Understanding the Problems of Transition into Higher Education

Helen Crabtree, Carole Roberts, University of Salford and Christine Tyler, Education Consultant

Abstract

This paper reports on a study which compares the teaching of business and business related subjects in one English university and a number of associated tertiary (post-16) colleges. The research was carried out to explore similarities and differences in the teaching and learning environments in these two sectors in order to gain a better understanding of why some students appear to find it difficult to make the transition into university. This comparative study forms the first part of an ongoing project intended to improve retention and achievement of first year undergraduate students who move directly from level 3 qualifications in school or college into university. While the research focuses in particular on business and business-related qualifications, the results of this study are likely to be of wider interest to those involved with first year undergraduate students, irrespective of subject or discipline of study.

Background to the Study

Changes in post compulsory educational policy over the past decade have placed increasing emphasis on the concept of widening participation and lifelong learning. These changes are underpinned by the need to provide equality of opportunity for groups which are under represented in tertiary and higher education (such as ethnic minorities and lower socio-economic groups) but are also driven by the need to develop workers with the appropriate knowledge and skills required to support national economic development (Parker 2003, Leitch Report 2006, HEFCE 2006). As a result, the government's aim is to encourage more young people to remain in education beyond the school leaving age and to increase the level of participation in higher education in England, with a target of fifty per cent of those aged between 18 and 30 by 2010.

Within English universities, the majority of students still enter university at 18 or 19, straight from school or college. However the increased emphasis on widening participation has already resulted in increased student numbers and an increase in student diversity. This has created problems for both academic staff and students. Thus university lecturers have commented on the challenges presented by mixed ability groups or groups from a range of different backgrounds or experiences and the lack of time and resources for student support activities and have expressed concerns about students' attitudes and motivation (Ottewill and Macfarlane 2003, Hayward et al 2006). There is increasing concern about high levels of student withdrawal, particularly during the first year of the undergraduate programme (Harvey *et al.* 2006).

Recent reviews of research on barriers to widening participation in higher education (Gorard *et al.* 2006) and the first year student experience (Harvey *et al.* 2006) have identified a range of issues which have been studied in connection with the problem of student retention and achievement. These include the importance of social and academic integration, the mismatch between student expectations and experiences, lack of appropriate academic study skills and the importance of student support.(Gorard *et al.'s* findings were that there is a slow movement towards equity in the system) Findings are mirrored by research carried out within the University of Salford which has identified the importance of self concept and personal support systems as a factor in student persistence into the second year of undergraduate programmes (Roberts *et al.,* 2003) and the value of programme based activities which facilitate and promote social and academic integration as part of the student's early experience (Trotter and Roberts, 2006). In the case of academic integration, this latter study identified the importance of active student-centred teaching and learning activities and ongoing summative assessment. However Crabtree (2006) subsequently demonstrated that even under these circumstances many first year business students failed to engage effectively with the process, appeared to be unaware that independent learning was a requirement for success in higher education and lacked many of the skills necessary for effective independent study. (See work by Entwistle)

Both Gorard *et al.* (2006) and Harvey *et al.* (2006) comment on the limitations of approaching this situation from the perspective of student deficit and suggest that it might be more useful to investigate the situation from the perspective of the transition and adjustment into higher education. This seems logical since research has shown that students are likely to base their expectations and learning strategies on their previous educational experiences (Vermunt 1998, Cook and Leckey 1999, Kember 2001, Hibbert 2006)).

A review of the literature has identified a number of issues which might affect the student teaching and learning experience in college and university. One such factor is the nature of the qualifications delivered. In

the college environment these include level 3 vocational qualifications (such as BTEC National and AVCE awards and the new A level in Applied Business), which are assessed primarily by means of coursework assignments, and the more academic A levels which are assessed predominantly by unit based examinations, often based on preseen or unseen case studies (see for example National Database for Accredited Qualifications, Merrills 2003).

In 2001 an Ofsted report on the first year of implementation of Curriculum 2000 noted that students studying for revised A level qualifications had fewer opportunities for independent work than before and QCA reports in 2002, 2003 and 2006 drew attention to the heavy workload associated with both A level and AVCE qualifications. Further Torrance et al (2005) concluded that the move towards increased clarity of assessment criteria and processes has resulted in increased instrumentalism and that there is a tendency for the achievement of assessment outcomes to become a substitute for real learning.

Similar information on the effect of programmes of study is not available for the university sector but it is evident from the literature that the nature or purpose of the university course could be a factor which influences teaching practice and may influence the teacher's conception and perception of their role. Thus Entwistle (2005) highlights the emphasis which many university lecturers place on 'ways of thinking and practising' rather than the acquisition of subject knowledge and in the case of the business curriculum Macfarlane and Ottewill (2001) and Edmunds and Richardson (2005) have highlighted the tension which exists between theoretical knowledge ('study of business') and knowledge as it works in practice ('study for business').

Another factor of particular relevance to the college teaching and learning environment is the effect performance management systems have had on organisational culture and practice. Thus Ball (2003) has noted that the use of measures of performance to monitor and maintain standards in education (known as performativity) is actually changing the nature and practice of teaching and James (2005) reported that the strong link between qualifications and funding in FE colleges may have inhibited the introduction of improvements in teaching practice and the value of outcomes for learners. Although the literature raises a number of issues which are likely to affect the student experience in college and university, available empirical information is patchy and incomplete. This makes it difficult to formulate a view on the specific problems which students will face when making the transition from college to university.

The research outlined in this paper provides a direct comparison of the teaching and learning environment in the two sectors and considers the implications for student learning careers.

Methodology

The starting point for this study was a desire to understand if there are significant differences in the teaching and learning environment in college and university and if so whether this could provide another part of the explanation for why some students find it difficult to make a successful transition into higher education. The methodology employed (grounded theory) is derived from a social constructivist philosophy which focuses on the importance of understanding how people make sense of their situation rather than seeking an objective statement of reality (Easterby-Smith 2002), and involves the collection of qualitative data and the analysis of this in order to gain a better understanding of the situation and to explore underlying attitudes, assumptions and beliefs which influence practice.

Data was collected by interviewing eight college tutors from four Sixth Form colleges (SF) and four Further Education colleges (FE) in the Greater Manchester area and ten university staff from the University of Salford, Business School. All had experience in the management and delivery of business related qualifications. (Further background information about the tutors and institutions involved in this study are shown in Appendix 1). Candidates were nominated by managers and then contacted directly by a member of the research team to explain the purpose of the study and to ask if they were willing to participate. In order to facilitate access and frank discussion about the issues affecting practice, interviews with college and university tutors were conducted by a member of the research team with specific, recent experience of working in that sector. Thus the interviews of college tutors and university tutors were conducted by different members of the team. In order to ensure a measure of consistency, the same set of open questions was used by both interviewers. These asked about participants' background and experience and explored issues relating to programme aims, teaching roles and responsibilities, teaching practice, the students' role, guidance and support provided and the main constraints which influenced practice. Interviews were recorded and the tapes were used by the interviewer to clarify and supplement notes taken during the conversation. The resulting

transcripts were returned to the participant to ensure that they accurately reflected their views before any further analysis took place. Data were analysed by reading and rereading all the transcripts in order to be familiar with the content, identifying common themes and then using these as the basis of a comparison of the two sectors. The outcome of this comparative analysis was also shared with participants in order to test the conclusions drawn. These findings were then used to identify factors which might impact on effective transition and which will be followed up in subsequent studies.

Findings
Analysis of the interview transcripts identified some similarities and a number of differences between the responses of college and university tutors which are summarised in Appendix 2. The issues which highlighted interesting differences are discussed in more detail below.

Programme Aims and Objectives
Participants were asked to explain the main aims and objectives of the programme of study. Views expressed by college tutors included the need to give students an understanding about business and business practices but the primary emphasis was on student success and achievement of the qualification. This was often expressed in terms of a desire to enhance opportunities for individual students - for example FE1 responded that the aim was:

> *"to prepare young people for employment"* and then added *"[I] want to drive students forward to achieve the best qualification … regardless of what their destination is. Competing for jobs needs high qualifications – both university and employment is a competitive market"*.

However there was also an indication that targets and performance indicators (used to manage and monitor the institution and individual teachers) had resulted in a focus on the qualification itself as the primary objective. This can be illustrated by the response of SF3 who noted:

> *"at the end of the day you can teach them what you want but it all comes down to success rates … The aims are to meet the GCE requirements and my students have to be prepared for exams in January and June"*.

The emphasis on student success was also implicit in comments made about the choice of awarding body:

> *"I chose AQA because … it was modular, so [students] could sit their exams in January and could achieve better grades by resitting any module that they weren't quite sure of."* [SC1]

In contrast few university staff interviewed made reference to levels of student achievement or the qualification itself as an aim of the programme, focussing instead on intended student outcomes. This was sometimes expressed in terms of providing students with the general and specialist knowledge and skills required to support employability and professional development. However it was evident from the interviews that the main emphasis was on the need for students to develop appropriate intellectual and conceptual skills. For example HE1 noted that the aim of a degree was to develop students who were:

> *"…able to reflect, to learn from experience, to identify and process relevant information, synthesise knowledge, evaluate, demonstrate independence and be capable of making one's own decisions, an ability to think, take a position, to justify and argue your case"*

While HE10 simply responded that the aim of the HND programme was *"to teach students to think – that's it!"* These views are not unique to Salford Business School since they are reflected in subject benchmark statements for Business and Management, Accounting and Economics (QAA), shared by lecturers in other business schools who recognise the importance of combining a vocational curriculum with a more critical approach which encourages and promotes debate about practice (Ottewill and Macfarlane 2003) and by staff in the sector generally.

Teaching and Assessment
The range of class-based teaching methods used in college and university were very similar, usually involving a combination of approaches including PowerPoint presentations, worked examples, case studies and class discussion. Group work was mentioned more frequently by FE and university tutors than SF tutors. Work experience, was also a feature of BTEC National programmes in FE colleges. However most colleges appeared to provide both A-level and vocational students with some opportunities for non-classroom based activities such as visits, trips or special events involving local business personnel. In contrast the approach to

teaching in university was more traditional, being totally classroom based. Case studies and real world examples were used to contextualise theory but linking content to the student's actual work experience and involvement of external speakers to support delivery of the curriculum, was only mentioned by one of the university tutors interviewed [HE6].

When describing their teaching practice many college tutors mentioned the use of informal assessment to reinforce learning or check progress. Thus it was common to start lessons by getting students to review previous knowledge by asking questions, or using flash cards, quizzes and tests. Practice exam questions and homework were used to monitor progress against target grades, based on previous levels of attainment. This assessment was often used both to target additional support for particular students and to help students to monitor their own progress. For example in relation to homework SF3 commented:

> *"I always give an opinion if someone could do better. All are told that if they get below 40 they must do it again, or they can redo [the work] if not satisfied with the grade. We use minimum target grades and compare this with other work on the front sheet."*

In contrast only one university tutor [HE2] mentioned the value of checking informally on the level of engagement of individual students. He noted that it was

> *"beneficial to hold 1 to 1 sessions to get students to account for what they had been doing … to look at notes [and ask] what book are you using."*

Several tutors commented on the need to provide formal feedback but even when tutors provided opportunities for formative assessment, this was felt to be of limited value because many students failed to engage with it. As HE7 said

> *"it's a pity sometimes that assessed work is assessed and goes towards their grade because you would rather that it was working towards improving something – but if you don't mark it, they don't do it."*

Consequently, tutors involved in delivery of 1st year skills modules indicated that for these modules it was normal to set a number of small summative assessments to ensure that students engaged with the learning process but this did not appear to be normal practice on other subject based modules.

The Teacher's Role and Responsibilities

Although there were many similarities in the teaching methods used by the college and university staff interviewed, there was a clear difference in the tutors' perception of their roles and responsibilities. Thus SF2 explained that:

> *"the role of the teacher … is to understand the nature of the syllabus, to reach classes effectively using a variety of different teaching styles and to make sure students make good progress."* In contrast a university tutor replied to the same question by saying *"we are responsible for the student's learning experience. It's up to us to engender an interest in the subject and to ensure that students receive adequate direction about how to access information. It's our job to give them the opportunities even though we can't make them use these."* [HE4]

As previously illustrated, college participants were likely to define their role in terms of delivery of the curriculum and/or to ensure that the student's made good progress. Promoting student interest in the subject or enjoyment of lessons appeared to be of less importance and FE2 even noted that "*I want to get the best I can for the students even if they aren't completely enjoying the course*". In contrast most university tutors define their role in terms of supporting and developing independent learning and thinking skills and promoting an interest and enthusiasm about the subject. HE3 summarised many of the issues raised when he reported that his role was:

> *"to stimulate the student's interest in the subject, to motivate them to learn … to develop a culture where people learn how to solve problems and get satisfaction from that."*

The Role of the Student

As might be expected from the previous discussion there were differences in the way in which college and university participants talked about their expectations of students. In the case of college tutors from both SF and FE colleges, the emphasis was predominantly on basic 'hygiene' factors relating to behaviour (like attendance and punctuality) and working hard to meet deadlines or to achieve the standards expected of them. For example SF4 said that he expected learners:

> *"To attend as often as possible, to have equipment and textbooks with them, to be able to answer to question and answer sessions [and] to achieve above the minimum target grade."*

Although SF1 and FE4 felt that their students were expected to engage in some independent learning by using textbooks and Internet websites, other tutors seemed to regard this as less important, referring mainly to homework and reading newspapers to improve their general business knowledge.

Not surprisingly university tutors reported that they expected students to be proactive, engaged and motivated. For example HE4 noted:

> *"a good student is interested in the subject, attends classes, asks questions [and] will prepare for classes."*

Several tutors interviewed noted that although they wanted students to prepare for class by reviewing notes, preparing case studies and doing practice examples many students would not do so. In some cases this had required tutors to modify their teaching strategies. For example HE8 noted:

> *"Whereas 10 years ago I would've given [students] something to prepare for the following week, now because I know only about 5 will have done it … I end up just giving them things they can do within the time frame of the class because that's the most realistic way of getting them to do it."*

Although several tutors mentioned poor attendance and punctuality this was usually presented as a constraint which had to be worked around rather than a factor which had to be addressed. The main concern expressed by university tutors related to their perceptions about the attitudes of students – for example:

> *"I don't think that [students] fully understand the purpose of doing a degree at university. We, as lecturers, expect them to learn. We expect them to have autonomy but most of them just want to get through, get by, pass the module and proceed to the next level" [HE5].*

In addition concerns were often expressed about a decline in the standard of the student intake or that students were less well equipped for study in university. However it was interesting to note that several college tutors expressed similar concerns about students on entry to college. Thus FE4 commented:

> *"When I first started teaching the students I had on the National Diploma were better equipped for independent study than those we have today"*

and also mentioned that students tended to only participate in activities which were assessed, while a number of SF and FE tutors indicated that students often needed additional support with basic skills like English and Maths. In addition several participants mentioned that although Educational Maintenance Awards (EMAs) had encouraged more individual students to move to college after school, such students may have attendance and related problems associated with low aspirations and expectations.

Guidance and Support

The data indicated that both college and university tutors were likely to provide students with handouts and to provide access to additional resources to support student learning, either as a paper copy or through a virtual learning environment (VLE). In the college context the aim appeared to be to provide all or most of the information required - *"we take newspapers into the lesson to refer to rather than rely on them to read them in their own time"* [FE4] - while in the university environment this was often intended to provide a starting point, a platform for further work. For example HE10 explained:

> *"I want people to give me answers that aren't simply from my handouts and lecture notes. I want proof that they've done some reading round the subject."*

This was usually indicated by the provision of recommended reading lists in module handbooks or by identifying specific sources which should be consulted but there appeared to be little opportunity to check that this was being done (or that the material was understood) other than when modules were assessed. Students undertaking BTEC National qualifications in college were encouraged to use IT and library resources as part of their formal assessment activities, however FE2 noted that despite investment by the college and the specialist support available from library staff *"the resources are woefully underused."*

Research carried out by Torrance et al (2005) identified that the increasing transparency of assessment criteria associated with the new post-16 qualifications has resulted in a high incidence of coaching, practising for examinations and provision of formative feedback to improve coursework assessment grades. These findings are supported by the data collected in this study. For example, in relation to A-levels, SF2 noted:

> *"You're on this treadmill, and it's like business studies exam questions, homework, practice questions"*
> and in respect of vocational qualifications FE2 said:

> *"We do err on the side of giving them masses and masses of help … do you stand back a bit and let them sink a bit and potentially get a merit rather than a distinction or a pass instead of a merit, or do you say 'Have you thought about this' and let them go off and do it."*

All college participants mentioned that the timetable included opportunities for additional student support. *"Every member of staff has one lesson per week … so all a student has to do is to come and knock on the door."* [SF2]

University tutors were much less likely to focus on the needs of individual students. It was more usual to consider the student group as a common entity and to expect individual students to take the initiative to seek additional help if they were experiencing problems. For example HE5 indicated:

> *"students are given contact details of staff so they can get extra help if needed. There are drop-in sessions (but these are not well attended unless an exam is imminent). ... We put past questions and solutions on Blackboard to help them prepare for the exam. [There is] also a supporting website with more resources. We do as much as we can to help but whether they want to learn is up to them."*

This somewhat impersonal approach to student support was common to most tutors. Although all participants said that they provided one to one support if a student had problems, only one [HE4] appeared to recognise the importance of a good staff-student relationship if such an approach was to be effective. She commented in respect of personal tutorials *"the system doesn't work very well unless you are proactive, make appointments and get to know them"*

Methods Used to Monitor the Standard of Teaching

The interviews highlighted clear differences in the emphasis placed on monitoring performance between the college and university sector. When asked how their effectiveness was measured, college tutors highlighted the importance that their managers placed on 'success rates' (% students achieving qualification x % students retained) and 'value-added' (based on comparison of actual student performance against minimum target grades). For example SF4 replied:

> *"[we are] measured by results first and foremost. If the results are good they'll stay off your back. Success rates more and more – teachers are of the opinion it's results but I keep reminding them it's success rates."*

FE3 noted

> *"in my role success rates are a driving force and have become more so over the past two or three years."*

In addition all colleges undertook regular lesson observations. Most participants questioned the value of these, for example SF3 noted that it was *"tick box management"* but added that *"it put you under pressure to do the lesson plans which is a good discipline."*

It was evident from the responses given by the university tutors that there was far less emphasis on formal evaluation of performance in the institution although the majority said that they engaged in a process of reflection and self evaluation. For example HE6 noted

> *"I have no sense that someone else is monitoring the standard of my work, its self evaluation based on a wish to improve."*

Only one tutor [HE3] commented that at institutional level (i.e. at Senate and at Faculty level) there is increasing scrutiny and interest in pass rates, retention and the proportion of 1st and upper 2nd degrees awarded. He noted

> *"results say something about what has been done. If the results are poor the University tends to say it's our fault … but on the other hand, if the students aren't prepared to do the work there's not much that you can do."*

However there did appear to be a certain amount of informal monitoring taking place at the level of the programme team. For example HE4 noted

> *"the programme leader looks at these measures [student feedback, exam results] and would talk to colleagues if there appears to be a problem in order to resolve it. Improvements depend on establishing a good relationship with colleagues rather than policing performance"*

and others commented that questions about standards of assessment were sometimes raised at Boards of Examiners meetings if average results appear too high or too low.

Discussion and Implications

This research was carried out in order to obtain a better understanding of the teaching and learning environment in a number of tertiary (post-16) colleges and an English university and to use this information to consider the impact that this might have on a student making a successful transition between the two sectors.

Analysis of the data collected as part of this study suggests that the teaching and learning environment is influenced by a number of factors including a tutor's self concept and beliefs about the nature of teaching, the way in which the effectiveness of teaching is assessed and the attitude and abilities of the student. The relationship between these factors is illustrated in Fig 1.
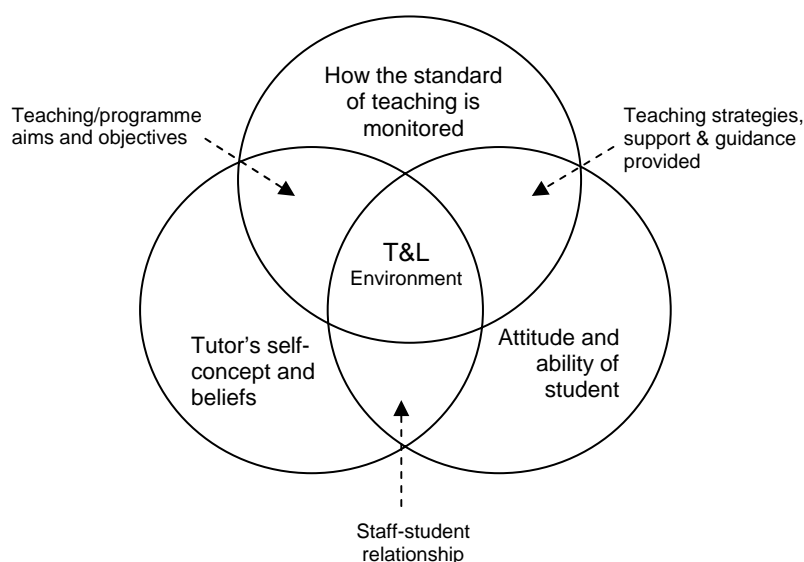
Thus in the college environment tutors see their role as teachers of the subject taking due regard to the needs of the individual student. However the heavy emphasis on performance targets within colleges, leads to increasing emphasis on achieving the qualification as the primary end point and to teaching strategies, which are highly supportive of the individual in order to optimise assessment outcomes. Under these conditions students will know what they are required to do and will feel relatively secure as the close relationship between the tutor and the student means that their learning is managed and closely monitored. It is possible that one of the LSC's current initiatives on 'Personalised learning' may increase this further.

In contrast, within the university setting the tutors were more likely to see their role as motivating students to develop an enthusiasm for the subject, together with independence, self confidence and problem-solving abilities. In contrast to the college environment, the effectiveness of teaching was not subject to formal assessment. Instead it was based on a system of reflection and self evaluation which was sometimes supplemented by informal feedback from other members of the programme team. This review process was likely to take some account of student feedback but the main emphasis was usually on the need to 'maintain standards' and as a result poor performance was usually interpreted as a failure of the student rather than a problem of the teaching methods employed. The fact that there is less supervision of learning, and that the staff student relationship is more impersonal, means that the student may feel more uncertain and insecure, and this is may well reduce motivation, erode self confidence and could lead to a decision to withdraw from the programme. The importance of supporting students to understand some of the differences at university is

important. For example the non-allowance of resubmission of assessed coursework is in contrast to their experience with college homework.

There was a concern that students entering the first year of university often failed to engage adequately, either by not attending, not preparing for classes or by not reading around the subject in order to improve understanding. The data collected in this study leads to a number of possible explanations for this phenomenon. The first of these is that it is a consequence of the impersonality of the staff-student relationship in university. Thus the student becomes one of a crowd with no real accountability, whereas if a college student failed to attend a class or to submit homework to the college tutor this would be noted and followed up.

Another explanation for failure to engage is that students are highly instrumental and are only motivated by assessment. This may not just be a problem of students in university since a similar concern was expressed by one of the college tutors interviewed. However there is a suggestion that the problem may be increased by the college experience since the pressure to cover the syllabus in a limited period of time and for students to achieve at least minimum target grades, often appeared to force the tutors themselves to become more instrumental and assessment focussed and reduces the time and opportunities available for a more relaxed and developmental approach.

Finally one might ask if students entering university from college understand why they need to become independent learners and whether they are developing the skills required. Thus the superficial similarities in teaching methods used in college and university, provision of handouts and the use of a VLE, may mask the fact that learning and assessment objectives in university are different from those in college and this fact may not be appreciated until the subject is assessed, leading to academic failure. In addition it was clear from the information collected that the importance placed on student success in the college environment does not create many opportunities for independent learning, although this may be better in the case of students taking vocational qualifications. A level students, in particular, appeared to have little opportunity or incentive to obtain further information from the literature or to read more widely around the subject and they were not usually required to write extended essays or reports.

The next stage of this project involved the use of questionnaires to explore the extent to which students in the colleges take responsibility for their own learning and whether this is the same or different from the attitudes expressed by students who are coming to the end of their 1st year in the university. This will be the subject of a further paper.

Appendix 1: Background information about tutors and institutions sampled in this study

College participants	
Current role	All subject leaders for business in either SF or FE college. Six actively involved in teaching and 2 managers of FE centres
Teaching qualifications	All have a teaching qualification (7 have PGCE, 1 has BEd). Most believe a teaching qualification is important, all believe it is useful
Subjects/qualifications delivered	A-level Business Studies, Accounting, Economics Vocational qualifications – BTEC National Certificate or National Diploma, A-level in Applied Business, AVCE in Business (being phased out) All colleges except 1 (FE) offer both A-level and vocational qualifications. SFC have higher proportion of students studying A-levels than in FE colleges
University participants	
Current role	All actively involved in 1st or 2nd year teaching on undergraduate programmes Includes 1 programme manager and 2 first year tutors (one of whom is also an admissions tutor)
Teaching qualifications	Six have teaching qualifications and 1 to start programme in September 07 (1 C&G, 2 PGCE and 4 PgD in Learning and Teaching in HE) All interviewees believe that teaching qualifications are useful
Subjects/qualifications delivered	Subjects delivered include general business, HRM, accounting, economics, IS/IT, statistics and service industry management modules, delivered on 4 diploma/Foundation Degree and 4 honours degree programmes

Appendix 2: Comparison of the college and university teaching and learning environment

Theme	SF/FE	University
Programme aims	To develop an understanding of business To enhance student's career prospects To achieve the qualification which determines progression to the next stage of development (HE or a job).	To provide the student with the general and specialist knowledge and skills required to support employability and ongoing professional development. The main emphasis was a desire to develop individuals who can analyse, evaluate and apply knowledge to solve problems.
The role of the teacher	To teach. To deliver the curriculum, monitor progress and optimise assessment outcomes (for both the institution and the individual)	More than delivery of content, to motivate the students, to develop an interest in/enthusiasm for the subject, to develop independence and self confidence.
Teacher's expectations of the students	Similar issues are identified but the emphasis was different	
	The main emphasis was on classroom control (e.g. attendance, punctuality, working hard to	The main emphasis was on being proactive, taking personal responsibility for learning.

	achieve work of the expected standard)	Emphasis on reading around the subject, seeking to understand the subject and asking questions for clarification.
	Some mention of a hope that students would read more widely (particularly newspapers) and do more than instructed (but acknowledged that this did not usually occur).	Some mention of hygiene factors like attendance, behaviour and working hard, but usually cited as a constraint which inhibited achievement of the teaching aims.
Teaching styles	Likely to be influenced by the individual's preferred teaching style	
	There is a clear emphasis on teaching/management of learning. SF tutors more likely to adopt a more traditional teacher led approach, FE tutors more likely to be student centred (but this may in part be a consequence of the qualifications delivered)	Appears to vary from individual to individual but the normal split made between lectures and tutorials probably makes it feel like a teacher led curriculum, with activities designed to reinforce learning and understanding (i.e. more teacher led)
Teaching methods	Similar range of teaching methods used – a combination of exposition, worked examples, case studies and discussion.	
	Lessons planned to provide lots of variety (e.g. including exposition, practical exercises and discussion in a single class period). Regular tests to reinforce learning and monitor progress.	Common to separate exposition from activities and discussion, but this does depend on issues like group size and the timetable (i.e. length of classes). Some awareness of the need for variety. Very few checks on learning other than summative assessment.
Guidance and support for students	Tutors in both sectors are increasingly likely to provide students with handouts rather than expecting them to take notes. There is also increasing use of the VLE as a way of providing students with handouts and links to additional resources.	
	Teachers are likely to provide students with any additional resources needed to support in-class activities and homework.	Although some tutors will provide copies of key references, there is an expectation that students will use library resources to find the information which they require.
	The main sources of additional knowledge are textbooks and the Internet	Initially students may be directed to textbooks but as the programme proceeds they are likely be expected to locate and make more use of journal articles
	Students are given extensive help and advice on how to do assessed work, including feedback on coursework and suggestions on how it can be improved. The unit based nature of A levels mean that students can resit exams to improve marks without penalty.	Less usual to provide advice or detailed guidance on coursework. Level of guidance provided (e.g. exam technique) is usually left to individual tutors.

Both sets of teachers offer 1 to 1 support if students are having problems but

	Students needing additional support are identified and followed up, or the additional 1 to 1 meetings are compulsory for all students and are used to review progress.	Students are expected to seek help (on both academic and pastoral issues). Uptake of these opportunities tends to be poor.
Independent learning	Little opportunity for independent learning on A levels. Situation may be better on vocational programmes but research tends to focus on finding out about practice rather than theory.	Independent learning expected but little support available to develop independent learning skills as part of the programme (although some recent developments in this areas).
Measures of teacher effectiveness	High level of centralised control and monitoring of performance using success rates (student retention and achievement), inspection and teacher observations and to a lesser extent programme review. Reinforces 'good teaching practice' and focus on the performance of individual students	Predominantly based on personal reflection and self review. May be some informal peer input. Some concerns about student retention but the main emphasis of teaching staff is the need to maintain standards.
Overview	An environment which recognises the student as an individual and demands high standards of them. **'Tough love'**	An anonymous environment where the student is often left to own devices, to sink or swim. **'Laissez faire'**

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