, another focus group participant said:

> *We had to write a business plan so I have taken something that was actually an assignment and applied it into the business so I have a document that is actually relevant to what I am doing and that has been really good. I wouldn't have done it and it has been an eye opener to be honest – really good* (Focus group participant, Grp2, M3:52).

While the integration of theory and practice can be largely deemed to have positive outcomes, this did not always prove fruitful for all concerned. For example, Lecturer Natalie relayed that she had received a 'rather cross' email from a company's Human Resources manager who was unhappy that her colleagues were being asked to analyse their workplace practice. This

manager was clear in her view that the organisation's employees were not qualified to critique the HR policy and practices of the organisation for which they worked (Lecturer Natalie:335).

Also expressed was the view that concerns and/or anxieties around the course assessment strategy were detrimental to the learning process. One female participant from the same focus group commented:

> *I think it* [concern over undertaking the course assessment] *may have kind of stopped the filter of the whole learning process because it is so at the front of their minds they are so worried about the assessment that they are not taking so much in because all they are thinking is my god, my god, my god, it stops them learning because it is kind of at the forefront (*Focus group participant, Grp6, F3:609).

Interestingly, another focus group undertaken with participants from the same organisation all unanimously agreed how important it was to them that they successfully complete the course assessment requirements saying:

> *Very important. Yes. For personal development I don't think it's anything else really*
> (Focus group participant, Grp5, F1:364).

> *I think I would be really annoyed with myself if I didn't pass it*
> (Focus group participant, Grp5, F2:366).

> *I wouldn't have that sense of achievement - you know if I didn't have something to go for at the end, a presentation or a dissertation or whatever* (Focus group participant, Grp5, M3:376).

> *It's nice to add to your CV as well. If we want to progress to team leaders we can take that into our interview and say we have passed this course, we have got this knowledge now, we have this now to take forward to the next role* (Focus group participant, Grp5,F2:380).

Other views from across the focus groups in support of completing the courses assessment requirements included:

> *We've gone this far, we want to go all the way now and have something out of it*

 (Focus group participant, Grp3, M4:282).

It is quite important to me as I am looking to do further and get higher qualifications. I am looking to do a lot more

(Focus group participant, Grp2 ,F3:59).

Those focus group participants who had completed the assessment requirements were on the whole very positive about the experience. Comments included:

If it was just a course, I would have forgotten everything. There have been loads of courses, just the other day, you listen to someone talking and in a week you've been on another course you're back at work. This is making you do some work behind it and making you think, for me anyway, it sinks in a lot more, you remember things a lot longer, you don't just listen, you sort of understand it yourself and put it into words I guess (Focus group participant, Grp4, M4:524).

And:

 It makes sure that you understand what you have been taught. Because if you don't go through that stage of the assignment then I know that there were things that I thought I understood but when I came to do the assignment, I realised that no I didn't and it made me get down to it and study to be able to answer the question (Focus group participant, Grp2, M2:97).

It is clear that engaging with the course assessment process and the allied academic skills are central to the reported strength of the learning experiences over and above skills acquisition. The focus group participants comments here provide some insight into how these courses can at least, facilitate access to powerful knowledge through the educative experience they have been through and the higher education credits they may achieve.

Pedagogy

Emerging from the range of expectations outlined in the previous chapter were a comparable breadth of pedagogies.   Natalie, a Human Resources lecturer was very clear that these work-based learning students could or should not be taught in the same way as typical undergraduate cohorts. She argued that it was imperative to understand the 'client base' to ensure that course content was relevant or participants would 'switch off' (Lecturer Natalie:127).

In a comparable vein, Eyres et al (2008) have argued that transformational change to traditional models of delivery in higher education was required by universities if they were to successfully engage employers and employees. As already made reference to at the beginning of the chapter, three out of the twelve interviewees spoke of the importance of lecturers having industry experience in their subject areas. The position was based on the premise that it served to legitimise them to employers who may be sceptical about what university staff can offer business people. There was also a view that lecturers' experiential knowledge of working in relevant professional fields in turn better facilitated their ability to ensure course participants were able to synthesise theory and practice.

For lecturer Tracey:

You have to adapt teaching strategies. You can't just do a straight lecture. My background is from an applied background I never do just straight theory - I've always intertwined practice with theory because I've done it myself so I can articulate real world examples that go along with theory and models. It's definitely a strength in this environment because you are more believable. They respect you more I think because they think she knows what's she's talking about because she's been here (Lecturer Tracey:61).

And lecturer Natalie:

Because (a) my background is in HR and training I understand people's motivation for learning in the work place and (b) because I run my own business and I tend to be very client focused in that situation so I don't find it [synthesizing theory and practice] *particularly difficult to manage'* (Lecturer Natalie:99).

And lecturer Sian:

All the guys who are working for [Project Y], *they are all professionals, they are all industry experts, they are all experienced, they know what they are doing (*Lecturer Sian:527).

In their delivery of the courses, all the lecturers interviewed talked about using a high degree of application to real world and more specifically real work experiences in their teaching and learning strategies. A shift away from traditional didacticism to pedagogic approaches such as situated, peer, reflective and experiential learning and the teaching role as a facilitator rather than lecturer are further cases in point.

For lecturer Tanya, the comparably smaller class sizes and the life experiences that work-based learning course participants brought to the course delivery marked distinct differences to typical undergraduate teaching. She said:

> *The main difference I have found is that it is much more interactive, I am used to teaching a class of 50 or 60 or up to 100 students things like marketing research and its very kind of spoon fed, me, chalk and talk, my power point me just talking for maybe two hours […] you will get the odd one or two students who will say something, but mainly they are 18 years old, they are quite shy, they are inexperienced and they feel as though they should just sit there and believe everything I say whereas it's a bit more enjoyable to be part of the* [work-based learning] *programme because I am teaching real business people who are experienced, they are creative, they are innovative, they are entrepreneurial people, they have strong views about marketing and so it's a really informal, engaging process. I will lead with some ideas and some examples but it is very two-way and I'll be challenged as well, I'll be challenged on my own views which I think is good* (Lecturer Tanya:35).

That university lecturers were going into businesses and working with employees in subject areas that would be beneficial to the organisation introduced it seemed, an element of the lecturer role being one of a consultant engaged in an iterative process of business improvement rather than as what we would typically understand as the role of an academic. Arguably, and particularly within 'in-house' classes where course participants all derive from the same organisation, the relevance and pertinence of using real work issues as a teaching tool is both accessible and pedagogically germane. A pedagogical advantage of the in-house model was identified by Lowri in that lecturers were able to apply theories to the organisational context. A focus group participant who when expounding on how the course had benefitted her said:

> *this is very relevant as it is tailored specifically for us which is a big benefit, you could go somewhere else on a Performance Management course and not get the same from it because it is just about the subject as opposed to us* (Focus group participant, Grp3, F4:361).

Though for Lecturer Leo, too great a focus on work-related issues can be problematic in that the delivery of the courses' theoretical content can be compromised by course participants wants, needs and expectations. He said:

With work based learning we are more like workshops – it's more like an away day every time we show up. It's like we are giving them tools as opposed to theories. It's more like a Ted talk. They want something….., they don't want theory, they want practical solutions (Lecturer Leo:23).

He also said:

*You don't have the time to wax lyrical about theories…They want you to translate it for them saying why don't you try this or look at that? (*Lecturer Leo:51).

In terms of the building of knowledge in any strategic or deeper learning sense, then we see a clear risk of understanding being constrained to personal work contexts (Boud and Soloman 2003) to the detriment of the building of higher learning attributes associated with powerful knowledge. For ICT Lecturer Simon, an approach that moves students from the practical to the theoretical is required. He said:

It is a tricky balance and it involves rotating elements and phasing them in and out so for example in the first couple of weeks of a course I would hope to express the reasons why the subject will be useful and how it will affect them, so that it makes an impact on their lives and they can see it. I make sure the first few weeks are very interactive so they engage with the subject in a hands-on way and then I would be looking in the third or fourth week of a course to be connecting the things they have done with the theoretical side phasing that in so by the time they come to do the assessments at the end of the course they would have covered theory as well as practical elements, interactive elements, they understand why it was useful to them as well as important for them to complete the course and [then the] *theory becomes more interesting when it has a real world context'* (Lecturer Simon:69).

The relationship between theory and practice in the delivery of these short courses revealed a range of perspectives. For some it was an area of much tension and for others there was a seamless association between the two. Lecturer Non, for example argued that within her subject area of professional practice in the creative industries, theory and practice were inseparable with no tension at all. For others including Leo the issue was far more problematic, particularly in ensuring that the actual course content was aligned with the prescriptions laid out in the university validated course descriptors. He said:

We have to work incredibly hard to make the module descriptor fit with what students/ employees want and to synthesise theory and practice. Some people would argue that we are spoon feeding (Lecturer Leo:64).

Of interest is the comment of one course participant who had taken Leo's Leadership and Management course who commented:

The way that he delivered the course – he had of given us all the theory and all the practical application and the thinking but he disguised it that you didn't even realise he was teaching you a lot of the time which I thought was brilliant….it felt like you were engaging in something and you were actually bringing something to the party, like a workshop, I suppose (Focus group participant, Grp4, F3:447).

Flexibility

Lecturers interviewed repeatedly made comparisons between the work-based learning projects and their experiences of the delivery of mainstream higher education. The flexibility inherent to the projects in terms of curriculum content, modes and places of delivery, contact hours and assessment requirements were expounded as being critical to meeting the needs of the funding body, individuals and businesses. For Lecturer Sian:

The flexibility of what we offer is a massive part of it. There isn't a particular end of year term time or any of that nonsense, we will teach right through wherever it is needed. We will go out to the employer […] We have introduced a lot of new modules based on what the clients want. So rather than try to fit the learner into what you have got, a Business Development Officer goes out and actually finds out what does business want. It is so important, so vital to Wales and part of it is actually going out and saying what do you need, what's the need? (Lecturer Sian 242).

Similarly, when asked how she thought the work-based learning courses differed from conventional undergraduate teaching Lecturer Caroline was very clear in her response:

I think the flexibility – I tend to travel around or go and meet students whenever they need me. I will meet them on a one-to-one basis, probably only for half an hour, three quarters of an hour usually at the beginning or the end of the working day to try and fit in and to accommodate their requirements. I do meet students on campus, but again it's at strange times of day, not necessarily term-time. It's a totally flexible programme, I do quite a lot of on-line support through emails, the students contact me via email and

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send drafts of work that I will have a quick look through and give them feedback in writing either by email or feedback over the phone (Lecturer Caroline:26).

Across the three universities and two work-based learning projects, a range of modes of delivery were evident. For example, in some instances the provision was manifested in intensive three or four full day courses in one week. Others preferring to have weekly 2 hours' sessions over a more protracted time period. Lecturer Simon spoke of the need to be flexible and work around the needs of employers and employees in relation to successful course delivery:

There are specific differences teaching in the work place, often work places will discuss before you begin the course what options are available to them, for example whether it would it be acceptable to call a person out of the room if they were needed for work reasons if they were able to take telephone calls. If the classes could be halted at a particular times, or certain classes skipped because of busy workloads that sort of thing. We sometimes experience shift working where it is agreed prior to the course that some people will skip certain sessions and that they will be rotated. All of these things have an impact on the approach to teaching, to the pedagogy to have to be carefully planned ahead to accept these kind of unusual changes (Lecturer, Simon:157).

For ICT Lecturer Tim, the fact that his courses were delivered in off-campus local settings was important not just in relation to the time saved travelling to and from classes but because he thought courses delivered on university campus' could be a disincentive for engagement for some adults.

I think the fact that it's not within the university campus has some benefits, because I think for some people, especially older people, they still feel that university is for your youngsters(Lecturer Tim:515).

This view was echoed by a focus group participant who said:

I've only had to go into the university for my Masters twice and I hate it. It's a campus, I don't know where I am going, I just park and wander aimlessly and try and follow a map. When you are a normal student you know exactly where you are going and I think it is something that we don't have to deal with or we don't want to unless we really

have to. To me, I think doing it on site is beneficial and it is based around our work and it brings us all together as well (Focus group participant, Grp 4,M5:412).

And another:

I think that as a mature student, being at [course venue in a Business Innovation Centre] *gives you that bit of confidence. There is nothing worse than walking into a class and everyone else is about 18. And they say to you 'Are you the new Lecturer? And you have to say 'no I am one of the students'* (Focus group participant, Grp 1, F3:114).

The locally-based delivery of the courses was repeatedly identified as a reason that individuals were able to access the courses. Two focus group participants said:

I am a single parent so if this wasn't based locally, it just wouldn't work for me (Focus group participant, Grp1,F4:76).

I am from the next valley over so travelling is what 15-20 mins: Not a problem as it means I can work it around work as well. I do things in the office before I leave in the morning and I will have things when I go back to deal with. So it fits in quite nicely (Focus group participant, Grp 1, M1:77).

Knowledge

For course participants, the knowledge on offer through these courses can be seen as threefold. Namely, skills-based know-how knowledge, theoretical knowledge and academic study skills. The extent to which these were both delivered and received is seemingly contingent upon the subject of the courses and the expectations and basic assumptions of those delivering and receiving them. In an interesting acknowledgement of the educative nature of the courses, Lecturer Natalie stressed what she thought of as the importance of knowledge acquisition (regardless of type) for her course participants over and above the achievement of higher education credits. She differentiated between 'learning' and 'achieving' saying:

I think from the students that I've had some of them have given me verbal feedback and some written feedback to say that they did find the assignment useful in making them think about how they were doing things and actually improving how they were doing things. I don't think for the majority of my students, they are driven by achieving the

credits – academic credits - they are driven by wanting to learn something, wanting to know how to do something, some of them have actually been terrified of the thought of doing some academic work, they'd never done anything like it before, so that has not been a driver to come and get these academic credits (Lecturer Natalie:230).

For some, the impact of engagement with the courses was truly transformative. Lecturer Caroline relayed an anecdote of a student informing her that the course assessment requirements had 'revolutionised' her life:

By doing her reflective essay - she actually said that it completely revolutionised her life. When she started the programme, she spent the whole time completely stressed out because she hadn't done this, she hadn't done that, she hadn't done the other, all these things she had to do. But, by sitting down and thinking about where she was now and where she had come from, she was able to turn everything round and to say, look what we have actually achieved in the last two years – we can sit down and plan, think where we can be in two years' time and she was and is a completely different person (Lecturer Caroline:249).

Lecturer Non similarly reported a comparable scenario of the impact of undertaking a 'work-related study' as part of a Creative Industries course:

One of my students says it [the course] *has changed his life, it has changed his whole perception of how he learns, his capacity to learn. He was doing a part time MA, but dropped out of it. He says that it has helped him to understand what he needs to do more than the course he is doing because it's like the MA he was going to do has its own agenda and that agenda differed from his agenda* (Lecturer Non:207).

The incorporation and expectation of reflective practice into teaching, learning and assessment strategies was a repeated component of the learning experience. Lecturer Caroline gave anecdotal evidence of the impact of engaging reflective practice on individuals' lives. Interestingly she was not speaking of this in a widening access to higher education sense but on the transformative impact of reflective practice on existing graduates. She said:

Reading some of the essays that come back, particularly from the Masters students who started the programme thinking of themselves as an individual that yes has to go through this process [of reflecting on their practice], *actually at the end of it they have come bouncing out of the process totally having changed their lives because of the way*

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that they do use reflection and reflective practices and have looked at that as a development tool for themselves and for their team (Lecturer Caroline 142).

Focus group participants, in this case, who had undertaken a Leadership and Management courses, highlighted the impact of broader reflective components of the course over specific skills acquisition: Examples include:

its more about self-realisation really about how you are acting and how you influence others so it is just about self-awareness more than anything (Focus group participant, Grp5,M1:10).

We talked about challenging the norms – but we kind of reflected on what are norms in our areas in our jobs, things like that, they have become more apparent to me personally, we do challenge those whereas before we just sort of saw it as the norm (Focus group participant, Grp4, M6:113).

It's not so much a teaching course, it was more reflecting on your experiential learning that we are already doing – the things we are already doing – applying the theories and just putting some meat on the bones with regards to it and it does cause you to reflect on yourself, where you have been acting, reacting, thinking and then you can use that information then to make the judgments on whether you can continue to do the same things, do you change things, how do people react to you, it wasn't teaching you new things, it was putting into context what we are already doing which I think is important (Focus group participant, Grp4, F3:67).

Pedagogically, the practice of facilitating students to analyse their own experiences to arrive at a position of critical understanding of their realities is well-rehearsed particularly in adult education (Freire 1970, Guile and Griffiths 2001, Avis 2009). What is less clear within curriculum theory is the relationship between such pedagogic practice and powerful knowledge. Interestingly, for arguments that de-value instrumental and vocational knowledge over traditional knowledge, (Wheelahan 2015 and Young 2013), is the view that work-based learning course participants as working adults were more experienced and knowledgeable than their undergraduate mainstream student counterparts In the words of one focus group participant:

When you are a university student you haven't really got any practical experience to lend itself to all the theories you are being taught (Focus group participant, Grp4, F3:250).

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Another that:

> *When you are a student – that's what the book says, that's what the theory says, you can't draw on any form of experience– you can't draw on different leaders to compare, but then you actually go out and you walk the talk, and talk the walk. It's like passing your driving test and learning to drive, isn't it?* (Focus group participant, Grp4, M2:256).

Regardless of having completed the course assessment requirements or not, the impact of these courses on individual working lives was in numerous cases a significant one.

> *I don't think and I'll be honest – I don't think I would ever have challenged because it's just the way it was. Other companies I have worked in has been the same as well. I have never gone into a one-to-one and talked about their weaknesses and come out and thought it may as well have been the other way around because it would have been better - I've never done it because that's the way it was. Now we are doing it this way and it's mad to think that that could have been changed* (Focus group participant, Grp6, M2:257*).*

And:

> *There was another Team Leader who started on the course but he didn't finish it, but even after the first day of the course he did something from that course - tried it out on someone, something he had learned* (Focus group participant, Grp6, M3:129).

A further dimension to learning experience was the place of peer learning. As illustrated in the excerpt below from a course participant who worked for a multi-national steel producer speaking of the value of these courses in bringing people from the same organisation together:

> *You don't stop and look around and see well actually they're doing that over in that area, that's really working for them, we sort of just carry on and just pedal like hell underneath the surface you know. So it was good to have a cross of different styles of management, shifts and different areas, just sort of take -its all part of the sharing and learning experience, not only did we take on a course, but we took from each other* (Focus group participant, Grp4,M2:141).

A participant from a separate focus group spoke of the value of being able to share knowledge and experiences with people from different companies. He said:

> *Previous to coming on the course, I have had to figure everything out for myself. By then going on the course, when I have a problem, well then hopefully there will be someone there in the class that will be able to help me though the problem without me having to spend weeks or months trying to resolve it myself on my own which is unfortunately the situation that some people in small businesses are in because they can't afford to leave the business* (Focus group participant, Grp1,M2:56).

Lecturer Tracey spoke much about the opportunities for peer learning that allied the work-based learning courses. Moreover, she argued that in addition to the transferable skills associated with typical higher education study, work-based learning students can also develop skill-sets in relation to supporting and mentoring others.

> *I think they* [work-based learning students] *will acquire exactly the same transferable skills as any under-graduate. Most of them have got those skills anyway, they are running businesses and/ or they are self-employed, but I think they develop further their skills and they develop additional skills like facilitation and mentoring skills….They go out together as cohorts for their lunches or their tea and coffee breaks and you listen to them, and they are doing it there as well so it goes beyond the class room. I think they learn an awful lot more and they learn so much from each other more than I think a normal under-graduate does. Our cohorts often are completely mixed and they have different people you know from start-ups to people who have had twenty or thirty years in business so it's really good to watch and see'* (Tracey:570).

Tracey also spoke of knowledge acquisition as a collaborative process between herself and the course participants saying:

> *I think there is a lot of collaborative learning which is still formal but it is just collaborative and equally there is learning which comes about full circle where I learned as well and then I'll go and take that away and do that themselves* (Lecturer Tracey:897).

Similarly, lecturer Leo spoke of his role as facilitator rather than a teacher. He railed against the assumption that students are empty vessels to be filled by an all-knowing teacher. Instead he uses the analogy of academic theory providing the cement to pull bricks of student experiences and realities together. He said:

> *I am not a teacher. I am a facilitator. I facilitate..I've just got the books which form the cement. Hopefully, you will want to put the bricks together, but the bricks that's their experiences, their realities, not mine. That old thing of am I a font of all knowledge and they are the empty vessel? No, absolutely not. I am not there to make deposits in their empty minds and for them to take out one day when they need to recall it word for word. I am there hopefully for them to get their bricks together with my cement* (Lecturer Leo:895).

In an attempt to encourage the lecturers to reflect upon the nature of the courses and how the content and delivery related to the types of knowledge initially raised in the introductory chapter, I asked them to relate their experiences as a work-based learning lecturer to the following claim of Michael Young (2010b):

> The purpose of (formal) education is to ensure that as many as possible of each cohort or age group are able to acquire the *knowledge* that takes them *beyond their experience* [original emphasis] and which they would be unlikely to have access to at home, at work or in the community (Young 2010b:5).

While Young is, it is presumed, referring to formal education as full time compulsory schooling, I asked the interviewees to apply Young's assertion to the experiences of the adult learner studying a short university course.

For Lecturer Tim, the work-based learning courses did take participants 'beyond their experience'. He said:

> *So it's about taking them beyond their own knowledge and experience
> and dropping them into something quite new which they would be
> unlikely to have access to at home, work or in the community… I hope
> they are able to have access to it now that they have obtained some*

additionality to their understanding and knowledge. It's not something that they necessarily would have engaged with prior necessarily (Lecturer Tim:626).

For Lecturer Simon, there were parallels between Young's words and his own pedagogic practice. He said:

If knowledge in that context is being used as I would hope it was, - to mean a more self-actualised understanding of the information provided then that would be the appropriate..I think education's purpose in my point of view is to move up a ladder from dependency on other people's thinking and understanding to an autonomy and self-actualisation and so to the extent that the original author would agree with that statement by their use of knowledge there, I would agree with it (Simon:315).

For Lecturer Natalie, the quote was '*a bit idealistic*' and:

I think if you are looking at full-time students coming in, 18 year olds, then that's probably a more relevant quote, but when you are looking at work based learners their expectations and the purpose for them, from their point of view might be quite different to that. They don't see formal education in the same way […] our approach to it has to be entirely different to the approach that we take to the 18 year olds. I think if we are going to go down the route of adult learning in higher education then we've got to look at redefining what we are trying to do with them (Natalie:756).

Implicit within Natalie's response is the notion of difference between these course and mainstream university provision.

While Lecturer Leo recognised that the courses may facilitate access to the understanding of powerful knowledge espoused by Young (2010), he did question its relevancy to the experiences of working adults. Moreover, he questioned the value of university created and maintained knowledge. He said:

I suppose what we do might enthuse them [course participants] *to go on to access to that so called powerful knowledge but, if we are going to sit in these rooms here [*on a university campus*] and think that what we've got is so precious only the invited are allowed to get in. It's a bit like keeping realms of knowledge, like Plato's cave isn't it? Where we could see ourselves as academics as being the people in the cave, life is going on around us, we think we know it all, but we haven't experienced it all. They are the*

ones who know more and we learn more from them than they ever would us. That formal is just that it's a cave isn't it?...is knowledge the static thing that is in print in books in certain institutions which if you are lucky I will invite you in and you can read a couple of those books or is knowledge really truthfully being created out there by all those plebs that we might not let in? I would argue for the latter quite frankly, I think they are the ones who really create the knowledge. I can read as many books as I want on leadership but leadership in certain settings is going to change astronomically - I don't know the settings they do. I can tell them leadership in five minutes, it would take them five weeks to teach me the settings so which one is more valuable? Knowledge, whatever it is cannot exist in a vacuum, to relegate it to formal education is to say that it is (Lecturer Leo:843).

For Lecturer Sian, the fact that these courses placed a higher value on experiential learning, than may have historically been recognised by mainstream higher education was positive. She said:

I just think that this project is allowing the sector an opportunity to evolve and actually respond to today's society and evolve from this sort of qualification – actually recognising the value of experiential learning, lifelong learning and all these other things and helping education to evolve which I think it has to in a more flexible open way recognizing the different people and different approaches and that is something, an ethos, I would love to see in schools. So I think these type of projects which are really opening it out and challenging a lot of those ideals are very exciting, really important and are going to contribute to the whole evolvement of how we see education (Lecturer Sian:984).

It is useful here to acknowledge differing cultural interpretations. In a UK context, a *skill* is something deemed both conceptually and in practice as distinct from knowledge. In an analysis of UK and German interpretations, Clarke and Winch (2006) concluded that there was no Anglo-Saxon equivalent concept in Germany. They offer that in Germany, the achievement of what we would consider as a lower status VET qualification afforded the status of *'ein qualifizierter Arbeiter'* [a qualified worker]. Linked to salaries such qualifications brought with them social and legal status (Clarke and Winch 2006:263). They go on to reference the findings of Biernacki, (1995) articulating how measures seeking to compare how practical knowledge or qualifications are perceived, need to understand differences in systems of production. They offer the example:

> *In the continental sense 'qualification' is bound up with the value of labour under legal obligation and protection and is negotiated. Vocational education is in turn a system of 'qualification' to provide a given quality of labour. Thus, in the continental setting where wage levels are linked to qualifications, the employer buys the right to deploy for a given time 'labour power' whose potential or quality is recognised and protected by law. In Britain, in contrast, the employer pays for a particular (customary) output assessed through in situ performance unrelated to the potential or quality of the labour involved. This means that the British concept of skill remains, as it was in the nineteenth century, that of 'property in skill', attached to particular tasks, with labour employed from project to project or from job to job, recruited on the basis of experience rather than qualification and rewarded on the basis of output rather than labour power or potential* (Clarke and Winch 2006:267).

Recognition of these differences in the societal value attached to knowledge types serve as a reminder of the relativity of such concepts central to Bernstein's (2000) pedagogic device and Young's (2013) 'knowledge of the powerful'.

For Boud (2003) the imperatives for knowledge production are very different in academic institutions and workplaces and that needs to be acknowledged within work-based learning curriculum. He draws on the work of Gibbons et al (1994) who propose two modes of knowledge production. Mode 1 described as disciplinary and Mode 2 as trans-disciplinary. Interestingly, there are seemingly no powerful differentials ascribed to the modes.

The fieldwork findings have revealed how 'know how' knowledge has foregrounded the communication of theoretical knowledge. For many this has been desirable and indeed, if it had not been so, many course participants would not have engaged with the courses at all. It is interesting that the broader educative potential of the courses was to some extent strategically shrouded by universities for fear it would present a disincentive for engagement. A focus instead was placed on the 'quick hit' upskilling that could be achieved. In turn, this approach helped to ensure project targets were met. It did however present challenges for lecturers tasked with encouraging course participants to complete the course assessment. This lack of clarity also caused some resentment for course participants who may have felt they had been 'mis-sold' what the courses were about. For some with prior qualifications, they had no interest in putting in the time and effort to achieve a small amount of higher education credit. For others,

with poor or no post-compulsory education experience, the challenge of completing a piece of work for the scrutiny of university academics was unwanted.

Across the fieldwork findings, evidence of course participants having had positive educational experiences abound. These were strongly though not exclusively, linked to having fully engaged with course assessment requirements. A tentative conclusion can be drawn that this in turn, is linked to individuals being facilitated to access some of the attributes of powerful knowledge. For example, that the course content and teaching and learning methods including the assessment strategy had equipped them with reliable and testable explanations which were open to challenge. For Young (2013) these are key constituents of powerful knowledge. He also advocated that powerful knowledge 'be acquired in specialist educational institutions staffed by specialists (Young 2013b:5)'. If we accept that the university lecturers were the owners and imparters of powerful knowledge, then this is only problematic in so much as the knowledge acquisition occurred in workplaces rather than specialist institutions.

A principal emergent theme from the fieldwork findings explored in the final concluding chapter is the relevancy of the concept of powerful knowledge to the experiences of these course participants for whom the looked-for constituents of powerful knowledge may differ from Young's.

Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusions

This concluding chapter re-visits the professional issue raised in Chapter 1 and subsequent research questions articulated in Chapter 3. It aims to synthesise empirical findings with the theoretical framing provided by curriculum theory, and does so by considering each research question in turn. Providing a reminder of the thesis' core issue, it commences with an excerpt from a paper by Young (2013) who writes:

> *We differentiate knowledge because in important ways not all knowledge is the same. We differentiate knowledge according to the best way we have to date of representing the differentiation of reality. We intuitively feel that some knowledges are 'better'—epistemically, morally or aesthetically—than others, and that they represent criteria about what is true, what is beautiful and how we should treat our fellow human beings and the non-human world that are more universal than others. If we accept the fundamental human rights principle that human beings should be treated equally, it follows that any curriculum should be based on an entitlement to this knowledge* (Young 2013b:231).

Entitlement of course, does not guarantee availability and it is here that the principle of accessibility is critical. By its very nature, power is distributed unequally and if we accept that university vocational short courses should have a primary emphasis on upskilling, pedagogic approaches associated with powerful knowledge are likely to be subjugated to the point of being lost. In its most 'upskilling' sense, the curriculum is powerless and the access to further learning it provides is limited. However, and importantly, both for the individuals concerned and for theoretical debate, upskilling is not without value as the acquisition of new skills has its own intrinsic worth and resultant power. This, for many course participants was the principal motive for engagement. The acquisition of tangible skills that had a direct economic impact for individuals and businesses were repeatedly reported as being positive outcomes of the courses. A tension between the provision of 'an education' and 'upskilling' is symptomatic of the contradictory directions, i.e. fair access and the perceived need for a knowledge society on which vocational curriculum is premised (Avis 2009). Indeed, the expressed aims of the work-based learning programme (see page 29) are a clear manifestation of these contradictions. Also of relevance here is that while commitments to skills and economic development and even

widening access to higher education are clear within the programme's aims, reference to knowledge acquisition, a fundamental characteristic of university study is glaringly conspicuous by its absence. The relevance of this omission? It could easily be argued that the inclusion of specific reference to knowledge acquisition is simply not appropriate here and that it is an implicit outcome of both aims. Conversely, is the perspective that this constitutes a tacit admission or acceptance of inequity in higher education curriculum.

From a societal and sociologically functionalist perspective, the structural channelling of accessibility to knowledge strata through a breadth of curriculum can arguably be justified and maintained on assumptions that vocational curricula are more relevant, accessible and motivating for non-traditional students. There are certainly arguments identified by both Wheelahan (2015), and Young (2013) used to justify such differentiations in curriculum content. Furthermore, primarily instrumental curriculum and pedagogic practice are further legitimised by their demonstration of an 'employer responsive' curriculum offer. Both Welsh and UK government policy and guidance explicitly require such collaborations premised on the contribution universities can make to economic renewal (Welsh Government 2014, BIS 2015).

Concurrently however, the entitlement to powerful knowledge, central to Young's argument is denied and questions of social justice remain unanswered. As Preston and Green (2008) identify, the notion of participation in vocational learning is limited to 'getting a job' rather than the aspirations of broader civic and social activity associated with the wider benefits of learning (Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning 2006). This is problematic in terms of both what higher education is and for proponents of equity within university curriculum. As Young asserts above, there is arguably a moral imperative to ensure equitable knowledge within curriculum. Thus, in terms of curriculum parity, and despite any explicit focus on occupational knowledge and skills, vocational education should not preclude access to powerful knowledge.

Knowledge and curriculum

The first research question sought to establish how the sociology of education might further an understanding of knowledge and curriculum as they relate to the part-time adult learner in Wales studying university short courses in the workplace.

The work of influential sociologists in the field of curriculum theory and most significantly that of Bernstein (2000), Young (2008), Muller (2009) and Wheelahan (2010), has provided much understanding. More specifically, the Social Realist approach outlined in Chapter 3 which sees knowledge structures categorised along four dimensions (see page 45) is a helpful conceptual tool. It identifies a need for vocational curriculum to become better grounded in theoretical disciplines and ensure approaches to pedagogy are supportive of theoretical and powerful knowledge. For Wheelahan (2010), this is achievable and she writes:

> *a vocational education can provide students with access to 'society's conversation' if it provides them with explicit and systematic access to the relevant disciplines that underpins their field of practice, which includes the capacity to recognise different forms of knowledge and to traverse the boundaries between them* (Wheelahan, 2010:105).

That said, theory and practice are of course, qualitatively different, and a reconciliation of the two in this research is not unqualified. In particular, the theoretical defining features of powerful knowledge are arguably challenged by application to the real world experiences of the course participants involved in this research. In a wholly theoretical sense, the notion of powerful knowledge as a curriculum principle to which there should be equality of access is not in dispute. Neither is the principle that vocational knowledge can or should facilitate access to powerful knowledge. What is of contention is the question, in this work-based learning context at least, of what powerful knowledge *is*. For example, the 'power' that accompanies skills acquisition for adults in work who are unlikely to ever access full-time mainstream higher education cannot be ignored in a definition of powerful knowledge. Something of contradiction is revealed here as the epistemological assumptions allied to neo-conservative models relegating learning and knowledge acquired through workplace experiences as second rate (Hager 2004), meets the reality that for many of the work-based learners such knowledge is both desirable and moreover, brought with it immediate powers for individuals and businesses. It may be that a relativising of the concept is appropriate contingent upon application to

different groups. This should not mean the loss of egalitarian principles but would incorporate recognition of the wants and needs of different learners.

To return more specifically to the research question, the interplay within Bernstein's pedagogic device has in particular, facilitated understanding of how a large expansion in knowledge and educational opportunities has not resulted in widespread democratisation and egalitarian education for all. It highlights how the meaning and utility of powerful knowledge for individuals cannot be divorced from its broader accompanying social capital. i.e. the type of university attended and the type of course studied. For the students with whom this research is concerned, this can be extended to their experiences as students and the limited access they had to university systems and services.

Central to accessibility to powerful knowledge and all it brings is the subject studied. As we have seen in prior consideration of the pedagogic device, the courses on offer within the work-based learning programme typically represented moves in discourses away from singulars to regions. Constituting a weakening in epistemic relations, for Bernstein (2000) this can be problematic in so much as:

> *every time a discourse moves, there is space for ideology to play. New power relations develop between regions and singulars as they compete for resources and influence* (Bernstein 2000:9)

The courses and subjects on offer within the work-based learning projects were in such subjects as 'Leadership and Management', 'Integrating Marketing Communications' and 'Professional Practice for the Creative Industries'. Theoretically, for students, the ramifications of such 'woolly' subject areas are contradictions and confusion (Muller 2009) as they struggle to ally the courses studied to any recognisable theoretical base. Ivinson et al (2011) similarly warn of new regions that 'their ambiguity makes it difficult to form representations of areas or fields that precede development' (Ivinson et al 2011:16). The fact that these courses were very short in comparison to traditional university courses, and predicated on limited expectations of theoretical knowledge, doubtless play roles here in the investment course participants make in their subject areas in comparison to mainstream students. Though no asserted effort was made to pursue evidence here, the extent to which Muller and Ivinson's expressed contradictions and

confusion was experienced by course participants was not immediately apparent in this investigation. This may well be an area for further research.

Fieldwork findings reported that the impact of engagement with these courses for the individuals studying them was very broad. For some, a direct economic impact on their businesses was evident as the skills acquired facilitated improved practice. It was also clear that skills acquisition was not confined to 'know how' or profane knowledge but for some course participants at least, included the acquisition of broader meta-cognitive skills associated with university study. For others, the achievement of university credits was a stepping stone for further higher education study. Also, in some cases, the experience of having engaged with these courses and assessment strategies was a catalyst for additional learning whether that be within higher education or not.

Consideration of the extent to which the notion of powerful knowledge can be applied to these work-based learning courses needs to acknowledge the weight of study undertaken. Quantitatively, the work-based learning courses in their 10-20 credit capacities, necessarily limit how much knowledge is accessible. In comparison to the full 120 credits that constitutes a typical academic year's study, the implications are obvious. It is then, very interesting that despite this limited exposure, fieldwork findings clearly evidence the development of reflective practice, critical thinking and theoretical knowledge. These features are allied to Young's defining characteristics of powerful knowledge (see page 9) and suggests powerful knowledge as a curriculum principle was evident in the pedagogy of *some* of the lecturers. In turn, the fieldwork revealed that characteristics of powerful knowledge were mirrored in the experiences of *some* course participants.

Equally, it is apparent that any inequality inherent to these courses in comparison to more mainstream approaches to both widening access and mainstream university curriculum was of little or no relevance to many course participants. Some had higher qualifications and others, who didn't, were seemingly equally uninspired by the prospect of 'earning' higher education credits. Instead, the instrumental and arguably powerless curriculum was a motive for engagement for many of the course participants. Accordingly, accepting the premise of a clear epistemological grounding with accompanying pedagogic practice as a baseline for

instrumental curriculum has the potential to be at odds with employers' and employees' expectations of universities' involvement in upskilling.

In summary then, the application of sociological curriculum theory has facilitated understanding of these courses as instrumental curriculum with a clear message of the primary delivery of 'know-how' knowledge. Emerging from such vocational curriculum is an inequity in the knowledge type to which students have access. This does not however preclude such curriculum as a vehicle for the delivery of powerful knowledge but does highlight how an emphasis on upskilling can be to the detriment of the development of higher level thinking and understanding of theoretical knowledge. While the disciplines from which the course subject areas derive are distanced from their theoretical discipline bases, some of the characteristics of Young's notion of powerful knowledge are evident in pedagogic practice. Where a 'rub' is identified is in the applicability and relevance of Young's notion of powerful knowledge to the wants, needs and circumstances of working adults.

Widening Access

The second research question considers the efficacy of these work-based learning courses in widening access to higher education. Nationally, an increasing number of adults engage in higher education, many through such initiatives as the work-based learning programme. Nevertheless, this is not a principal focus of university widening access activities which has an emphasis on young people (Bekhrandia 2003) and is characteristically manifested in 'fair access' approaches. That said, and as discussed in Chapter 2, the martketisation of higher education manifested in the metrics by which universities are appraised, has brought about a shift in discourses and distinct locating of widening access activity as determined by universities status (McCaig 2015). This has resulted in a position where higher status institutions typically, though by no means exclusively, promote fair access models and their post-1992 counterparts promote their proximity to regional labour markets and utilitarian approaches to widening access. This meritocratic model results in selective universities 'creaming off the top', those individuals from under-represented groups whose circumstances have positioned them for consideration and who are deemed most capable to succeed. Concurrently, for lower status institutions, initiatives reaching out to non-traditional university students through vocational curriculum are essential to ensure their individual viability

(Thompson 2000). Widening access activity is accordingly aligned and maintained within institutional hierarchies.

Intrinsic to the acknowledgement of such hierarchies is an acknowledgement of inequitable access to higher education. As previously discussed, while these work-based learning courses may be effective in engaging non-traditional learners in higher education learning, policy and practice means that in the same way universities are unequal so are their approaches to widening access.

In terms of types of universities, it is worthy of note that University A, a research intensive red brick pre-1992 university, contrary to the assertions above, was involved in the delivery of these work-based learning courses. As this curriculum is typically more readily allied to post 1992 institutions, this could be attributed to the fact that the provision was funded by the European Social Fund and part of a broader Higher Skills Wales initiative that also included funding for Master's degrees and PhD's with which the University was also involved. A search of the University's website revealed no expressions of, or commitment to widening access or working with regional employers.

It is clear from these research findings, that it is not simply that the curriculum that may be less powerful that creates or could create unequal access to higher education. It is a breadth of related factors that do this. These include:

- status of the university attended;
- curriculum and pedagogy;
- progression opportunities available;
- accessibility to the wider student experience including student services;
- differentials in university administration;
- flexibility in delivery.

Furthermore, this research has revealed that while it may strategically make sense in terms of the longer term impact of a better educated working populace to focus on widening access activity for young people, we know that a reality in Wales, is that there are currently a comparatively high number of working adults who are low-skilled, and with no or few formal

qualifications. Hence, despite curriculum and progression limitations, for such individuals it is evident that provision such as these work-based learning courses is an enabler that can effectively widen access to higher education.

In support of an approach that will facilitate access to powerful knowledge via vocational curriculum these conclusions are helpful. The link between widening participation to higher education and work-based learning courses such as those under scrutiny in this research can be found in the advancement of workers and the professional progression that can result (Walsh 2008). This can be interpreted in one of two ways. Firstly, it could mean that individuals previously excluded from such learning opportunities by the demands of full-time employment, are facilitated to undertake higher education degrees in subjects allied to personal interest and aptitude. So, in the same way that universities reach out to school children in disadvantaged communities, comparable activities could be undertaken with working adults who have poor or no prior educational attainments. Secondly, it could equally mean that short vocational and instrumental short courses such as these, provide individuals with skills and university higher education credits to improve their productivity in the workplace .

HEFCW's strategic approach to widening access states:

> *The aim of widening access is to secure inclusion, progression and success in higher education to enable learners across all age ranges and backgrounds, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees* (HEFCW 2014).

That these courses were only offered in European Union identified geographical regions deemed socially and economically disadvantaged, and that there were no prior educational attainment pre-requisites, the potential for the courses to widen access to higher education is clear. However, as standalone, instrumental short courses, designed to upskill, the ability of the work-based learning provision to achieve HEFCW's aspirations is questionable. For them to truly succeed, clear progression routes onto further higher learning would be required. Findings revealed that these work-based learners were not explicitly facilitated to such routes and where individuals had used the courses as a stepping stone for further learning this was of their own volition and doing rather than having been strategically supported.

The reality is that there was little incentive for universities to focus on the provision of appropriate progression opportunities from these work-based learning courses. Universities were quantitatively measured by the cumulative higher education credits achieved by the projects rather than the numbers of students progressing onto higher learning. It is unsurprising that projects focused on operational delivery and credit accrual rather than working with their broader institutions in the promotion of progression routes. Additionally, the flexibility of when and where these courses were delivered were repeatedly identified as important for the course participants. There was no evidence that any of the participating universities without the financial subsidies that accompanied the work-based learning projects, were seeking to sustain such flexibility in other curricula. Economically, this is likely to have been unviable. From the university perspective, in comparison to the delivery of lectures by one academic to a campus-based lecture theatre of 100+ students, then the economies of scale of lecturers travelling to workplaces to teach small groups would be disproportionately costly not least when the return in terms of credit accrual is factored in. This is compounded when the number of course participants who chose not to undertake the course assessment is similarly brought into calculations. A further disincentive for universities was that as the work-based learning students had not paid any course fees it made it difficult to ascertain if employers or individuals progressing onto further higher learning would pay requisite course fees. So, because little had been done to facilitate progression routes from these courses, universities were ill-informed on the extent to which these factors of flexibility and fees were key determinants in engagement or indeed, the appetite among these cohorts for further higher learning opportunities.

A post work-based learning programme evaluation concluded that the focus of the projects during implementation was on '*fairly utilitarian and applied learning, relevant to immediate needs related to current employment, rather than progression to further, more intensive, higher-level learning* (Old Bell 3:5). It is fair to say that although the overall work-based learning programme's aims did aspire to provide non-traditional routes into higher education it is evident that for most participants this was a short route terminating in a dead end.

If we accept that these work-based learning courses are a form of widening access activity, the potential for inequity does not just apply to the nature of the provision as compared to 'fair access' approaches to mainstream university curricula. The findings evidence disparity within

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courses themselves and more specifically how they are delivered and to whom. The in-house approach where course cohorts derived from the same employer is most readily allied to what Lester and Costley (2010) describe as a 'tactical' partnership, where the learning is organised to align with staff development aims was, as reported in Chapter 4, the dominant mode of delivery within the two projects. Whilst providing opportunities for personal continuing professional development, this approach has obvious tensions between any learning needs that may have been identified by individuals and the organisational priorities identified by the employer. For example, some course participants reluctantly attended courses when required to do so by their employer rather than by their own volition. In consideration of widening access activity then, there has been no invitation for course participants to join a cultural elite in terms of exposure to the promotion of the benefits of higher education learning associated with fair access models. Instead, for these course participants, they were asked to complete a university course they did not choose to do and in subjects they may not have been interested in. Such a situation is obviously potentially problematic and unlikely to be conducive to raising aspirations for further higher education study. In this scenario then employer needs are prioritised over those of individual employees.

The 'open' course model in comparison is more compatible with the pursuit of individual continuing professional development aspirations (see Chapter 5). In comparison to the in-house model it can be assumed that the course participants were attending voluntarily to study a subject they had chosen to do.

Individual agency emerges as a consistent theme when the efficacy of these courses as a method for widening access is considered. That is, some particular course participants chose to use the higher education credits as part of a personal higher learning pathway while for others this was of no interest. There was also evidence of a consensus view within focus groups on the utility of the courses over and above 'upskilling' in specific subject areas. Groups 5 & 6 (in-house groups) for example, saw the courses predominantly in terms of the upskilling they offered whereas Groups 1 & 2 (open) spoke more about the courses as providing higher education credit which could have utility. Group 4 were not particularly interested in the credits but were in the theoretical knowledge.

Completion of course assessment requirements

Fieldwork findings suggest a relationship between the experiences of course participants and who completed the course assessments and positive outcomes associated with the transformational approach to widening participation. This is a position reflected within the evaluation of the entire work-based learning programme which linked positive feedback on the courses with having successfully achieved higher education credits:

> *That there is an association between those who achieved qualifications or credit and positive views of the training and of outcomes flowing from it, suggests perhaps that greater success in linking participation to qualification outcomes (perhaps by developing, as some projects have done, more imaginative ways of integrating assessment into the learning) would have been beneficial* (Old Bell3:6)

There is evidence within both Chapters 5 and 6, from both course participants and lecturers on how this has been a critical element for many course participants with some reporting that it had in fact been life-changing.

To return to the research question of the efficacy of these courses in widening access, an acknowledgement needs to be made that for many, these courses where neither wanted or regarded as a route into higher education. Equally, we have also seen that these courses can and have provided a route into further higher education learning for those course participants who wanted it.

Where the use of this provision as widening access activity becomes problematic is not so much in the curriculum offered as a lack of progression opportunities following initial engagement. If universities do use these student numbers as evidence to their funding bodies of widening access activity as I know the one I worked for did, then without suitable progression opportunities a further inequity for the widening access student studying vocational curriculum is apparent.

Pedagogy and assessment

The final research question asked about the roles of pedagogy and assessment in the route to powerful knowledge. Within broader higher education realms, we have seen a complex interplay between discourses associated with neo-conservative models of knowledge and those

of technical-instrumentalists with the latter increasingly prevalent in government rhetoric. In a general sense, less emphasis is being placed on official knowledge within university curricula and more on transferable and employability skills. A loss of faith in the 'Enlightenment project' (Griffin 1997:3) encapsulates the sentiments associated with a move away from neo-conservative assumptions of the role of universities as sacred trustors whose role it is to impart it's knowledge to a privileged and competent few. In addition to a growth in institutions branded universities, the influences of new managerialism and new performance management have permeated institutions across the higher education hierarchy. This is manifested in less emphasis on universities' roles as communities of scholars and more on their capacity to operate as a business or workplace (Deem, Hillyard and Reed 2007). Placing an increased emphasis on graduates to ensure that they have the requisite skills and knowledge for employment exemplifies the commodification of knowledge the move made from 'knowledge to knowers' *(*Wheelahan 2010:94).

For those interested in the power of knowledge and equity within curriculum, two questions arise. One is around what is being lost by the incorporation of 'know-how' knowledge into university curriculum and the second, by association, what is required to ensure vocational curriculum such as these work-based learning courses offer (increased) parity in the power of knowledge they proffer? The first question is explained by curriculum theorists as risking a weakening in epistemic relations the further curriculum becomes separated from the disciplines they derived, then the less powerful it becomes. It can also be assumed that the more time spent on university courses learning employability and other transferable skills then the less time available for the acquisition of subject-specific theoretical knowledge.

In response to the second question of parity within work-based learning higher education offers, Bernstein (2000) cautions against the 'exploration of vocational applications rather than upon exploration of knowledge' (Bernstein 2000:169-170). It is within these emphases that power differentials in accessing different types of knowledge are most apparent. If vocational curriculum is limited and distanced from discipline bases then students engaged on such provision are disadvantaged. Wheelahan (2015) draws on the work of Bernstein (2000) and Durkheim (2006) using the notion of 'collective representations' which are transient bodies of knowledge shaped into disciplines that allow us both to understand our worlds and assert some

control over our future. They also ultimately serve a normative role 'as a means through which society conducts its conversation about itself' (Wheelahan 2015:752). Denial of access to and consequent understanding of such knowledge is thus to, theoretically at least, deny individuals a participative role in the processes of knowledge development.

That these were accredited university courses results in comparisons with the nature and content of other higher education courses. Significant deviations from traditional models of university curriculum and indeed from that associated with 'official knowledge' are clear within these intentionally instrumental curriculum offers. That these courses were available through funded target-driven and time-limited projects has meant that pedagogically, it has been impossible to detach practice aimed at retaining students and ensuring they are able to complete assessment requirements from that aimed at the provision of higher level learning experiences.

Derived from the fieldwork findings, some of the key pedagogical characteristics of these work-based learning courses can be summarised as:

- applied teaching and assessment strategies that had utility for course participants;
- strategies that promoted the notion of assessment for and of learning;
- the promotion of reflexivity;
- lecturers as collaborators / facilitators;
- peer learning;
- embedded study/academic skills.

A repeated aspect of course delivery was the degree to which pedagogic approaches were facilitative and collaborative above hierarchical and didactic. It was clear that the notion of the lecturer as the knowledgeable expert tasked with the one-way delivery of knowledge was deemed inappropriate by both interviewees and focus group participants. Instead, there was evidence of lecturers and course participants working together in the synthesis of knowledge with experience. In this context, the workplace is used as a learning resource serving a distinct curriculum purpose. The relationship between this practice and the defining features of powerful knowledge is necessarily a subjective one. The importance of the lecturers' basic assumptions about the courses is pivotal in so much as they determine the pedagogic

approaches employed and emergence or not of higher level learning attributes associated with powerful knowledge.

Conclusion

Prioritising knowledge perceived to be of value and relevance *(*Freire, 1970, Jones & Thomas 2005:619) has been integral to the way lecturers constructed and delivered these courses. While sociological theory has had much to offer in terms of classifying types of knowledge (e.g. Durkheim's 'sacred' and 'profane', Bernstein's 'vertical' and 'horizontal' and Vygotsky's 'scientific' and 'everyday' encapsulated in neo-conservative and vocational knowledge forms), the dearth of a theory of what knowledge is has precluded the development of a knowledge-based curriculum (Young 2013). It has simultaneously by its absence, allowed the ORF to dominate the nature of vocational curricula (Wheelahan 2010) resulting in the maintenance of a hierarchy that de-values such qualifications (Thompson 2000).

In consideration of the perceived power associated with the knowledge acquired through university education, it is not without irony that the Council of Industry and Higher Education has reported employers favoured graduate attributes as:

Communication skills 86%

Team working skills 91%

Integrity 85%

Intellectual ability 76%

Confidence 64 %

Character / personality 73%   (Archer and Davison,2008)

Unacknowledged by the Council is the intrinsic relationship between the value of such attributes and personal education histories. As Watson (2014) accurately comments:

> *the acid test is whether they* [employers] *search intensively enough for institutions and courses that take such requirements* ['employability skills'] *seriously, or are content merely to screen by institutional reputation* (Watson 2014:52).

The reality is that the calibre of graduates' employability attributes are often secondary to the weight of social capital allied to the institution from which they graduate. British media often cite research such as a recent Sutton Trust report on the educational backgrounds of the UK professional elite which revealed that a disproportionate amount of the top professions are populated by the alumni of private schools and Oxbridge (Kirby, 2016:2). The Financial Times likewise reported that 'top jobs' in the corporate world remain the prerogative of those who have studied at elite universities (Bradshaw, 2015). The fact that of the fifty-six British Prime Ministers to date, forty two studied at Oxbridge (Blanchflower 2016) provides further demonstrable evidence of this relationship.

Cognisant of the breadth of social, political and economic interrelated structures and systems perpetuating these realities, there maintains an opinion that the knowledge acquired by graduates of elite institutions is of superior calibre and power to that proffered by other education providers. Moreover, this view is used to ensure the maintenance of this elite education system. Justified by Haldane (1997):

> *the study of ancient disciplines in ancient universities is, in general, intellectually more serious than the practice of cultural studies in the new universities [..] Those who deny this are generally not in a position to make informed judgements or have a vested interest in seeing intellectual hierarchies undermined* (Haldane1997:53).

Critically for this research is not so much the social hierarchies (Burr 2003) and cultural interpretations (Clarke and Winch 2006) which clearly play central roles in perceptions of curriculum, but on the 'intellectual seriousness' to which Haldane refers. Parity within curricula requires focus on epistemic rather than social relations (Wheelahan 2010:105) and it is here that theory and practice converge as these work-based learning courses are considered.

I have been conscious throughout this process of seeking to avoid the sentiment encapsulated in the qualitative researcher critically interpreting and mediating discourses and socio-political processes from or to an ethical position (Ball,1997). That said, there is doubtless an ethical dimension here in relation to epistemic access. While, the frustration evident in the excerpt above is understood, debates provide a societal dis-service if they preclude consideration of how individuals who will never be in the privileged position of studying at an ancient university can be given access to the intellectual tools required for higher learning. Using 'intellectual

seriousness' as a measure of quality fails to address what a student of the Classics is given access to that the Cultural Studies student is not.

The experiences of these work-based learning course participants have revealed that the university learning in which course participants were engaged provided educative experiences over and above that which could be expected through professional development non-HE workplace training courses. A clear articulation of what such pedagogic practice and curriculum principles are would do very little to threaten the hierarchies to which Haldane refers which are deeply entrenched within broader societal inequities. It would however, focus attention away from such seemingly protectionist vernacular to a recognition of the importance of more egalitarian curricula.

That is not to say that the worth of these courses should be dismissed. While we can readily accept that this work-based learning manifestation of higher education is limited in the access to higher education it provides, this neither means that the knowledge acquired is without power nor that the higher education learning has been without value. As funding for adult education continues to be withdrawn it is important to recognise that the reality is that the low-skilled, low-paid working Welsh populace, many of whom engaged in these work-based learning course are, despite their inclination or potential, extremely unlikely to proceed to undertake a university degree. Fieldwork findings have revealed that course participant experiences reiterated the value attached to these courses over and above workforce 'training' courses. Hence, regardless of the extent to which these courses widen access to higher education in the general sense of the term, there is value in using higher education in this way.

Moreover, if it can be assumed that through engagement in such work-based learning opportunities, individuals are facilitated to participate more fully in the employment markets, enhance career chances, develop self-efficacy and critical thinking, all of which are skills and attributes associated with higher learning (BIS, 2012) we should ask have they thus been provided with at least a form of powerful knowledge? Even if that form is not compatible with Young's definition? Or, if not powerful knowledge as understood by Young et al, then at the very least a route towards it?

The 'power' associated with the courses is revealed in four distinct manifestations. They are the:

- impact on personal and business productivity;
- capacity to serve as a transformative model of widening access;
- acquisition of transferable metacognitive skills;
- wider benefits of learning.

A spectrum is evident ranging from student and lecturer expectations that these courses were wholly instrumental aimed at upskilling in specific subjects (e.g. social media) through to the other end of the spectrum where lecturer pedagogic practice and individual student/course participant expectations extolled transformative and educative capacities.

It is important not to shy away from the instrumental and utilitarian underpinnings of the provision but instead to acknowledge them as the foundations on which a powerful curriculum can be built. Far from de-valuing the curriculum and knowledge inherent to these work-based learning courses, these research findings offer that these courses are (or have the potential to be) of great utility for working adults. The extent to which this work-based learning curriculum can ally itself with the transformative approach to widening access is limited but nonetheless evident. Lecturer and course participant approaches to course delivery and how they are received have been central to the extent this has been achieved. It is arguable that a 'socially real' perspective is required here. There is no question around the importance of addressing the power differentials between traditional mainstream university curriculum and vocational qualifications. The incorporation of curriculum elements providing the objectivity of official knowledge into vocational courses seems an essential element in any drive towards equivalence. However, the relationships between these arguments and these work-based learning courses is less straightforward. The issue of individual agency is an important one here. That is how the lecturers and course participants themselves both understood and used the courses, whether that be in solely skills-based capacities and/or as part of a progression route to further higher learning.

Where the research findings are most closely allied to Young's defining characteristics of powerful knowledge is when lecturers and course participants referenced the integration of

theoretical knowledge into course delivery and where the experience of engaging with course assessment strategies nurtured the development of meta-cognitive thinking. There are however, within the research findings, confusion and 'grey' areas that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the 'clouding' of pedagogic practice attributable to the time-limited, target-driven nature of the work-based learning programme has made it arguably more complicated to identify that pedagogic practice aimed at promoting higher level learning and that which was aimed at securing the achievement of higher education credits. Secondly, while key constituents of powerful knowledge have been articulated by Young (2013) along with the Social Realist dimensions (Young 2008) along which the conflicts between neo-conservative and instrumentalism can be measured (see page 45), they are open to interpretation. While this has enabled these research findings to be applied to both, this is not without ambiguity. For example, it could be argued that the development of critical thinking, reflexive capacities and synthesis of theory and practice which were all reported as having occurred through engagement with the courses are all evidence of three of Young's expressed constituents of powerful knowledge. That is that it should provide reliable and testable explanations of ways of thinking, be open to challenge and provide a basis of suggesting realistic alternatives (Young 2013). However, without a more systematic approach that further unpacks Young's constituents of powerful knowledge and the degree to which these aspects were achieved, the analysis as presented could be argued as being on thin theoretical ice. Thirdly, the breadth of expectations and basic assumptions about the nature of the courses from course participants, employers and lecturers complicates and clouds the identification of an 'appetite' for the use of higher education in this way.

Regardless of individuals' motivations and assumptions, these work-based learning courses arguably embrace the progressive possibilities of knowledge-based economies (Avis, 2016) in their provision of higher learning opportunities in non-traditional modes to non-traditional students. Realities as expressed by the course participants revealed that a full-time university education is either undesirable, inappropriate or inaccessible.

Good quality adult learning brings with it a breadth of wider benefits which ultimately advantage the public purse. These are primarily around health and well-being but also include increased civic participation and improved family interactions. Evidence suggests that formal

learning improves confidence having twice the impact of being employed. Other benefits include reductions in self-reported depressions, improved physical health, reductions in number of GP visits, greater involvement in voluntary work and improved financial expectations (Dolan et al 2012).

If there is any gap in the sociology of education curriculum theory it is here in how a knowledge-based approach to curriculum can incorporate the nuances required for adults, who will not be studying degrees in universities to access powerful knowledge, to improve their lives. Knowledge 'as the route not only to societal competiveness but also to its well-being' (Avis,2009:3) underpins such an approach which embraces the potential for work-based learning to not just be about work but to use this orientation to embrace a wider educative role. Promoting accessibility to powerful knowledge through a knowledge-based *and* utilitarian curriculum requires a clear articulation of both powerful knowledge as a curriculum principle and supporting pedagogic practice.

Having sought to apply sociological theory to the professional issue questioning the nature and quality of work-based learning short university courses, I support Young's (2008) assertion that accessibility to powerful knowledge is a matter of social justice. I also uphold the view that it should be recognised as a curriculum principle. This is caveated by a need for further consideration through systematic inquiry and practical application of the theoretical concept of powerful knowledge to the real life experiences of working adults.

 A relationship is clear between the expectations of course participants and perceptions of the power of the curriculum. For example, Focus Group participant F1 in Group 1 is referenced earlier as saying that her main motivation for coming on the course was to learn how to set up social media pages and that she had achieved her goal. Her focus was clearly on skills acquisition and the 'power' that these new skills could bring to her and her business. Conversely, in the same focus group, another female (F4) was clear that she was strategically using the accrual of the higher education credits as a stepping stone to further higher education study. It follows that within the parameters of Young's (2013) defining characterisitcs of powerful knowledge, we can at the very least, assume that these work-based learning courses have the capacity to facilitate access to powerful knowledge to individuals and groups who are

typically excluded from such higher-level learning opportunities. We can similarly conclude that individual agency has a role to play here.

Perhaps of greater relevance are the lecturers' expectations of the courses as exponents of powerful knowledge. Two thirds of the lecturers made explicit links to the courses as vehicles to widen participation and provide transformative educational experiences. i.e. Lecturers Simon, Lowri, Non, Iona, Caroline, Sian, Keith, Leo and Tim. For example, when asked about the relationship between the courses and the concept of powerful knowledge spoke not only about how the courses could provide subject specific knowledge and skills but they also equipped course participants with the ability to make better judgements (or they used language that could easily be interpreted as meaning this). In comparison, Lecturers Natalie, Tracy and Tanya expectations of the courses were more instrumental in nature. They spoke far less about the development of transferable skills or any attributes of higher learning and more about the impact of engagement with the courses on individual businesses and regional economies. Also reported by some lecturers was the view that any requisite theoretical components of the courses got in way of the delivery of more skills-based knowledge.

That course participants' experiences of university administrative systems were seemingly inadequate to accommodate this mode of the delivery of higher education, can, for the most part, be explained by the comparable small scale of the work-based learning project's administrative requirements as compared to the overwhelmingly majority of other university courses. However, despite many of the course participants informing that they had no desire to be seen as university students, the ramifications of this limited access shouldn't be ignored. We have seen that Young's notions of powerful knowledge is premised on limited accessibility. i.e. higher education courses within a hierarchy of both courses and higher education institutions. Importantly, what becomes accessible upon access to such curriculum is not just the powerful knowledge as defined by Young, but the social and cultural capital that accompanies it. This is principally manifested in the status of the university and course attended. Both provide their relative access to wider influencing factors such as libraries, resources, student services, specialist support and many other broader student experiences that arguably bolster access to, and command of, skills inherent to powerful knowledge. Hence,

the simple lack of access to this 'hidden curriculum' and university electronic systems and /or student ID cards arguably represents a more significant barrier than it may first appear.

Findings offer that it would be a mistake to accept that powerful knowledge is inaccessible to individuals such as those engaged on these work-based learning courses. If we accept a constituent of powerful knowledge (p.9) can be manifested in curriculum and pedagogy as opposed to being delivered in 'specialist institutions staffed by specialists' then the power integral to these courses grows increasingly apparent. We have seen that for some course participants, their experience of engaging on the courses was truly transformational. For others, the impact was less dramatic but many reported that having engaging with the course provided them with a new transferable skill set that included the abilities to reflect, think critically and integrate theory and practice. We have also seen that a 'hook' for engagement used by lecturers was to make the course content relevant and utilitarian to perceived business needs. Rather then, than seeing the social justice and economic imperatives as tensions within work-based learning provision, we can start to see the potential for them complementing each other in curriculum that provides both upskilling and powerful knowledge. In Welsh context where as we have seen, qualification bases are low in comparison to UK averages then widening access to higher education in this way has the potential to reap broader societal benefits. That is, truly educative work-based learning university courses which equip individuals with a skillset associated with powerful knowledge and its benefits. Elements of the flexibility in the modes of delivery inherent to the work-based learning courses would need to maintain to facilitate accessibility for working adults. Similarly, for such provision to effectively widen access to higher education then transparent progression opportunities would need to be in place.

That said, using Young's defining characteristics as they stand, I am confident to conclude that vocational curriculum in this form can provide powerful knowledge but less confident in whether this is a desirable outcome within the parameters of these work-based learning courses. Key determinants here are the requirement for clarity of expectations within the triad of university, employer and employee/student relations.

While these courses as they stand may constitute a lesser from of widening access, it is an important one. Not least in recognition of the limited educational and professional

development opportunities available for working adults and the positive life outcomes that engaging with education brings. Crucially where these courses are identified as being of poorer epistemic value, i.e. curriculum and knowledge content and progression opportunities, these are all qualitative concerns that can be addressed.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Prospective participant information sheet

Thank you for agreeing to consider being part of this research. You have been selected as a prospective participant through your involvement as a student or Academic within the European Social Fund supported Work-Based Learning Programme. More specifically, because of your association with either the XXXX or XXXX projects. Without the voluntary participation of people such as yourself, this work would not be possible and I am extremely grateful for your time.

Who am I and why am I doing this?

My name is Kirsten Merrill-Glover[i] and   I am undertaking research with Cardiff University School of Social Sciences as part of a Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD). The research has the approval of the School Ethics Committee and I am being supervised by two Senior Research Professors. In addition to my role as a Doctoral student, I am also the Project Director of both XXXX and XXXX.

What will it involve?

I am researching the experiences of students and academics involved in studying and delivering short university work-based learning courses. I am interested in identifying how these courses are different or similar to other university courses from the perspectives of students and tutors. There are absolutely no right or wrong answers, I am simply interested in listening to your views.

What will I do with the information?

Information from the Focus Groups and Interviews will be transcribed and if you are interested, I will give you a copy of your contribution. Transcripts will only be read by me and will be kept in a secure place in line with Cardiff University's School Research Ethics Committee protocols. Information from the transcripts will be used to inform my Doctoral research as well as helping to shape further work-based learning projects. No real names will be used within the transcripts or subsequent documents relating to this research.

What if you change your mind about taking part?

Participation in this research is voluntary decision and it follows that you are free to withdraw at any point you wish without giving a reason.

Contact Information

If you would like more information about this research, then you can contact me via email Kirsten.merrill-glover@southwales.ac.uk or telephone 01443 482330.

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Thank interviewee for her/his time and agreement to partake in research.

Introduce self and ensure interviewee has received a prospective participant information sheet.

Explain that:

1.   I am a student of Cardiff University SOCSCI undertaking an EdD and that this research relates to my thesis. The overall aim of the thesis is to apply theories from the sociology of education to develop an enhanced understanding of the professional realm of widening access to higher education in Wales. In particular, a specific focus is placed on the use of Credit Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) at level 4 and above accredited learning to 'upskill' employed adults in the workplace. More specifically, is a focus on the ramifications of the curriculum and pedagogic approaches on offer through such widening particpation activity in relation to the individual student and for access to what is deemed 'powerful knowledge'[3].

2. research has been approved by Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences School Research Ethics Committee and all non-anonymised data will be stored safely in line with Cardiff University protocols and will only be accessed by myself as the researcher.

3. the interview is anticipated to last for around 1 hour and that participation is voluntary and as such s/he is free to withdraw and leave the interview at any point.

Indicate why the interviewee has been selected. i.e as an Academic delivering university short courses via the European Social Fund Work-Based Learning Programme XXXX and XXXX Projects.

Provide the opportunity for the interviewee to ask any questions at this point.

Seek permission to record the interview.

Ask interviewee to introduce him / herself and confirm the courses they teach.

Appendix 3: Interview Questions.

Explain that questions centre on three main themes, namely pedagogy and assessment strategies, widening participation in higher education and consideration of the nature of the knowledge imparted through such university short courses.

Pedagogy and Assessment

1. What do think are the differences if any between this type of work-based learning teaching and campus-based delivery of higher education?
2. How do you mange tensions between upskilling/training and engagement with university courses?
3. To what extent would you say that your pedagogy and assessment strategies are influenced by student retention and attainment?
4. To what extent do you feel that your assessment strategies encourage deeper learning over and above seeking to ensure students are successful in attaining higher education credit?
5. What difference do you feel delivery in workplaces makes to the pedagogic approaches you employ as an academic?
6. What transferable skills if any, do you feel students acquire through engagement with such university short courses as these work-based learning courses?

Widening Participation
7. To what extent do you feel that these courses encourage progression onto further higher education courses?
8. Do you actively encourage progression routes for work-based learning students?
9. What barriers / if any do you think there are to work-based learning students progressing on to further HE study?
10. How do you think the work-based learning offer differs from other Widening Access/participation curriculum offers?

Nature of knowledge

11. What is the purpose of what you teach?
12. Quote: 'The purpose of (formal) education is to ensure that as many as possible of each cohort or age group are able to acquire the *knowledge* that takes them *beyond their experience* [original emphasis] and which they would be unlikely to have access to at

home, at work or in the community' (Young 2010b:5). How does this quote relate to your experience as a work-based learning Lecturer?

13. Ask interviewee if they would like to say anything else they feel may be relevant but which has not come up through discussion thus far.

Thank interviewee for his/her contributions and ensure s/he has my contact details.

Appendix 4: Focus group questions, revisions and Discussion Guide

Pilot Focus Group Question	Link to Thesis	Comment / Revision
1. Do you feel you have developed skills that you can use within your workplace?	Q4	Worked
2. ~~Can you think of any examples of how studying these courses has made you approaches work tasks differently?~~		Deleted as too much duplication
3. To what extent do you feel that you are university students?	Q4	Worked
4. If you do not already have one, has doing this course made you think about doing a degree?	Q4	Worked
5. How relevant has the course been to your current job?	Q4	Worked
6. Do you feel you have also developed any other skills that will be useful for your broader life experiences? E.g. Critical thinking, academic writing, academic referencing, research skills etc.?	Q4	Worked
7. ~~To what extent has engagement with this course developed your ability to think critically in relation to work and out of work experiences?~~	DELETE	Not appropriate
8. Would you say that any skills you have acquired over the duration of the course are more or less important than		Worked Add another question asking if individuals have any specific course or

any higher education credits you may have achieved?		qualification attainment goals.
9. ~~Can you think of any examples of how studying these courses has made you think differently about your job?~~		
10. How important for you was /is it that you successfully complete the course assessment requirements?		Worked
11. Has the module assessment strategy helped in furthering your knowledge and understanding of the subject area?		Worked
12. Can you think of any examples of how your experiences of studying these courses has made you challenge any work practices or your thinking?		Move to the top

Revised Focus Group questions and Discussion Guide

Thank participants for their time and ensure all have received a Prospective Participant Sheet.

Reiterate that:

1. I am a student of Cardiff University SOCSCI undertaking an EdD and that this research relates to my thesis. The overall aim of the thesis is to apply theories from the sociology of education to develop an enhanced understanding of the professional realm of widening access to higher education in Wales. In particular, a specific focus is placed on the use of Credit Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) at level 4 and above accredited learning to 'upskill' employed adults in the workplace. More specifically, is a focus on the ramifications of the curriculum and pedagogic approaches on offer

through such widening particpation activity in relation to the individual student and for access to what is deemed 'powerful knowledge'[4].

2. research has been approved by Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences School Research Ethics Committee and all non-anonymised data will be stored safely in line with Cardiff University protocols and will only be accessed by myself as the researcher.

3. the Focus Group is anticipated to last for around 45 minutes to1 hour and that participation is voluntary and as such anyone is free to withdraw and leave the room at any point.
4. discussion is confidential and that group members should feel free to say as little or as much as they wish.
5. Around 10 prepared questions will be asked with room for impromptu questions.

Indicate why the prospective participants have been selected. i.e as students engaged on university short courses via the European Social Fund Work-Based Learning Programme XXXX and XXXX Projects.

Provide the opportunity for group members to ask any questions at this point.

Seek agreement to participate and consent to record conversations

Move to question 1.

1. How relevant has the course or courses you have studied been to your current job?
2. Can you think of any examples of how your experiences of studying these courses has made you challenge any work practices or your thinking?
3. Do you feel you have developed skills and knowledge that you can use either in work or your broader life?
4. To what extent do you feel that you are university students?
5. If you do not already have one, has doing this course made you think about doing a degree?
6. Are there any barriers to you going on to pursue a degree?
7. How important for you was /is it that you successfully complete the course assessment requirements?

8. Would you say that any skills you may have acquired over the duration of the course are more or less important than any higher education credits you may have achieved?
9. Do you have any plans to gain further HE credits or qualifications?
10. Has the course assessment strategy helped in furthering your knowledge and understanding of the subject area?

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[i] My name has changed to Kirsten Jones since the fieldwork was undertaken