

HN Tracking Study

Final Report

Dr Robert Ingram and Professor Jim Gallacher
Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning

November 2011



Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership

Acknowledgements

The research team wish to thank the students who have completed both our initial questionnaires in the colleges, and who have responded to our follow-up study. We are also very grateful to staff in the colleges who have assisted us in gaining access to students for this study.

We would like to thank Dr Narjes Mehdizadeh for her valuable contribution to the initial phase of fieldwork on the study, data entry and publication of the first Interim Report. We also wish to thank Kerry Brodie for her contribution to both the data entry and the presentation of the report and Eli Dutton for her assistance with the data entry.

For further information about the study contact Dr Robert Ingram

Tel No: 0141 273 1287

Email: HNTracking@gcu.ac.uk

Contents

List of Tables	3
Section One: Introduction.....	4
1.1 Background and context of the study	4
1.2 Structure of the report	5
Section Two: Methodology	6
2.1 Sampling framework and fieldwork strategy	6
2.2 Characteristics of the overall cohort	7
2.3 Fieldwork on destinations: Follow-up with 2009 and 2010 cohorts.....	8
2.4 Characteristics of the follow-up cohort.....	9
Section Three: Findings from the Study.....	11
3.1 Overview of intentions and destinations	11
3.1.1 Differences between subject areas	12
3.1.2 Differences between mode of study	13
3.1.3 The impact of other factors	14
3.1.4 Differences between intentions and destinations	14
3.2 Level of further study	14
3.2.1 Levels of recognition for those who enter undergraduate degree study	15
3.3 Employment routes: in and out of HN study.....	16
3.3.1 Employment routes during and post-HN study.....	17
Section Four: Conclusions and Implications.....	18
References	19
List of Acronyms.....	20
APPENDICES	21

List of Tables

Table 1: HN subject area of overall cohort	6
Table 2: Age range of overall cohort.....	7
Table 3: Relationship between mode of study and HN level of study of overall cohort.....	8
Table 4: HN subject area of follow-up cohort.....	9
Table 5: Relationship between mode of study and HN level of study of follow-up cohort	10
Table 6: Comparison between intentions and destinations of HN students	11
Table 7: Comparison of destinations by subject area of HN programme	12
Table 8: Comparison between intentions and destinations by mode of study of HN programme	13
Table 9: Comparison between intentions and destinations by level of further study.....	15
Table 10: Full-time entrants to first degree courses with HNC/D (or equivalent) in Scottish Higher Education Institutions, 2005-06	15
Table 11: Relationship between level of HN study in 2008-09 and 2009-10 and level of entry to bachelor degree courses in 2009-10 and 2010-11	16

Section One: Introduction

This final report draws on findings from the fieldwork undertaken in a longitudinal study that has looked at the destinations of individuals who have completed Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) in a sample of colleges in the Greater Glasgow area.

The Higher National (HN) Tracking Study has been undertaken by researchers in the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL) at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU). It was funded through the Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (GGAP) which is itself funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The Partnership, one of five articulation hubs in Scotland (plus the Open University) is undertaking a collaborative programme of work involving universities and colleges within the Greater Glasgow area. The aim of GGAP is to enhance the volume and quality of articulation activity. An important objective of this study therefore was to provide baseline data which will help inform the work of the Partnership.

The study explored the following issues: the number of students who progress to degree study or other forms of study or training in different subject areas; the qualifications to which they progress; the numbers of students who entered employment (or unemployment); the types of occupations to which they progress and differences in destinations between full-time and part-time students. We have also gathered data on both intentions and actual destinations, and have some data on why these changed in some cases.

1.1 Background and context of the study

There are currently no systematic data available in Scotland on the destinations of both full-time and part-time students after they have completed their HNC or HND. The SFC and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) publish useful data which give an indication of the 'HN population' in Scotland. In addition, First Destination statistics provide some information regarding the progression routes of full-time students. However, there is a need for a more systematic study that provides data on the aspirations of HN students, both full-time and part-time, and their actual destinations after completing their programmes. This longitudinal study now provides data of this kind. It is hoped that this will be of value to partner colleges, universities and other agencies when developing policy and strategy which will enhance the volume and quality of articulation activity.

It should also be noted that the study is complementing other work being undertaken within the articulation hubs. For example, colleagues within the Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife and Borders Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH) are collating national data for a matching exercise involving information gathered from Further Education Statistics (FES)/SQA and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). They have also recently published a report on the changes in recording procedures needed to improve the system for tracking articulating students (Croxford et al., 2011). ELRAH have also commissioned a study of the experience of students who have made the transition from higher nationals (HNs) to degree level study (Howieson and Croxford, 2011).

The context in which this study has been undertaken is created, not just by the SFC's initiative to support articulation (SFC, 2007), but also by the wider recognition in many countries that short-cycle higher education (HE) courses, such as HNC/Ds, have a growing range of functions (Parry, 2009). While many of these programmes and qualifications were developed initially with a clear function of helping educate and train people for specific occupational areas, often at intermediate level rather than the higher professional level occupations, they are increasingly being used as 'transitional' qualifications, which enable students to progress to bachelor level degree qualifications. This is also often associated with initiatives to widen access to HE (Gallacher et al., 2009). This study helps us establish the extent to which this development has taken place in Scotland, and the subject areas which can be most clearly identified as providing transitional qualifications.

1.2 Structure of the report

Section Two provides details of the methodological approaches adopted in the study. This section explains what sampling methods were adopted in relation to (a) the selection of colleges within the Greater Glasgow area which participated in the study, (b) the range of HN programmes selected, and (c) the sample of students who were studying these programmes. The section also outlines how each phase of fieldwork was conducted. In Section Three we summarize the key findings that have emerged from the data collected. In Section Four we provide a concise summary of the main conclusions which have emerged from the study to date and consider some implications for the development of policy and provision in this area.

Section Two: Methodology

2.1 Sampling framework and fieldwork strategy

The study was designed as a longitudinal one, which enabled us to gather data from participants shortly before they completed their HNs and some months after completion. This has allowed us to explore students' aspirations as they neared completion of their programmes, and also the actual destinations in which they were established some months later.

The sampling framework involved choosing a representative selection of colleges within the Greater Glasgow area which offered an appropriate range of HN programmes. The initial choice of colleges was designed to enable us to establish a cohort of students which included those studying full-time and part-time on both HNC and HND programmes, and covered a wide range of disciplines. The subject areas involved were chosen to provide an inclusive range of many of the most popular HNC/D programmes validated by SQA (SQA, 2011) and provided within the colleges. The range of subject areas included and the numbers of students who completed the questionnaire within each subject are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: HN subject area of overall cohort

HN Subject Area	%*	N
Beauty Therapy	5	44
Built Environment**	15	129
Business	10	86
Computing	10	87
Creative Studies	5	48
Engineering	19	163
Health Care	9	76
Hospitality /Travel and Tourism	4	35
Social Care	10	85
Social Sciences	6	51
Sport and Fitness	9	76
Total	100	880

* In all tables percentages are rounded and so may not always add exactly to 100%.

** Includes Quantity Surveying, Architectural Technology and Construction

There were two initial waves of fieldwork; the first in Spring 2009, the second in Spring 2010. The second wave was undertaken partly because we were not able to establish contact with some student groups we wished to include in our 2009 data gathering exercise.

This has resulted in us strengthening the numbers of our overall cohort. Data were gathered at this stage by arranging with college staff an appropriate time to visit each college and distribute a short questionnaire to students who were due to complete their programme of study.

This fieldwork strategy had a considerable advantage in that it produced high levels of responses. As Table 1 shows, a total of 880 students (460 in 2009 and 420 in 2010) completed the questionnaire, which represented approximately 72% of those who were studying this selection of HN programmes in the sample of colleges at the time the fieldwork was undertaken. However, it had the disadvantage that we could not control the numbers in any one subject area; this depended on the numbers enrolled in our sample colleges. As a result, as can be seen in Table 1, there are some subject areas in which we have an over-representation of students such as Engineering and Built Environment, while in other areas there is some under-representation. In addition, the number of part-time students within some programmes was not as representative of the national data as we had anticipated, for example in Business, Health Care and Social Care. As a result there was an under-representation of part-time HNC students within our sample. However, overall, our cohort is broadly representative of HNC/D students in Scotland's Colleges.

2.2 Characteristics of the overall cohort

The initial information gathered included data on the social and educational characteristics of our cohort and their intentions regarding progressing into further study, employment or both. It should be noted that, while the total figure was 880, a very small number of participants did not answer all of the questions relevant to them; hence not all of the data collected on characteristics and findings detailed on intentions are based on the maximum number of possible responses. The questionnaire used is attached as Appendix A.

We have compared the social characteristics of our cohort with the profile of the national student population in Scotland's Colleges by drawing data from the SFC's Infact database (SFC, 2011). While this provides a very useful overview of the national student population, it is not strictly comparable with our cohort as the SFC data records students at the point of entry to their programmes, while our data reports students about two to three months prior to completion of their HNC/D programme. However, this comparison gives a good indication of the similarities and differences between our cohort and the national population.

Table 2: Age range of overall cohort

Age Range	%
≤19	34
20-25	39
26-35	18
36-45	7
>45	2
Total (N = 870)	100

Table 2 shows the age profile of our cohort. This is very similar to the national profile, although the SFC uses age bands which are somewhat different (SFC, 2011).

With respect to gender more marked differences can be noted. In our cohort there was an over-representation of males (59%), while the SFC figures indicated that the sexes were equally represented in entrants to these programmes (SFC, 2011). This over-representation of males in our cohort is explained in large measure by the high numbers of students in Engineering and in Built Environment which we have noted above.

Table 3 provides data on the numbers and percentages of students on HNC and HND programmes, and the distribution of full-time and part-time students on both types of programme. From this it can be seen that 53% of our cohort were on HNC programmes, while 48% were on HND programmes, and this conforms almost exactly with the national profile (SFC, 2011). However while nationally 24% of HNC/D students are part-time (SFC, 2011), students in this mode of study made up only 16% of our overall cohort. This reflected the patterns of student participation in the colleges included in our study.

Table 3: Relationship between mode of study and HN level of study of overall cohort

Mode of Study	HN Level				Totals	
	HNC		HND			
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Full-time	74	344	94	395	84	739
Part-time	26	118	6	23	16	141
All students	53	462	48	418	100	880

We have also gathered data regarding the previous qualifications of our cohort. A total of 272 (31%) reported that they had 3 or more Highers at the point of entry to their HNC/D programme, and 84(10%) did not report any qualifications. The majority of students in this cohort would therefore not have been eligible for direct entry to a degree programme on the basis of traditional entry qualifications. This confirms the role of HNC/Ds in providing alternative entry into degree level study for those who chose to follow this progression route.

2.3 Fieldwork on destinations: Follow-up with 2009 and 2010 cohorts

As we have indicated the project was designed as a longitudinal study to enable us to follow HNC/D students through into further study and/or employment. The follow-up fieldwork with both the 2009 and 2010 cohorts in which we gathered data on their destinations was conducted approximately four to eight months after participants completed their HNC/D programme in each of those years, depending on the date on which follow-up contact was successfully established.

A total of 764 students provided us with contact details which enabled follow-up. We were successful in contacting 457 of this group for the follow-up fieldwork (215 from the 2009 cohort and 242 from the 2010 cohort), which accounted for 60% of the 'available' cohort.

Participants were contacted initially via an electronic SurveyMonkey questionnaire. This was followed up with email, telephone or mail contact for those who did not respond immediately. Since all participants were given a unique ID number it has been possible for the research team to cross-reference their responses on destinations with their initial intentions. However, similar to the 880 who participated in the initial fieldwork, a very small number of the 457 follow-up participants did not answer all of the questions relevant to them; hence not all of the data collected on characteristics and destinations are based on the maximum number of possible responses. The questionnaire used to gather data on destinations is attached as Appendix B.

2.4 Characteristics of the follow-up cohort

Given the time period between collecting initial data and undertaking the next stage of fieldwork, the follow-up cohort was, unsurprisingly, older than the initial cohort and the national population of HNC/D students. This is confirmed by the large decrease in those who were aged 19 and under, from 34% to 15%. In terms of the male/female split, the follow-up cohort moved slightly closer to the national profile though the number of males still outnumbered females by 57% to 43%.

In relation to the distribution between HNC and HNDs, the follow-up data was very close to both the initial cohort and the national profile, however part-time students continued to be represented in a pattern which was similar to the initial cohort and therefore was about 9% less than the national HN part-time population.

Table 4: HN subject area of follow-up cohort

HN Subject Area of Follow-up Cohort	%	N
Beauty Therapy	4	17
Built Environment	14	64
Business	11	48
Computing	7	33
Creative Studies	6	25
Engineering	20	87
Health Care	12	53
Hospitality /Travel and Tourism	4	19
Social Care	9	39
Social Sciences	6	28
Sport and Fitness	7	29
Total	100	452

To enable meaningful comparisons to be undertaken between the follow-up and initial cohorts, it was important that both cohorts were by and large comparable. We can report that this indeed was the case. It can be seen from Table 4 that when the breakdown of the follow-up cohort by HN subject area is considered, it was broadly similar to that of the initial cohort as shown in Table 1.

Finally, Table 5 provides data on the follow-up cohort in relation to the numbers and percentages who studied on HNC and HND programmes, and the distribution across both types of programme by mode of study. It can be noted that, when compared to the figures described in Table 3, the characteristics of the follow-up cohort were very similar to those in our initial sample.

Table 5: Relationship between mode of study and HN level of study of follow-up cohort

Mode of Study	HN Level Studied				Totals	
	HNC		HND		%	N
	%	N	%	N		
Full-time	78	177	93	198	84	375
Part-time	22	50	7	16	16	66
All follow-up cohort	51	227	49	214	100	441

Section Three: Findings from the Study

3.1 Overview of intentions and destinations

As noted in Section One, the main aim of this study was to establish the uses which HNC/D students make of their qualifications. We have suggested above that many of these were initially designed as education and training for specified occupational sectors, and are interested to establish whether this continues to be the case for all of these qualifications, or the extent to which students are now using these qualifications to enable progression to degrees.

Our first set of comparative data in Table 6 summarizes the stated intentions of our overall cohort on completion of their HN programme, and the actual destinations of those who participated in the follow-up phase of the study.

Table 6: Comparison between intentions and destinations of HN students

Route	Intentions	Destinations
	%	%
Employment Only	26	33
Further Study Only	39	29
Further Study and Employment	35	28
Unemployed		7
Other		2
Totals	100 (N = 872)	100 (N = 457)

The evidence presented here indicates that the majority of students who complete HNC/Ds progress to some form of further study, and only a minority proceed or continue in employment with no further study involved. This in itself is an important point in recognizing the function of HNs in contemporary society. For many students their prime function has ceased to be preparation for specific occupations, and they can be seen as *transitional* qualifications which, while remaining broadly vocational, have a key role in enabling students to progress to some form of further study. Most of these students will progress to bachelor degrees.

It can also be noted from Table 6 that whereas 74% of respondents had indicated that they intended to proceed to further study when they were nearing completion of their programmes, only 57% actually did so. This raises the question of why this group of students did not progress as they had apparently planned. Data we have gathered during our follow-up survey provides some useful answers, and a range of reasons have been presented. Firstly it can be noted that 46% of these students indicated that by the time they actually

were ready to progress to their next stage they had apparently changed their minds. Their choice was now to enter or continue in employment without any further study at this point. A further 15% indicated that they still intended to progress to further study in the following year, while 16% indicated that they failed to find a suitable programme or withdrew after beginning a course. The remaining students had been influenced by a mixture of work, financial or personal issues. This evidence of changes in intentions is an indication that decision making for many of these students is often a complex process. Progression through study is often a much less straightforward and linear process than it is for many school leavers who progress more directly into degree programmes. We will discuss this issue further below.

3.1.1 Differences between subject areas

The data presented above provide an overview of the intentions and destinations of HNC/D students. However our data enable us to investigate some important differences between subject areas and these are highlighted in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Comparison of destinations by subject area of HN programme

HN Subject Area	Employment Only	Further Study Only	Further Study and Employment	Un-employment	Other	Totals	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	N
Beauty Therapy	71	0	12	12	6	100	17
Built Environment	30	27	34	9	0	100	64
Business	23	35	33	6	2	100	48
Computing	15	52	18	12	3	100	33
Creative Studies	24	12	56	8	0	100	25
Engineering	55	21	16	7	1	100	87
Health Care	13	51	26	0	9	100	53
Hospitality/ Travel and Tourism	53	21	16	11	0	100	19
Social Care	56	13	18	8	5	100	39
Social Sciences	14	46	36	4	0	100	28
Sport and Fitness	21	17	55	7	0	100	29
Totals	34	29	28	7	2	100	442

From Table 7 we can see that a continuum is emerging. In a number of discipline areas, particularly Social Sciences, Business, and Computing, many of the follow-up cohort progressed to *further study only* or *further study and employment*, and only a relatively small percentage of students entered or continued into *employment only* after completion of their HNC/D. These qualifications can therefore be seen as being for most students transitional ones, the main purpose of which is to provide opportunities to progress to further study. Most of these are full-time students, and the data we have gathered on employment after completing HNs indicated that, in many cases, their occupations are not directly related to their studies, but this is part-time employment to support their studies. In contrast, there are a number of disciplines where most students use their qualification to either enter into or continue in employment. This can be seen particularly in the areas of Beauty Therapy, Social Care and Hospitality. In these cases the data we have gathered on occupations after HN completion indicate that a majority were in occupations directly relevant to their HN qualification, and their HN was part of the process of gaining a relevant professional qualification. In a number of these areas a relatively high proportion of students were part-time. These are programmes which have a very clear role in preparing students for entry to a particular profession or occupations. The HN Health Care occupies an interestingly distinctive position in this respect. While a relatively high number of students in Health Care progressed to further study, this reflects the existence of a number of 'endorsed' HN programmes within this field, which facilitate progression to level 2 of degree study as part of the progression towards their professional qualifications. Other disciplines appear to be situated at various positions along this continuum.

In presenting this analysis of differences between subject areas we have focused only on destinations and not on intentions. This is mainly because, in discussing the emergence of the continuum which we have identified, differences between intentions and destinations is of less importance, and the inclusion of the intentions data would have made an already large table more unwieldy.

3.1.2 Differences between mode of study

In addition to the differences in the uses made of HNs between different subject areas there are also major differences between full-time and part-time students.

Table 8: Comparison between intentions and destinations by mode of study of HN programme

Route	Intentions		Destinations	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
	%	%	%	%
Employment Only	23	41	30	58
Further Study Only	44	14	33	6
Further study and Employment	33	45	28	29
Unemployed	-	-	7	5
Other	-	-	2	3
Totals	100 (N = 732)	100 (N = 140)	100 (N = 375)	100 (N = 66)

From Table 8 it can be noted that part-time students were much less likely to proceed to further study (35%) when compared with full-time students (61%). It can also be noted that part-time students were considerably more likely to change their minds regarding their destinations. Thus while 24% less part-time students proceeded to further study than had stated this as an intention, only 16% of the full-time students changed their minds in this way. Most of these part-time students were in areas such as Social Care, Built Environment or Engineering, and already in relevant occupations. They were therefore more likely to remain in these occupations, and it would appear that, while they considered the possibility of undertaking further study, this became less attractive when they had actually completed their qualifications.

3.1.3 The impact of other factors

Our data have also enabled us to explore the impact of other factors on the uses which students make of their HN qualifications, however little of significance has emerged. Older students were rather less likely than younger ones to be in the *employment only* category, but this reflected the fact that they were more likely to be unemployed or have other commitments, rather than being more likely to proceed to further study.

There was also little evidence that gender itself made a difference to progression patterns, although this did have the expected impact on the programmes on which students were studying, with more males in areas such as Engineering and Built Environment and more females in Health Care and Social Care.

There were also only limited differences in the progression patterns associated with the level of qualification for which students were studying, with 59% of HND students proceeding to further study, while 55% of HNC students did so.

3.1.4 Differences between intentions and destinations

We have noted in this analysis of our data that there are a number of students for whom their actual destination is different from their stated intentions some months earlier, near the conclusion of their HN programme. We have provided some information about the reasons which students give for these changes. It is also clear that part-time students are more likely to change their decisions in this way than are full-time students. We have also noted that the majority of our respondents do not have qualifications which would enable them to gain direct entry to degree programmes, and the majority are not direct school leavers, with more than 25% being aged 26 or older. It seems clear then that many of these students are in a number of respects different from the school leavers who proceed directly to degree programmes in universities. Their progression through the various stages of their educational journeys is a more complex and less linear one, and can be influenced by a number of factors, including their occupational situation, but also their personal, financial and domestic circumstances. These factors should be borne in mind in ensuring that appropriate support is provided for these students.

3.2 Level of further study

We have noted above (Table 6) that 57% of respondents proceeded to further study. From Table 9 on page 15 we can see that more than three-quarters of these students (77%) entered undergraduate degree programmes, while a small number (1%) proceeded to postgraduate programmes. These data also indicate that the percentage choosing to proceed to an undergraduate degree has increased modestly when compared with the

intentions stated at an earlier stage, reinforcing the importance of undergraduate degrees as the progression route for these students.

Table 9: Comparison between intentions and destinations by level of further study

Level of Further Study	Intentions	Destinations
	%	%
HNC/HND	17	18
Undergraduate Degree Level	70	77
Postgraduate Degree Level	3	1
Other Type of Further Study	3	3
Don't Know	7	-
Totals	(N= 633) 100	(N = 262) 100

It can also be noted that a number (18%) progressed to further study at HN level. It would appear that some of these students were on the first year of a HND programme, and should not have been included in our sample, which was intended to include only those completing an HNC/D.

3.2.1 Levels of recognition for those who enter undergraduate degree study

Research has been undertaken at a national level (SFC, 2007) which has raised issues concerning the fact that not all undergraduate degree level students in Scotland who progress to HEIs with an HNC/D qualification receive full credit. The SFCs definition of articulation is “...entry to the second or third year of a university degree course using a Higher National Certificate or a Higher National Diploma (HNC/D) gained in a college as an entry qualification” (2007, p10). In other words, students should receive full credit for their HNC and HND when entering an undergraduate degree programme.

SFC national data shows, in relation to entrants to full-time degree level courses, that for a sizeable minority of HN completers their qualification enables access, but they do not receive their full credit entitlement. Thus it can be seen from Table 10 that 33% of entrants to degree courses were entering at year 1 (equivalent to Level 7 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)) and not receiving full credit. While 21% were entering at year 2 (Level 8 of the SCQF), it is not clear from these data how many were entering on the basis of HNCs or HNDs, and whether they were obtaining full credit.

Table 10: Full-time entrants to first degree courses with HNC/D (or equivalent) in Scottish Higher Education Institutions, 2005-06

Year of Degree Course Entered	%
Year 1 (SCQF Level 7)	33
Year 2 (SCQF Level 8)	21
Year 3 (SCQF Level 9)	46
Total (N = 3,721)	100

Source: SFC (2007).

A key aim of the HN Tracking Study has been to provide additional evidence in relation to levels of recognition that HNC/D completers receive which can inform the work of the articulation hubs and other stakeholders in this field. Our findings in this area confirm the

picture that has emerged in the national data that not all undergraduate students who enter higher education institutions (HEIs) with an HNC/D receive full credit. They also enable us to distinguish between the entry levels achieved by HNC and HND students.

Table 11 shows the relationship between the level of HN study and level of entry to degree courses for students within our follow-up cohort.

Table 11: Relationship between level of HN study in 2008-09 and 2009-10 and level of entry to bachelor degree courses in 2009-10 and 2010-11

Level of HN Study	Level of Entry to Bachelor Degree Courses				Totals	
	Level 1 (SCQF L7)	Level 2 (SCQF L8)	Level 3 (SCQF L9)	Did Not Answer		
	%	%	%	%	%	N
HNC	47	42	8	4	100	79
HND	8	16	75	1	100	118

We can see that those with an HND qualification were more likely than HNC students to enter with advanced standing. Three quarters of the HND group entered degree study with full credit, while just over two-fifths of those who entered with an HNC received the full credit. An additional 8% of HNC students progressed to Level 3. From checking through the data it would appear that this ‘anomaly’ can be explained by the fact that all of those who articulated to level 3 undertook their HNC part-time, doing the same course in the same college, so we presume that a local agreement enabled this small group to enter at level 3.

However, our data also shows that about a third of our students did not receive full credit when progressing. To investigate the reasons for this outcome we asked those who entered level 1 with an HNC or HND or level 2 with an HND *why* they entered at those levels. The total number of HNC/D completers who entered degree study at the ‘wrong’ level was 66, and 59 of this group gave a response to the above question. 29 of these respondents indicated that they had no choice but to enter at that level while 3 indicated that they entered at that level because they did not meet the course requirements. A further 18 indicated they had chosen this entry point or chosen another course. The remaining 9 responses were unclear. These findings suggest that most students who enter without receiving full credit have little control over this decision, however we should also note that a substantial minority had chosen to enter at this level.

3.3 Employment routes: in and out of HN study

As we pointed out in Section 1.1, many HNC/Ds were developed initially with a clear function of helping educate and train people for specific occupational areas. We have also noted that many of our overall cohort were combining work and study while undertaking their HNC/D programme. Indeed, 615 (70%) of our overall cohort indicated that they were in some kind of employment when we conducted the initial phases of fieldwork. This final section of the report explores further the occupational sectors that our cohort worked in while studying for their HNC/D qualification and their employment destinations after completion.

3.3.1 Employment routes during and post-HN study

When we analyzed the data gathered on the types of occupations of those in employment *while studying their HNC/D programme* we found that the majority were in employment unrelated to their HN programme of study. Of the total who indicated they were in work, 44% (268) were employed in an occupational field related to their HN subject. The majority of those in related work were concentrated within the Beauty Therapy, Social Care, Built Environment, Engineering and Health Care sectors. These findings relate to our earlier suggestion that a continuum of different types of HN qualifications now exists, and some of these subject areas are at the more occupational and/or professional development end of that continuum. Among those in occupations which appeared to be unrelated to their HNC/D typical occupations were positions such as sales assistants or working in cafes or pubs.

In the follow-up phase of fieldwork we also collected data on employment positions *after completion of their HNC/Ds* which have enabled us to analyze whether there was any 'fit' between employment destinations and the HN subject area of study. We found that of those who indicated they were in work, exactly half (137), were employed in an occupational field related to the HNC/D subject area that they studied. The majority of those in related work had completed programmes which we have identified above as being at the more 'vocational' end of the continuum. Finally, similar to our earlier findings on occupations while studying HNC/Ds, many of those in 'unrelated' work after completion of their HNC/D were employed in the retail and hospitality sectors.

Section Four: Conclusions and Implications

The main conclusions from this study can be summarized as follows:

- The study has provided, for the first time, systematic data on the intentions and destinations of a sample of both full-time and part-time students who complete HNC/Ds.
- The findings clearly show the establishment of a continuum in which, while at one end there are some HN programmes that are very much focused on occupational preparation, at the other end there are a number of programmes in which the primary use, for a large majority of students, is as *transitional* qualifications for progression to degree level study.
- There is also evidence of significant differences between full-time and part-time students, with full-time students being more likely to proceed to further study, while only just over one third of part-time students proceed to any form of further study.
- There is evidence that around one third of HNC/D students do not receive full credit when progressing to degree programmes, but HND students are considerably more likely to receive full credit than are HNC students.
- There is evidence that a considerable number of students change their minds between the intentions they state shortly before completing their HNC/Ds and the actual final choices which they make. Furthermore part-time students are more likely to change their minds in this way than are full-time students. This reflects the complex range of factors which influence decision making for many of these students, which include employment, domestic and personal circumstances.
- Building much stronger links between these *transitional* programmes and relevant degrees can create opportunities to establish more seamless progression routes, and ensure that students are well prepared for successful study at degree level.
- There is a need for staff in colleges, universities and SQA to jointly consider changes in curriculum and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment which will be required in order to strengthen these links.
- This study enables staff within the articulation hubs to identify these transitional programmes with substantial numbers of students who progress to degrees.
- There is also a need to ensure that appropriate forms of support and guidance are available for students for whom the progression through their educational journeys can be complex and non-linear.

References

- Croxford L., Howieson C., and Steele S (2011) *Recording and reporting student articulation from Scottish Colleges to Scottish HEIs through UCAS*. Edinburgh: ELRAH <http://www.elrah.ac.uk/Documents.aspx?itemID=bc5bdc4e-9933-41e4-ab7f-745f88c0f247>, last accessed 10 November 2011
- Gallacher, J., Ingram, R. and Reeve, F. (2009) *Work-based and work-related learning in Higher National Certificates and Diplomas in Scotland and Foundation Degrees in England: A Comparative Study*. Glasgow: Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Howieson, C. and Croxford, L. (2011) *Students' Experience of the Transition from HN to Degree Study*. Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh
- Parry, G. (2009) Higher Education, Further Education and the English Experiment. *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 63, (4), pp. 322-342.
- Scottish Funding Council (SFC) (2007) *Articulation for All?* Edinburgh: Scottish Funding Council.
- Scottish Funding Council (SFC) (2011) *Infact Database*. Edinburgh: Scottish Funding Council. <https://stats.sfc.ac.uk/infact/>, last accessed on 24 June 2011
- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (2011) *Statistics 2010*. Glasgow: Scottish Qualifications Authority. <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/42887.html>, last accessed on 13 July 2011

List of Acronyms

Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning (CRL)

Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife and Borders Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH)

Further Education Statistics (FES)

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)

Greater Glasgow Articulation Partnership (GGAP)

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Higher National (HN)

Higher Nationals (HNs)

Higher National Certificate (HNC)

Higher National Diploma (HND)

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

APPENDICES

Appendix A Questionnaire on intentions of overall cohort

Appendix B Questionnaire on destinations of follow-up cohort

HN Tracking Study

Questionnaire on intentions for HN students to complete

This very brief questionnaire is part of a research project which is separate from your course. It is being run by researchers from the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning in Glasgow Caledonian University to examine where students who are studying for a higher national certificate (HNC) or higher national diploma (HND), like you, end up after they complete their course. This study will provide, for the first time, reliable information about the destinations of both full-time and part-time students who complete these programmes. We hope that this will help ensure that these programmes are as relevant as possible to the students who participate in them. We will also send a brief report to all our participants to let you know what our study is telling us about how you and your fellow students are using your qualifications.

Confidentiality

Agreeing to complete the questionnaire is of course voluntary. Can we reassure you that the views of students will be collected together and individual students will not be identified in the published reports or in discussions with programme staff. Anything you tell us is confidential and you will not be identified from the data or in any reports emerging from the project. All data collected will be stored separate to your personal details in a password protected server space accessible only by the project researcher, **Robert Ingram**.

We will attempt to contact you again in the autumn of this year to find out what you are doing then (more details of this are at the end of this questionnaire). We will contact you via the details you supply at the end of the questionnaire.

Thank you for your help with this study. If you require further information about the study or would like to discuss anything in relation to this piece of work please get in touch with:

Robert Ingram: Tel: 0141 273 1287 Email: HNTracking@gcu.ac.uk

HN Tracking Study Questionnaire

Name of College:

1. What age are you? (Please tick the appropriate box)

1	19 or under	
2	20-25	
3	26-35	
4	36-45	
5	Over 45	

2. What gender are you?

1	Male	
2	Female	

3. What course are you currently studying? (Please give full title below)

HNC in _____

Or

HND in _____

4. From the list in the table below please tick which subject area your HNC or HND is in?
(Please tick the appropriate box)

	Occupational field	Please Tick
1	Built Environment/Construction	
2	Hospitality/Travel and Tourism	
3	Computing/IT	
4	Business	
5	Social Sciences	
6	Social Care	
7	Health Care	
8	Beauty Therapy	
9	Sport and Fitness	
10	Creative Industries	
11	Electrical and Mechanical Engineering	

5. Are you a full-time or part-time student? (Please tick the appropriate box)

1	Full-time	
2	Part-time	

6. Are you due to complete this course in June 2010? (Please tick the appropriate box)

1	Yes	
2	No	

7. Educational Background

How many Highers in total do you have? (Please tick the appropriate box below)

Number of Highers	Please tick
None	
1 - 2 Highers	
3 - 5 Highers	
6 + Highers	

What other qualification(s) do you have? For example, National Certificates, other HNC/HND qualifications, Standard Grades, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) etc

Please list these below (name of qualification(s) only is required, no need to give the number of qualifications)

8. Are you currently in employment? (Please tick the appropriate box)

1	Yes, full-time employment	
2	Yes, part-time employment	
3	No	

9. If you answered YES to Question 8, can you provide your job title below.

Job Title _____

10. From the list in the table below please indicate which occupational field your current job is in. (Please tick the appropriate box)

	Occupational field	Please Tick
1	Hospitality/Travel and Tourism	
2	Retail	
3	Call Centre	
4	Business/Administration	
5	Finance	
6	Health Care	
7	Social Care	
8	Beauty Therapy	
9	Built Environment/Construction	
10	Sports	
11	Media	
12	Computing/IT	
13	Electrical and Mechanical Engineering	
14	Other (please specify).....	

11. **What is your intention once you finish your HNC or HND this June?** (Please tick the appropriate box)

	Intention	Please Tick
1	To find new employment?	
2	Continue in current employment?	
3	To go on to further study?	
4	Combination of 2 & 3?	
5	Combination of 1 & 3?	
6	Combination of 1 & 2?	
7	Combination of all three options?	

12. **Why have you chosen the option that you ticked in Question 11 above?**

13. **If your answer to Question 11 above included 'To go on to further study' what level of qualification and title of course do you hope to study? Please complete the following**

	Level of qualification	Please tick which qualification	Please give the title of the course of further study you hope to do
1	HNC/HND		
2	Undergraduate degree study		
3	Postgraduate degree study		
4	Other type of further study		
5	Don't know		

14. If your answer to Question 11 above included 'To find new employment' what occupation sector from the list detailed below do you hope to work in? (Please tick the appropriate box)

	Occupational field	Please Tick
1	Hospitality/Travel and Tourism	
2	Retail	
3	Call Centre	
4	Business/Administration	
5	Finance	
6	Health Care	
7	Social Care	
8	Beauty Therapy	
9	Built Environment/Construction	
10	Sports	
11	Media	
12	Computing/IT	
13	Electrical and Mechanical Engineering	
14	Unsure	
15	Other (please specify).....	

15. From the answer you gave in Question 11 above, has this always been your intention since you commenced your HNC or HND? (Please tick the appropriate box)

1	Yes	
2	No	

If you answered NO, why did you change your mind?

We would like you to be involved in some follow-up research in the autumn of this year and into next year. This will give us very valuable information about what people actually do with their HNC/Ds. We therefore would appreciate your permission to contact you in the future. This would be to ask you questions about what you are doing in about 6 months time, and whether this differs from your current intentions. Everyone who participates in the next stage will be entered into a free prize draw to win an iPhone, or something of similar value which the winner would prefer.

We are conscious that people's contact details can change and would therefore be very grateful if you can provide the following information to ensure that we can keep in touch with you.

PLEASE PRINT DETAILS BELOW IN BLOCK CAPITALS

Name:

Home Address:

Home phone No:

Mobile phone No:

Personal email address:

Once again, can we reassure you that these personal details will be stored securely and will not be accessed by anyone outwith the research team. These details will be used only to contact you about this study and the data will be destroyed at the end of the study.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. HN Tracking Study Questionnaire: Destinations of 08-09 cohort

1. Participant ID:

2. What age are you?

- 19 or under
- 20-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- Over 45

3. What are you currently doing? (Please tick ALL that apply)

- In full-time employment (Please answer Questions 4 through to 9)
- In part-time employment (Please answer Questions 4 through to 9)
- In full-time further study (Please answer Questions 4 and 5 THEN 10 through to 15)
- In part-time further study (Please answer Questions 4 and 5 THEN 10 through to 15)
- Unemployed (Please answer Questions 4, 5, 16 and 17)
- Other (Please answer Questions 4, 5 and 18)

4. From your response(s) in Question 3, is this what you intended when you completed your HNC or HND in June this year?

- Yes
- No

5. If NO, why have you changed your decision?

6. If you specified "Employment" in Question 3, what is your current job title?

7. From the list in the table below please tick which occupational field your current job is in?

- Hospitality
- Retail
- Business/Administration
- Health Care
- Social Care
- Architecture
- Sports
- Beauty Therapy
- Media
- Computing/Information Technology
- Other (Please specify the occupational field in the space below)

8. Have you obtained a new job or changed jobs since you completed your HNC or HND in June this year?

- Yes
- No

9. Was the reason you obtained a new job or changed jobs associated with you completing your HNC or HND in June this year?

- Yes
- No

10. What is the FULL title of the course (including subject area) you are currently studying? For example, BA Social Sciences; BSc Quantity Surveying

11. Was this course you are currently studying your first choice?

- Yes
- No

12. If NO, why have you chosen this course?

13. If you specified "Further Study" in Question 3, from the list in the table below please tick which level of further study you are in.

- HNC
- HND
- Undergraduate degree level (Please answer Questions 14 and 15)
- Postgraduate degree level
- Other (Please specify what level of further study in the space below)

14. At what level are you currently studying your undergraduate degree?

- Level 1
- Level 2
- Level 3

15. If you entered Level 1 with an HNC or HND or Level 2 with an HND can you explain why you have entered at this Level?

16. If you answered "Unemployed" in Question 3 do you have plans to enter further study and/or employment?

- Yes
- No

17. If YES, can you briefly outline your plans?

18. If you answered "Other" in Question 3, what are you currently doing?

www.crll.org.uk



**UNIVERSITY OF
STIRLING**

Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning
Glasgow Caledonian University
70 Cowcaddens Road
Glasgow
G4 0BA

T: +44 (0)141 273 1347
F: +44 (0)141 273 1331
E: crll@gcu.ac.uk

Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning
School of Education
University of Stirling
Stirling
FK9 4LA

T: +44 (0)1786 466142
F: +44 (0)1786 466131
E: crll@stir.ac.uk

Glasgow Caledonian University is a registered Scottish Charity, number SCO21474