Strategic Options, Operational Challenges:
A study of Higher Education delivered in a
Further Education setting
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- Staff at IfL, who enabled us to obtain the views of over 3,000 teachers of HE in FE
- The Association of Colleges, who similarly helped us to record the views of more than 800 students who were undertaking their HE in FE
- HEFCE data staff, who provided us with data and answered our questions.
- And finally LSIS, which provided the means to undertake this research.

Madeleine King
Maldwyn Buckland Maggie Greenwood Simon Ives Anne Thompson
Foreword

Colleges of Further Education have delivered programmes of Higher Education for many years, responding to the requirements of employers in their area and the needs of students not served by other institutions. The role of Colleges in providing these opportunities for the development of higher level skills is gaining wider and well-earned recognition.

With skills at all levels at the centre of both Government and business plans for economic recovery and regeneration, Colleges are well placed to promote their role as providers of high-quality, value-for-money courses directly related to the higher skills needs of business and the aspirations of individuals.

This report presents what we believe to be the first major overview of the issues and challenges facing Colleges as they develop this vital role. It is a large-scale review, covering more than 25% of all colleges providing HE in FE, and includes specialist institutions such as land-based and art and design colleges. Whilst the majority of our respondents were medium to large volume providers of HE, we have also captured the views of colleges with relatively low numbers. The potential for colleges to consolidate and expand their role is confirmed but there are also areas where the College offer must be refined and developed if that potential is to be realised. We offer proposals for the direction of this further work.

At a time when education budgets are under significant pressure, Colleges have the opportunity to show that they can provide locally accessible, good quality and cost effective higher education.

We hope that the report will stimulate discussion and debate on how that can best be done. In doing so it will also generate wider recognition and respect for the role that higher-level vocational skills can play in the success of the businesses which encourage them and the lives of the individuals who achieve them.

John Widdowson
Chair, Mixed Economy Group of Colleges
Principal and Chief Executive, New College Durham
1. Introduction

1.1 The Mixed Economy Group of colleges (known as MEG) came into existence nearly twenty years ago. Member colleges are distinguished by the fact that they offer Higher Education (HE) to large numbers of students – a minimum of 500 FTE – in an FE setting. Many have done so for as long as the group has existed and therefore have an expertise in the distinctive form of HE that is HE in FE. Nearly half of the member colleges have more than 1,000 HE students: not surprisingly, this combination of critical mass and experience has positioned MEG as the lead organisation in the development of policy concerning HE in FE. This expertise was recognised by LSIS when it invited the group to undertake an analysis of the issues currently facing HE in FE, and to do so from a grass-roots rather than high-policy approach. We have deliberately based this research on the experiences of current staff and students in HE in FE rather than undertake a desk-based literature review. This is partly because very little research has been undertaken anyway and partly because we wanted to capture the mood of HE in FE at a time of considerable change.

1.2 The project was carried out during a time of unprecedented uncertainties within the HE sector, all of which will have significant impact on the delivery and development of HE programmes in Further Education Colleges (FECs). However, despite the financial restraints facing the HE sector, the Government remains keen to promote the importance of FECs in delivering a new type of higher education and developing higher level technical skills in the workforce.

1.3 During his Dearing Lecture on the Further of Higher Education\(^1\) Lord Mandelson made it clear that:

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‘… It’s important that this growing diversity of quality provision doesn’t stop with universities. One of the most important changes that we have driven in the higher skills system over the last decade is in making sure that university is only one of a range of options for advanced and higher learning. Especially if you want vocational training with a strong emphasis on technology or business skills……..Our best further education colleges and apprenticeships can provide a preparation for the world of work that compares in its excellence and market value to the best of our universities.’
\]

1.4 This research project set out to explore key issues in colleges’ strategic approaches to delivering higher education. It also proposed to identify the principal operational challenges facing the sector in this field and signpost ways forward. The project was commissioned in late autumn 2009 when the potential impact of a global recession on the funding of English HE was just beginning to emerge. Given the lack of structured research across the whole of this area of investigation, the project never intended to provide definitive answers to all the questions which it expected to emerge: instead it sought to place such questions in context and to identify ways to address them in the future. Once the full extent of the recession was known and a significant

reduction in public funding for HE announced in spring 2010, our study gained
a new perspective, leading us to focus on particular themes and issues.

1.5 In the academic year 2007 – 2008, 248 FECs offered HE in FE, either through
direct funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England
(HEFCE), indirect funding via a partner University or through a combination of
both. Of these, 127 were largely or wholly directly-funded. In carrying out the
research the team has interviewed nearly 70 key staff in FECs delivering HE,
as well as a representative sample of officials in the Sector Skills Councils
(SSCs) and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). In addition there has
been an extensive survey of student views and staff continuing professional
development (CPD) requirements for delivering HE in FECs. We have
captured over 800 student voices and more than 3,000 staff who teach HE in
FE have given us their views on a range of CPD issues. We have also carried
out an investigation of the Risks from the Higher Education Strategies of 64
FECs (i.e., 26% of those offering HE in FE.) The combined results of these
investigations have provided us with a wealth of information and evidence on
the state of HE in FE and the contribution that this makes to the economy
locally, regionally and nationally. It has enabled us to map the territory, identify
the key issues and develop a strategy for future support and development of
this important area of the higher education landscape.

1.6 HE in FE has expanded over the last ten years. The largest providers, such
as Newcastle College and Blackburn College receive teaching budgets
greater than those allocated to several small universities. Colleges which
provide smaller volumes of HE usually do so because they meet a specialist
need not catered for in other institutions. HE in FE is clearly an area of
importance in terms of developing vocational higher qualifications: the
research provides evidence of the activities that underpin the development,
delivery and success of HE in FECs.

2. Background and Context

2.1 Background

Colleges have been delivering HE programmes for over 50 years – Higher
National Certificates and Diplomas and professional qualifications were
successfully taught in Technical Colleges up and down the country for most of
the post-war period, as were professional qualifications from a range of
Accounting and Engineering bodies. This experience of delivering vocational
and technical education for local industries has enabled FECs to evolve and
develop new HE programmes, notably Foundation degrees, level 4 and 5
professional qualifications and progression routes to Bachelors and Masters
degrees.

2.1.1 The most recent validated data for 2007/2008 reports that 112,595
students were studying on HEFCE recognised HE programmes, of
which 13,445 were on non-HEFCE funded and 99,145 on HEFCE
funded programmes at 271 FECs and Sixth Form Colleges. Twenty one
FECs each recruited more than 1,000 students on HE courses. The
programmes include Higher National Diplomas and Certificates, Higher
level professional courses, teaching qualifications, Foundation, Honours and Masters degrees.

2.2 The Policy Context

2.2.1 The current Labour Government\(^2\) recognises the importance that FECs can play in the economy and two significant publications from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) underline this. We consider these in some detail below: taken together with the annual Grant Letter to HEFCE they suggest an emerging role for HE in FE that probably has all-party support in terms of its broad principles.

2.2.2 The Further Education and Training Act, 2007.

This piece of legislation is a useful starting point in this overview as it contained a measure which potentially transforms the delivery of Foundation degrees. The Act enables FE colleges to apply for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP). The first two colleges to go down this route hope to gain FDAP this calendar year and will begin recruitment to their own courses in 2011.

2.2.3 Two key documents shape the current policy context. \textit{Skills for Growth}\(^3\) takes as its focus the skills deficit, particularly higher technical or intermediate skills. This will be addressed by an expansion in the number of apprenticeships and by giving priority to skills that equip people for work. In particular, colleges are expected to expand opportunities for students to progress to higher education e.g. via the new diplomas or advanced apprenticeships, or by the development of bridging modules. FECs are also encouraged to develop qualifications that will enable students who gain a L3 qualification but who do not progress to HE to become self-employed. There will be increased investment in advice and guidance, development of apprenticeships frameworks for progression, increased targeted financial support and UCAS tariff points to enable ease of comparison for selection to HE.

\(^2\) As at April 2010

2.2.4 An important strand of the policy is to develop more flexible HE provision and the Government sees an important role for FECs:

“One in eight undergraduate students are now studying in further education colleges in England. As set out in our framework for higher education, we will expand new types of higher education programmes that widen opportunities for flexible study for young people and adults. This will include part-time and workplace-based courses, and the expansion of foundation degrees which are vocational degrees completed in two years designed jointly between employers and higher education. There will be an important role for further education colleges, as well as for universities in such provision, including through greater partnerships between universities and further education colleges.”

2.2.5 Alongside this is *Higher Ambitions*, the HE strategy document. Described as the new framework for Higher Education, its main focus is on universities but there is reference to the importance of FE colleges in delivering the Government’s agenda. One of its key recommendations is:

*Recommendation 35*: Universities and colleges, working with the Government, should make the concept of “Higher Education within Further Education” one that is universal across the country so that many more mature students, in particular, are able to study for a degree.’

2.2.6 The report refers to a ‘more diverse ecology’ of higher education providers in the future. It refers to the vital role that FE colleges have in delivering HE, especially in vocational and technical subjects:

‘But not all higher education is delivered in universities. There is a long tradition of delivery of higher education by further education colleges. This will continue, especially in areas dominated by vocational and strategic skills.’

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6 Higher Ambitions The future of universities in a knowledge economy  Chap 5 para 11; and Chap 6 para 27
2.2.7 There is a cautionary warning to FECs about of courses they should be
delivering and a reminder of the importance of quality

“Further education colleges are not universities and should not aim to
be. But they are a valuable part of the higher education landscape. We
have no view on what proportion of higher education learners should
be taught in further education colleges. That should be the outcome of
learner and employer choices, not an administrative target’ (p. 104).

‘As we made clear in our 2006 White Paper7 the focus of higher
education provision in further education colleges should be on skills,
and on qualifications up to and including foundation degree level. But
wherever higher education courses are delivered through further
education colleges the highest standards must be assured.’

2.2.8 These two reports were published in November 2009. In December of
that year Lord Mandelson sent the annual Grant Letter8 to HEFCE
setting out HE funding 2010/2011. Predictably, as the extent of the
recession was becoming more obvious, this looks for increased
efficiency and significant savings. It states

‘Higher Ambitions set out the importance of increasing the variety of
undergraduate provision. We want to see more programmes that are
taken flexibly and part-time and that a learner can access with ease
alongside their other commitments. We also wish to see more
programmes, such as foundation and fast-track degrees, that can be
completed full-time in two years. The underlying theme is providing for
diversity. Over the next spending review period, we will want some shift
away from full-time three year places and towards a wider variety of
provision. I would like you to assess current trends in demand; to lead
a debate on how diverse provision can be encouraged; and to give me
initial advice by Summer 2010’

2.2.9 The letter announced additional budget cuts but stressed the need to
protect research activity and minimise any impact on teaching and
students. The sector received its first real-terms cut for over a decade.
Within this, FE colleges which were directly funded generally
experienced grant stability or even a small gain, but this will be offset
by two other factors. In response to the Grant Letter, the HEFCE
Board set in motion the phasing out over two years of the additional


8 HEFCE Grant letter from Lord Mandelson accessed on 22.02.10 at
£24 million funding provided to support Foundation degrees. The allocation will be reduced to £12 million in 2010-11 and withdrawn fully in 2011-12. Foundation degree students will then be funded at the same rate as other undergraduate students. This decision will have a disproportionate impact on FECs and post-92 Universities.

2.2.10 Most significantly, however, is the penalty for over-recruitment above allocated numbers, and the clear message that there will be no further additional student numbers (ASNs). The knock on effect of this to indirectly funded FECs should not to be under estimated: several colleges report that their franchising partners are already either reducing their franchised provision or removing it completely in order to make the necessary savings.

2.2.11 This situation was only partly-eased by the March 2010 budget, which saw the announcement of additional places for STEM subjects. The Browne Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance will report in early summer, and a series of consultations administered by HEFCE and QAA over the quality arrangements for HE will also be completed at broadly the same time. At this point the in-coming Government will have all the information needed in order to determine how best to balance the financial contributions of the public purse, students and employers to HE, as well as reassuring all three of the quality of the product that they are purchasing. Their approach to this equation will be of particular interest to those delivering vocational HE, who predominately do so from an FE college and/or work-place setting.

2.3 The Research Context

2.3.1 A number of recent publications have looked at routes into higher education and the factors which influence students who find themselves applying to HE during an economic downturn.

2.3.2 A DBIS research paper entitled Alternative Routes into and Pathways through Higher Education\(^9\) was the result of research carried out by York Consulting commissioned in 2006 by the then Department for Education and Skills. This looked at routes into and through HE and categorised these as traditional and alternative. It describes alternative routes through HE as:

- `part-time learning; flexi-study; non-honours degree programmes such as Foundation Degrees, HNDs or Diplomas in HE; or any higher education undertaken at Further Education colleges`.

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2.3.3 The researchers developed typologies of students and characterised those on alternative routes as those studying Full time HE at an FE College; part-time learning or a non-degree level programme e.g. HND. The research has some interesting comparisons for our study concerning the value of studying HE in an FE college. The report noted that

“ Our interviews with students suggested that early educational experiences and the influence of family were also important factors in determining HE choices. There was evidence to suggest that students from vocational backgrounds did not, on the whole, have major problems accessing HE, nor were they struggling unreasonably to cope with the demands of HE.”

2.3.4 Another BIS Research Paper (Number 9) looks at the role and importance of finance when people are deciding to go into full-time Higher education in the UK. The Going into HE study ran from autumn 2007 to winter 2008; it was carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) on behalf of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)

2.3.5 Although the research is primarily related to traditional HE one of the key findings from the research is important for HE in FE and parallels our own conclusions in this report:

‘Applicants and students were nearly unanimous in seeing HE as an investment in career and earnings potential although some of them were worried about whether their investment would perform well over time. Despite this view, non-financial considerations, especially location and setting, outnumbered financial factors for applicants deciding between HEIs. For applicants whose backgrounds are less traditional in terms of HE entry (as gauged from social class, local area and prior HE experiences within the family), these location and setting considerations often equated to proximity to home, which has attendant cost advantages. Ideas of location and setting also tended to divide into mainstream concerns, such as an area’s student-friendliness, and a set of more horizon-limiting concerns such as whether a person might feel culturally or racially out of place in a given area’.

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10 Alternative Routes into and Pathways through Higher Education Research paper no. 4 Para 8.84 page 87

‘For non-traditional potential applicants, the main impact of a variable fee and support regime might therefore be on where they choose to study’.

2.3.6 The two Futuretrack\textsuperscript{12} studies are both long term, longitudinal studies which set out to investigate a number of areas of the student experience of HE. Funded by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit (HECSU) the full-time study follows 50,000 students who began their studies in 2006 through HE and into their first job. The study follows the cohort for six years. This research was undertaken by Kate Purcell and colleagues at the Institute of Employment Research at University of Warwick and was published in December 2009. A similar study of part-time students, many of whom will be undertaking their studies in HE in FE, is currently underway. This latter is being carried out by Claire Callender and her colleagues at Birkbeck College and is partly funded by BIS.

2.3.7 Just under half of the full-time Futuretrack students came from the widening participation cohort. Amongst the conclusions drawn from both studies are these:

\begin{itemize}
  \item socio-economic background was a major factor in decisions about where to study, with poorer students more likely to study locally and live at home
  \item part-time students were employment and career driven. They wanted an HE qualification in order to get ahead and meet their career ambitions
  \item only a minority of part-time students receive any help with fees from their employer – about 41%.
\end{itemize}

2.3.8 In November 2009 UVAC (the University Vocational Awards Council) completed its report on vocational progression to HE\textsuperscript{13}. This reviewed the position of those wishing to enter HE from a base of vocational qualifications and noted that the rationale for supporting such a route was well-known – it is based around arguments of skill needs, employability and social mobility. The report analyses the barriers to such progression and offers 24 Recommendations to policy makers. Of interest to this report are the first three:

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{12} HECSU. November 2009. Futuretrack: Findings from the Second Futuretrack Survey of 2006 applicants for UK Higher Education

\textsuperscript{13} UVAC. November 2009. Progression from vocational and applied learning to higher education in England.
Recommendation 1 – HE and FE partnerships, potentially working with Ofqual-regulated awarding bodies, should be funded to develop, deliver and award a new range of short, flexible, bespoke qualifications at level 4 with industry and professional credibility. This must be aimed at apprentices, other vocational learners and employees performing level 3 job roles with an aptitude and desire to progress to level 4 job roles and beyond.

Recommendation 2 – In the development of vocational progression, Government policy focus should be on progression to any higher level learning programme (e.g. Foundation degrees, honours degrees, HNDs/HNCs, new technical qualifications at level 4, higher-level NVQs, other higher level qualifications awarded by awarding bodies regulated by Ofqual and recognised professional qualifications), including ‘bite-size’, accumulative progression through accredited units, based on the best interests of the vocational learner and where existing, their employer.

Recommendation 3 – Government should champion and support, through targeted funding, those institutions (including FE colleges with significant HE programmes) that can demonstrate a commitment to recruiting vocational learners and that have, or are developing, expertise in the provision of learning programmes, recruitment processes and related support that meet the needs of level 3 vocational learners and their employers.
2.3.9 Finally, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) published its audit of England’s current skills base and future needs in March 2010.\textsuperscript{14} This two-volume document contains a detailed analysis of current and future skill needs by sector and by level of skill. It notes that:

“The Audit highlights the growing importance of technicians, driven by growing technological complexity, many within emerging sectors as well as existing sectors. This calls for vocational knowledge and workers with the ability to apply an in-depth understanding of a particular (often technical) field in a practical setting. This, in turn, places a growing emphasis on strengthening the intermediate vocational career pathways (from level 3) to ensure that the skill requirements for these jobs can be met and people can progress into these areas. Furthermore, whilst there are indications that in some of the traditional sectors, intermediate jobs (in for example skilled trades) are forecast to decline, many of these areas comprise a largely ageing workforce, and when replacement demand is taken into account, combined with issues about the adequacy of supply, this highlights significant pressing skills supply needs. In addition, the highest densities of skills shortages occur in many of these areas, and have persisted for some time. Further, there will also be emerging opportunities amongst the ‘emerging’ sectors for skilled trades too which will need to be met.”

2.3.10 Our own report includes analysis by representatives of the RDAs and the SSCs. The UKCES audit complements their comments by noting that:

“In regional terms, skill gaps are highest in the South East, the South West and the West Midlands. It is interesting to note too, that the largest increase in skill gaps since 2007 occurred in the South West and the West Midlands.

At sub-regional level, differences between cities in different locations and other areas have been subject to some attention because of their widely varying skills supply. There is evidence of a ‘north/south’ and ‘city/non-city’ divide. A major review of English cities illustrates that cities with highest proportions of people with graduate level qualifications are concentrated in the South East and those with highest proportions of people with no qualifications are in the north and west of England. Although supply of people with degrees has risen everywhere over the past 10 years, the gap between cities with low and high shares of graduates has widened since 1991. Cities and towns in the South East also have a higher proportion of children gaining good GCSE results (Parkinson, 2007).”

\textsuperscript{14} UKCES. (March 2010.) Skills for Jobs: Today and Tomorrow. The National Strategic Skills Audit for England 2010.
2.3.11 One of the distinguishing features of HE in FE is the close collaboration with employers in the design and delivery of relevant vocational programmes. The UKCES team notes that:

“Employer influence over content of qualifications taught in higher education and exposure to work experience appear to yield enhanced likelihood of graduate level employment. The same can be said of intermediate vocational qualifications, particularly Apprenticeships. This suggests that employability skills as well as qualifications which denote either technical knowledge or a general level of cognitive ability are valued by employers of graduates.”

2.4 Summary

This lengthy description of the context in which this study has taken place is made in order to show how well-placed HE in FE is, in terms of meeting public policy, student and employer need. Colleges which offer higher-level skills appear to provide positive outcomes to national policy initiatives – they are present in most towns and communities across the country, they are fleet of foot, in terms of rapidity of response to employer needs, offer high levels of support, often to students who have been with them for their FE training and provide a high quality HE experience led by well-qualified teachers.

2.4.1 The key strategic questions for colleges are how to sustain funding stability in uncertain times and how to maintain and enhance the quality of what the sector offers. (And which students and employers expect.) The two issues are linked and we return to them regularly in the subsequent sections of our report.
3. Report Overview

3.1 Why was this report written?

We undertook this research because whilst many claims are made for HE in FE, very little evidence has ever been collected across a large range of Colleges to defend or challenge some of the comments that are made. We set out to capture the views of a range of stakeholders and to do so in sufficient numbers to establish both a firm evidence base and a series of benchmarks for any future study of HE delivered in an FE setting.

3.2 The scale of the Report

This is a large-scale review of HE in FE. Using the three general lines of enquiry, (“Mapping the territory”; “Identifying the issues”; “Developing the strategy”) we contacted 80 providers of HE in FE and had either face-to-face or telephone discussions with 66 lead college staff. In the main these were Directors of Higher Education, but a small number of College Principals also offered to give us their perspective on current HE in FE matters. Working with IfL, (the Institute for Learning) we obtained the views of more than 3,000 HE in FE teaching staff and complemented this by a similar on-line survey of over 800 students who were pursuing their HE in FE. We also spoke to a number of Regional Development Agencies, Sector Skills Councils and Lifelong Learning Network staff to obtain the perspective of a range of external agencies. As a result we have accumulated a large volume of information about HE in FE.

3.3 The structure of the Report

Given the wealth of data that we had in our possession, it was important that we presented this in a readable way and we have chosen to adopt a two-part approach to the report. What follows is a summary of our findings, with conclusions and recommendations for future action, and then five free-standing component reports. This Overview refers to the findings in the more detailed reports, each of which is likely to be of interest to different readerships.

3.4 Summary of outcomes

The participants contacted in the course of this project are unanimous in their view that HE in FE is a respected and credible part of the HE landscape. It has achieved a maturity which is acknowledged by a number of outside organisations, such as QAA, and has been referenced in recent policy documents as having a key role to play in the emerging HE landscape. This could provide the foundation for a series of innovative responses to support economic recovery and sustain wider participation in HE. The provision of higher level skills, delivered through a variety of means, is seen by many as a crucial component of both the college offer and national need and this report provides evidence that such a view is not without foundation. However, for this to happen, the evidence available to us suggests that colleges must focus their efforts in several key areas. Using the sections of the report as a guide, the following points have emerged:
3.4.1 Mapping the territory

- HE in FE engages students, subject disciplines (principally in vocational areas) and geographical areas that traditional HE providers find difficult to reach.

- Although some Colleges organise HE in FE separately from their FE provision, most see real benefits for students and staff in the mutually-beneficial relationships which can exist when HE and FE are closely allied.

- HE provision in Colleges covers a wide range of subject disciplines, often responding to local or regional need. It is less clear how this provision meets changing priorities such as SIVs and engagement with the New Industries, New Jobs agenda is variable.

- HE in FE also covers a range of levels of study. However, current provision and plans for any growth across the sector focus on Foundation Degrees.

- HE in FE has measurable impact at local and regional level, dealing with specialist areas where demand may be restricted or shorter term. This includes working closely with regional agencies for economic development and small businesses.

- In some geographical areas where transport systems are poor and access to University-based HE is difficult, such as the South West and East Anglia, HE in FE offers the only accessible route to HE.

- Employers choose to send their employees on College-based vocational HE provision.

3.4.2 Identifying the issues.

The staff perspective

- Staff clearly value the opportunity to teach on HE courses, finding this personally and professionally satisfying.

- IQER is seen as a constructive process which has increased staff confidence on a range of HE matters.

- Although “scholarly activity” was not identified as a key issue, Colleges accept the need for staff teaching HE to be current in their knowledge of their subject and credible with their students and employers.

- There is a need to identify a credible source of professional support and development for those who teach HE in FE. Most staff rely on other colleagues and informal networks for this distinctive type of CPD.
In the vast majority of Colleges, staff are employed on a standard “FE” College contract. Given the absence of nationally agreed conditions, Colleges are developing their own interpretations and practices within those conditions. Staff regularly commented that sufficient time must be made available within these for adequate preparation to teach at HE level.

The student perspective

- A significant majority of students make a positive choice to study HE in an FE College. Local access, course choice and price are important considerations.

- HE in FE is the first choice for many younger students: they are not there because they failed to secure a place at University.

- HE in FE students are motivated by the enhanced employment prospects higher level vocational qualifications can bring.

- Students value higher taught hours, access to their tutors and small class sizes.

- Students value teaching expertise and subject currency above research activity in their teachers.

- Students studying HE in FE may be seeking a different experience of HE compared to their peers attending traditional universities.

The views of external agencies

- SSCs, Strategic Health Authorities, Lifelong Learning Networks and Local Authorities all work closely with FE Colleges when addressing their needs for higher-level skills.

- There is less involvement with RDAs but this varies within and between regions.

- All agencies commended the speed with which Colleges are able to respond to employer need.

- The nuclear industry and the health sector are the most likely areas of the New Industries, New Jobs agenda to involve Colleges, at least initially.

- It is still felt that Colleges are still more likely to focus on the needs of students than employers.

- A regional broker, such as the Association of Colleges, is needed to ensure that the potential of Colleges is recognised by a range of planning agencies and that Colleges are aware of the funding streams available to them from these sources.
Potential threats to HE in FE

- Most Colleges expressed concern that reductions in HE student numbers or funding would adversely affect their provision

- Although there are some excellent examples of HEI/FEC partnership working, Colleges still find difficulty with some aspects of the relationship, which is perceived as both hierarchical and unnecessarily burdensome

- Course viability, rather than meeting emerging local need, may become a priority

- Funding restrictions in other FE-related aspects of the Colleges’ work could have a detrimental impact on the ability to deliver HE in FE

- Data collection is uneven: many Colleges still have an uncertain grasp of data collection and management.

Potential opportunities

- Most Colleges saw great potential for expansion in vocational higher-level skills provision

- At a time of economic restraint, the ability of Colleges to offer skills-based provision in a responsive and cost effective way could lead to an expansion in College-based HE provision.

3.4.3 Developing the strategy

Perceptions of risk

- Some FECs appear to underestimate the risks to their provision, especially when taking into account changing policies in partner HEIs

- Colleges make the assumption that higher-level vocational skills and widening participation will remain a priority

- Many FECs need to have clearer strategies for HE. These should set out why they are making this provision, how it links with their FE provision and also how it will be resourced and supported in the short and medium term.

Organising HE in FE

- There is no consensus around the “best” College organization to deliver HE in FE

- However, Colleges must recognise the different demands of HE in FE and organise and resource accordingly
• There is an emerging sense that HE students see themselves as a distinctive group within the FE College setting. Many would prefer a separate environment for both social arrangements and teaching from FE students, and many comment on the presence of school-age students in an otherwise adult setting.

4. Conclusions

4.1 HE in FE is an established part of the new HE landscape that now contains a range of providers of HE. This is no longer territory solely occupied by Universities funded from the public purse.

4.2 There are a number of private providers of HE in England, most but not all of which are for-profit organisations and some of which, such as BPP and the College of Law also have degree-awarding powers. Private providers rarely engage in research, are employment-focused, charge high fees, use professionally-active staff to deliver courses, and make intensive use of online learning. In the main, their students are interested only in achieving work-related qualifications which will directly advance their careers.

4.3 The HE that is delivered in FE is similarly work-focused, but across a broader range of sectors than that currently occupied by the bulk of private providers. In the main, Colleges focus on Foundation degrees and Higher National qualifications, with less time being devoted to Bachelor degrees. At a time when the public purse is under pressure, the relative strengths of the different providers will come under scrutiny. College staff are employed on FE terms and conditions and are first and foremost teachers. Many are qualified in their original profession as well as being qualified teachers. They deliver work-related qualifications for a fee that is usually less than that charged by Universities and do so at a lower unit cost at the point of delivery than would be the case in a University setting.

4.4 IQER outcomes suggest that the quality of HE in FE is high. By the end of the academic year 2009 – 2010, QAA will have undertaken approximately 237 reviews and of the 63 published reports, only two have negative outcomes for Colleges. The comparable figure for the 130 English Universities is not available. In many cases, IQER assessors have commented on the quality of the employer engagement activity undertaken by Colleges.

4.5 Colleges have made a major contribution to widening participation in HE. In many areas, such as Bristol, Portsmouth, Nottingham or the towns of the North East, participation in HE is low. College staff in these areas are able to evidence the impact that they have made, not least with the development of a pool of people with HE qualifications who have remained and work in their locality but who are now able to act as exemplars to others, young and old, of what can be achieved through further study.

4.6 College staff commented that in some subjects nearly 100% of Level 3 students moved on to Level 4 study in the same or a related subject within their Colleges. Whilst in many cases the internal progression figure was less than this, the social and intellectual confidence gained by many students (e.g. those who had initially enrolled on Access courses, or who wished to pursue
full-time HE) frequently enabled them to consider applying for HE courses at nearby Universities, joining the 40% of College students who progress to HE. This role in broadening experience is often overlooked in any analysis of HE in FE.

4.7 The students who pursue their HE in FE do so for very clear reasons. Our student survey sets these out in more detail, but of relevance is a comment from one Director of HE, who noted that students who had moved on to University for a top-up Honours year often kept in touch with their former tutors in the College and invariably made comparisons between the approaches taken by the two institutions. He observed that contrary to staff expectations, the students rarely made any reference to the quality of the resources available within the receiving University – but they did comment on the larger class sizes and lack of contact time with their tutors.

4.8 In some Colleges, demand for places on particular HE courses had reached a point where the College was able to raise its admissions criteria. Staff were clear that aside from offering an impartial way of allocating places, one effect of this was to raise the status of the College and the course within the local community, as well as improving retention rates, raising standards and enhancing reputation.

4.9 Our research has covered a wide range of topics and leads us to conclude that HE in FE occupies a valuable niche that does not set out to compete with either the research-intensive Universities or the more narrowly-focused private providers of HE. It is characterised by being work-related if not work-based and often leads on from vocational qualifications, including Apprenticeship, rather than academic.

4.10 Many of our respondents noted that HE in FE lacks champions: whilst the University sector and many private providers are able to field influential supporters who can rally to their cause, HE in FE does not find it easy to attract the skilled networkers and lobbyists needed to perform this role for the distinctive brand of vocational higher education that is delivered in FE Colleges.

5. Recommendations

5.1 New policy directions

- Higher level skills are at the centre of plans for economic recovery. However, it has proved consistently difficult to articulate effective responses. Colleges have the potential to respond if enabled to do so by offering funded modules of study (currently deemed ultra vires) and empowered to work in consortia or other partnerships with Colleges and employers
- Government should work with employers to ensure that higher level skills are seen to be valued, encouraged and recognised as a valid pathway to higher study
- Learners achieving vocational qualifications at Level 3, including Apprenticeship, are considered less likely to progress to higher level qualifications. However, much tracking only follows those choosing full time pathways. Better methods to track part time and flexible routes are required,
including those which are undertaken some time after the Level 3 qualification is obtained

- Providers and designers of higher level qualifications must ensure that those qualifications are attractive to those learners who are currently reluctant to participate. This is most likely to be achieved by using flexible methods of design, delivery and assessment which build on the methodologies used in Level 3 rather than rely solely on traditional “academic” approaches
- Funding regimes should be structured to prioritise and incentivise higher level skills, where necessary targeting funds at specific types of provision

5.2 Action for Colleges

- Colleges delivering HE must have a clear strategy and rationale, which takes into account both the changing external environment and the College’s own capacity and aspirations
- HE in FE is an emerging recognised brand. Colleges must ensure that the uniqueness of that brand is developed and sustained
- Colleges must allocate sufficient human and other resources to deliver HE to the highest levels of quality
- College staff should be encouraged to undertake appropriate professional updating and participation in related national networks
- Colleges maintain that they make an important contribution to higher level skills at local and regional level. However, whilst there are many examples of good practice, Colleges have yet to establish themselves firmly as the preferred providers for such skills. Greater efforts to work with regional skills bodies, sector skills councils and employers are required if this is to be achieved

6. Post script

Since completion of the research phase of this project, a new coalition government has taken office committed to addressing the serious economic situation facing the UK. As with previous administrations, higher level skills are placed at the centre of recovery. Colleges have the opportunity to build on the strengths described in this report to deliver cost effective higher level skills programmes which deliver value for money, high levels of quality and the skills needed by individuals and the economy.
7. **Areas for Further Investigation**

In the course of undertaking the research and preparing this report, a number of areas for further investigation were identified. These include:

- Developing new approaches and definitions of higher level skills
- Continuing professional development for College staff teaching HE
- Creating networks for self help and collaborative working
- Better engagement with employers in delivering higher level skills
Strategic Options, Operational Challenges

Appendix A: Identifying the Issues

Introduction

A major part of our research took place during the course of 66 telephone discussions with senior staff in FE colleges. In the main these were Directors of Higher Education, with some Vice Principals and Principals also taking part. A small number were face-to-face discussions. A list of participating colleges is given in Annex 1. The areas of questioning are attached as Annex 2 and cover 8 broad areas of HE management and delivery. We give below a summary of the comments and issues that emerged.

In many cases, the separate reports analysing the Staff and Student surveys, the RDA/SSC interviews and the section on the Risks identified in college HE Strategies are companion pieces to this first free-standing report, as they add detail to the matters discussed during our interviews.

1. General Data

We began our discussion by asking our interviewees to give us some basic data concerning their colleges. We divided the respondents into those providing large volumes of HE (over 900 headcount) medium numbers of HE students (200 – 899) and small volumes of HE provision (1-199). We also noted whether they were largely directly funded (at least 80% of provision directly funded) or largely indirectly funded (80% indirect) or significant amounts of both. Some of this has been collated as Figure 1 below.

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**Notes on coding**

**Funding:**
- 1 = all or mainly (80% plus) direct HEFCE funding
- 2 = all or mainly (80% plus) indirect HEFCE funding
- 3 = mixed

**Volume:**
- 1 = 1-199
- 2 = 200-899
- 3 = 900+

**% of provision:**
HE students as a percentage of the college total number of students

**Partnerships:**
Number of HEIs with which directly funded colleges work
Number of HEIs from which colleges receive indirect funding

**Differentiation of HE and FE within the college:**
- 0 = Quality systems or management structures are not differentiated
- 1 = Quality systems or management structures are differentiated

What is most striking from this chart is the range of volume of HE provision, given both as a percentage of student headcount and also as total FTEs. Whilst some FE colleges have a small volume of HE – the lowest is 2% - in four of the 66 respondents over 40% of their headcount is HE. In straight numerical terms, they range from approaching 3,000 ftes to less than 60.
Figure 2: HE students as a percentage of college total by volume of HE (headcount)

N=66

Note:

1-199 = 3 colleges (5% of sample)

2-899 = 36 colleges (54% of sample)

900+ = 27 colleges (41% of sample)

Provision in most cases combines HEFCE-funded Prescribed Higher Education (phe) and Non-Prescribed HE (nphe) funded by the LSC or other agencies. Some colleges have only HEFCE-funded HE. Most report that this component is declining year-on-year, reflecting the competing demands on LSC budgets: the Council has a power but not a duty to fund this level of work.

Whilst not all colleges completed this data return, analysis suggests that within the participating colleges there are broadly more full time HE students than part time, the majority of whom are following Foundation degrees (Fds). In specialist colleges this can be reversed, however – at one land based college, over half of all HE students were following BSc. courses, with Fds accounting for 30% of all HE students.

Non-prescribed HE programmes usually accounted for less than 10% of the HE offer although this varied considerably, depending on the college’s history of association with AAT, CMI, etc or its delivery of NVQ4/5 qualifications. Most colleges offered CTTLS and DTTLS as well as Health Service funded provision.
Colleges in the main offer a range of HE provision, funded from a range of sources. Most have now been through the process of IQER and have found it testing but constructive: it has helped to focus thinking about a number of issues from structures to procedures, as well as shaping priorities. Student numbers, funding and quality issues featured large in our discussions, usually based on the need to maintain quality of provision in order to ensure that the college “brand” was never called into question by students, employers or partner HEIs. The next section of this report focuses on HE teaching staff and the arrangements for their Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

2. Staffing Arrangements

In this part of the survey respondents were asked to describe the staffing and delivery of HE programmes, the type of support provided for staff development, the range of activities undertaken and how the impact of this is monitored. They were also asked to comment on value added to the college of delivering higher education.

2.1 Percentage of staff teaching HE

Respondents were asked approximately what percentage of their staff teach only HE programmes or a mix of HE and FE courses and the split between full and part time/sessional staff teaching HE.

The percentage of college staff teaching only HE programmes varied considerably, from 5%- 100%. In 45 of the 66 colleges (68%) there were no staff who taught only HE, while in 2 colleges (one large volume and one medium) 100% of staff teaching on their HE programmes only teach HE. There is a tendency for large volume colleges have higher proportions of their HE teaching staff only delivering HE; of the 26 large volume colleges, 7 had more than 60% of the staff teaching HE only; of the 37 medium volume colleges only 1 had more than 60% and 1 specialist small volume provider.

97% of colleges expect their staff to teach a mixture of HE and FE courses. Respondents were often unable to identify the percentage of staff time spent on HE within a mixed timetable. 3 colleges expect all their staff to teach on both HE and FE programmes. However, teaching across HE and FE courses is seen as important in most colleges, This approach enables colleges to ensure flexibility of delivery and for staff to develop their teaching and specialist skills appropriate to different levels.

In 24 of the colleges (36%) more than 70% of staff teaching HE courses are employed full time; in 7 colleges (10%) there is a 50:50 FT /PT split; there was no clear relationship between volume of activity and staffing. Where part time staff are employed they bring industry expertise to the course, an understanding of current professional practice, and are able to provide support for student placements. Some colleges were unable to identify the percentage split between full and part time staff and pointed out that the percentage FT/PT staffing varied year-on-year and within subjects. Sessional staff are often industry-active and if their profession is doing well they would move back into this from teaching. Equally, many Fds are short-lived and the staffing balance changes regularly.
2.2 Support for CPD

Respondents were asked to what extent they provided remission and/or support for scholarly activity or research for HE staff (including those on NPHE).

All colleges recognise the value of and support staff development with their institution and many respondents referred to the mandatory 30 hours CPD for their staff. Specific support for HE varies considerably from providing remission from teaching duties to allowing staff to bid into a central CPD fund which is allocated across both FE and HE. 32 (48%) colleges actively support remission, although this is limited to those taking a higher degree in 3 cases. In some colleges, the remission offered was generous, but in most cases it probably averaged 2 weeks across the teaching year.

Colleges expect their staff teaching prescribed HE to have a degree higher than that they are teaching but there was no consistent funding for this. In 50% of the colleges staff are partially supported with the cost of post graduate qualification fees. Some university partners allow FE staff teaching on their HE programmes to take a post graduate course at a subsidised rate. There does not appear to be any distinction between volume of activity the support provided by the college.

Colleges also vary considerably in their attitude to supporting HE in staff development – staff are partially supported with the cost of post graduate qualification fees. Some university partners allow FE staff teaching on their HE programmes to take a post graduate course at a subsidised rate. There does not appear to be any distinction between volume of activity the support provided by the college.

Some provide encouragement and considerable amounts of time (e.g. 200 hours/ year for research active staff) while others will not prioritise one set of courses over another. One college operates a case loading model based on number of weeks taught per year and contact hours thus allowing staff to develop pedagogy and work with their partner HEIs to develop programmes. Amongst the colleges who did not actively offer remission, many noted that they had done previously, and that the present decision reflected a change in financial circumstances. HE CPD was not regarded as a priority when faced with declining HE funding.

A few colleges reported that they would rather their teachers have vocational expertise or specialist professional qualifications but there is little evidence of colleges funding membership of professional organisations.

All colleges expected their staff to have teaching qualifications and actively supported the acquisition of them; this often was delivered in house where they had a teaching programme e.g. Certificate in Education, or Diploma or Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning sector (DTLLS and CTLLS).

There appear to be only a couple of colleges surveyed that have a differentiated contract for their HE staff. It was overwhelmingly the case that FECs had single FE contracts for all their teaching staff.
Respondents did not refer specifically to staff on NPHE programmes or identify them as a special group - they were more often than not considered as being FE teachers and were unlikely to be engaged in research or scholarly activity.

2.3 Funding CPD

Respondents were asked how they funded research and scholarly activities and whether they had a differentiated HE in FE teaching and learning fund/budget allocation which supported remission.

There is considerable variation in the way colleges fund the CPD for HE teaching. Where colleges are directly funded and staff have a high percentage of HE teaching the pattern appears to be a differentiated budget; 20 FECs used the TQEF as a source of funding. Few colleges had a separate source of funding for HE CPD – in one case the money came from student fees, in another the institution confirmed additional funding from their partner HEI CETL over 3 years.

15 colleges addressed their HE staffs' scholarly activity needs from the college core CPD budget. Staff were expected to bid into the budget for funds; their needs were often identified at appraisal and their application then supported by their line manager. Some colleges provided staff development days that were specifically HE oriented and separate from FE teaching staff. There appears to be a preference for treating all staff equally as regards funding their CPD. The arrangements for NPHE staff accessing CPD support were also through bidding into the central college fund.

2.4 Important CPD for HE teaching staff

Respondents were asked to consider what they thought to be the most important aspect of scholarly activity in their college.

All institutions confirmed professional updating was a priority. There was unanimity that professional updating and the development of teaching skills were the prime purposes behind scholarly activity in HE in FE. Respondents were keen to point out that they were first and foremost teaching institutions and that the purpose was to ensure that staff were able to teach well at HE level. It was noted that the skills needed to teach at HE level were different to those used at Level 3, and that, within this, vocational HE required other skill sets again.

A high priority was to ensure vocational expertise in teaching HE courses. This was considered to be more important than research. However staff in one specialist college were involved in research and were recognised nationally as experts in their field. Only one general FEC said that the development of research skills was the most important factor.

It was acknowledged that staff needed to be recognised for their expertise and that scholarly activity enabled them to illustrate that they were still at the cutting edge of their subject.

In broad terms, the most mentioned areas were; professional updating, improvement of teaching skills, conferences, secondments, work shadowing
and publishing material. A few colleges referred to the importance of staff delivering and disseminating their research at conferences.

2.5 Monitoring arrangements

Respondents were asked how they monitor the impact of scholarly activity on the students and the college as a whole.

It is perhaps surprising that whilst many colleges earmark funding for HE CPD there is relatively little monitoring of the impact or effectiveness of this activity.

This section reflects the conclusions drawn from a previous MEG survey, in that very little monitoring was carried out to link the subject of remitted time and its impact in the classroom. Most of the respondents listed the main monitoring components as appraisals, course review, and regular monitoring to consider the impact of CPD on programme delivery. Some colleges referred to the HEI requirement for an annual monitoring report – but not specifically about impact of their CPD. Some colleges produce an annual report of published papers/conference presentations/journal articles etc.

Only 9 colleges (13%) linked teaching observation and the impact of scholarly activity in the classroom. Some colleges reported use of student surveys and feedback to monitor effectiveness which they linked to CPD.

Internal peer review of course materials and the comments from external examiners were mentioned by several colleges together with regular review and revalidation of programmes which tests industry relevance and currency of the curriculum.

In the main, colleges acknowledged that whilst they had appraisal and reporting systems that enabled staff to account for how any time off or funding was used, they were less able to draw a direct link to performance in the classroom or in terms of graduation results.

2.6 The value-added of HE teaching programmes and the costing model used for HE

Respondents were asked to consider the value added of teaching HE in the college to their staff and the college.

All respondents agreed that there was value in delivering HE programmes – this could be in terms of financial value to the college or more frequently in personal value to staff.

Three interviewees commented on the financial benefit of HE. All acknowledged that HE funding generally is more generous, more stable and more predictable. One respondent referred to being able to access HE capital funding. Others reported that delivering HE enabled them to diversify their funding streams and develop their curriculum and progression pathways. One respondent related the delivery of HE to the college’s long term strategy and noted that regardless of whether or not the HE programmes were deemed to be value for money, they were important to the future of the organisation as a whole. They were also part of the local and regional strategies.
Three colleges said that HE supported their strategic drive to develop work-based learning. They saw this as their niche: partner HEIs were not interested in this area of work. A specialist college was delivering HE courses that local HEIs would not choose to offer as they lacked the necessary expertise that was available within the college. A couple of respondents said that teaching HE enhances the profile of their staff and programmes for marketing purposes.

All respondents were very positive about the value to their staff of delivering HE programmes. All institutions confirmed that staff welcomed the status of delivering higher education programmes and saw benefits in the following ways:

- Increased activities and exposure to HEI intellectual and physical resources
- Increased credibility with partner HEIs
- Increased reputation of both staff and HE provision
- Knowledge transfer and sharing of good practice, networking
- Delivering HE provides exciting intellectual challenges for staff
- Staff gained a level of intellectual stimulation from their HE students that wasn’t possible when teaching at level 3
- The provision of vocational HE and widening participation were key drivers in staff motivation
- Staff enjoyment in teaching HE

There were also benefits in the way the college was viewed by students. Many respondents noted that students found the knowledge that they could progress to HE within their FE College motivational and that they took pride in knowing that their FE tutors also taught at degree level. Many staff had themselves come into HE via the same route and gained both confidence and kudos from offering a similar opportunity to younger students from similar backgrounds.

All colleges noted the value added of teaching HE - from sharing good practice across the FE and HE levels, to enhancing the reputation of the college, to motivating and providing an aspirational context for staff in the college.

Respondents were asked whether they used a different costing model for their HE and FE teaching. Only 6 colleges (three of which are specialist institutions) used a different costing basis for HE – the majority used the FE approach for the HE budget.

In all cases, HE was expected to make a contribution – usually 40% - to the college overheads.

**Summary of key points**

- All colleges interviewed expect their staff teaching HE to have a degree higher than the level they are teaching; some colleges would rather their teachers had vocational expertise or specialist professional qualifications
- All colleges expect their staff to have a teaching qualification and 50% will support them to get one
- Very few staff teach only HE courses – the majority teach both FE and HE – and this is seen as important in most colleges; the few staff that only teach
HE are usually specialist in a particular subject area and often part time in industry and part time teaching.

- All colleges offer staff development but usually through application to a central fund – only a few have designated HE funding; most consider professional updating to be the most important aspect of scholarly activity rather than original research.
- Staff development needs to be brought in line with what staff are asking for - IT and new technologies are clearly crucial and this is reflected in the (separate) Staff Survey. Managers, however, see professional updating as most important; this mismatch needs to be addressed.
- Scholarly activity does not register highly but this is required by QAA and supported by HEA – there needs to be a better understanding of what constitutes scholarly activity in the context of HE in FE and support given to staff to undertake it.
- There is little remission for staff carrying out research or scholarly activity; some colleges give some support for fees; some colleges tie this to the IFL requirement for 30 hours CPD.
- There appears to be little monitoring of the impact of scholarly activity or attendance at professional updating other than through student surveys.
- All colleges felt that they were getting value out of their HE – some in terms of the overall satisfaction that it gave their staff to teach HE, others in terms of a wider benefit to students in terms of progression routes.
- All colleges noted the value added of teaching HE from sharing good practice to enhancing the reputation of the college to motivating and providing an aspirational context for staff in the college.
- Apart from the amount of time spent solely teaching HE, there are no distinctive differences between colleges with small, medium or large volumes of HE activity.

3. Standards and quality

This part of the discussions focused on the management of standards and quality. We asked the following questions:

3.1 How is your college organised?

All institutions stated that a senior post holder held overall strategic responsibility for the management of higher education standards and quality. In most cases, the senior post holder held direct line management responsibilities for the middle managers in quality assurance and higher education development. This generic management structure was recognised as being effective in assuring the quality and standards of all higher education programmes and in meeting the colleges’ obligations to awarding body partners.

3.2 Do you have a single HE centre or co-location with FE provision?

Ten large institutions confirmed they delivered higher education provision in separate locations with two others debating whether or not to do so. This may
suggest that at some stage in the development of increased provision, critical mass influenced and shaped delivery arrangements. One of these institutions, however, stated it had since moved away from delivering HE in separate facilities but confirmed this was not a view supported by HE staff who preferred the differentiated model. In five cases, HE was delivered on a specific site often identified as a HE Centre offering teaching, drop-in and off-timetable facilities. Two of the largest providers and one medium sized specialist provider confirmed they implemented a dedicated infrastructure for the exclusive delivery of higher education. Both institutions considered that this was essential in the development of a culture and environment appropriate to the needs and demands of both staff and students. The development of a mature HE culture and ethos was seen as a high priority by the majority of large and medium sized institutions, reflecting the specific needs of older learners, who need to study locally.

A small number of institutions confirmed that whilst they had separate HE teaching & student facilities, HE students also had access to FE facilities. Variations, however, in resource management included a dedicated HE Learning Resource Centre funded by partner HEI, including HE book store, separate IT facilities and quiet working area, a designated HE area with drop in centre for non-time table access and a dedicated HE area, but shared cross college Learning Resource Centre facilities.

In the majority of cases, higher education provision was located alongside further education provision, with staff acknowledging the need for a cost effective approach to resourcing HE curriculum. When asked about the availability of access to key shared resources, it was generally accepted that access to, e.g., IT facilities outside of HE timetabled studies were not major concerns. Where concern over possible tensions between the requirements of two cultures was expressed, it was acknowledged that in most cases resourcing issues were resolved to the satisfaction of programme managers, delivery staff and the student cohort. The most common incidence highlighted was access to specialist resources outside timetabled sessions. This was particularly relevant in the second and third year of programmes where students are expected to acquire independent learning skills.

Colleges delivering HE alongside FE in the main acknowledged that as HE provision was an extension of FE curriculum, it offered motivation and aspiration to internal students aspiring to continue their studies within the accepted supportive environment of a mixed economy institution

3.4 Does the college have clearly designated roles and responsibilities at all levels for the management of HE provision?

This question achieved general consensus, evidenced by cross-referencing to appropriate HE Strategy documents, with roles and responsibilities differing across the range of institutions. These differences reflect, in the main, the strategic priority of higher education within the overall curriculum provision. Post holders included Deputy Principal; Vice Principal HE, Adult and Community; Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality; Vice Principal Learning & Achievement; Director of Curriculum and Director of Higher Education. In general, it was standard practice for the senior post holder to report directly to the Principal and
Chief Executive when assuming overall responsibility for the management of HE standards and quality.

Two large institutions, however, acknowledged that they were less well organised than they should be, with one noting that an impending IQER review was helping to focus on the revision and evaluation of structures and delivery mechanisms.

In most cases though, operational responsibilities lay within the tier of middle management, being delegated to one of a number of post holders including HE Development Manager, HE Manager, HE Registrar, HE Co-ordinator, Head of HE, HE Development & Partnerships Manager. In some cases, management of higher education was embedded within curriculum areas being the responsibility of Heads of Faculty/Departments, and in two cases, the HE Manager assumed overall responsibility for the management and co-ordination of higher education without line management responsibility. Middle managers generally expressed the view that, where senior managers held the delegated responsibility for higher education, there was a sense that the overall management and co-ordination of higher provision, including liaison with awarding body partners was unofficially delegated to middle management staff. One large college noted that where there were only small volumes of HE in a subject area, management roles were less clear.

3.5 Prescribed & NPHE systems?

In the majority of cases, including large, medium and small institutions, respondents confirmed that they managed higher education provision, including NPHE, through a joint FE/HE model. All colleges with NPHE agreed that this was managed by the subject leads.

Two large colleges noted that NPHE was more like FE in its procedures and organisation, whilst 1 medium sized institution reported that it had deliberately added NPHE programmes to the HE Prospectus to make the point that it should be recognised as such.

3.6 Should HE be managed separately?

When asked whether higher education should be managed independently, the broad majority said that it should not – the distinctive feature was that it was a continuation of vocational HE. Most noted that HE was only a small percentage of their college’s business and that it was rightly located within the FE structure. An integrated approach was “fit for purpose” as the expertise lay in the subject centres and it was more cost effective to share the funding of resources appropriate to the two areas of study. One large institution, whilst operating an independently managed system for higher education, stressed the appropriateness of the integration of resources for specialist subject areas. This also confirmed the importance of the sharing of good practice between staff and offering progression opportunities within the institution.

There were a number of dissenting voices however. Eight large, three medium and two specialist colleges were clear that HE should be organised separately with all of the large institutions operating on this basis. Each of the institutions
with large volumes of HE provision took the view that this level of critical mass warranted a separate system of organisation. This argument was appreciated by a number of other colleges, who, whilst supporting an integrated approach, could see that there might come a point when sheer numbers required them to organise differently.

One college noted that adults pursuing HE, particularly if they were older entrants to HE, did not want to study in a teenage environment and found the presence of 14-19 year olds detracted from the mature, considered experience that they had assumed that they would find in an HE setting.

One medium sized GFE was operating a separate system of delivery and organisation. The college had a number of physical University Centres and a large proportion of staff who only taught higher education. The Director of HE was the head of a substantial team of dedicated HE staff who operated at a strategic and operational level. Additionally, three other large institutions were giving serious consideration to organising HE separately. They were aware of the counter arguments – poaching of staff, the need to issue revised contracts and tensions over the use of resources, but took the view that that critical mass was propelling them towards a more appropriate system of organising and managing higher education provision.

3.7 Committee structures

All colleges’ reporting mechanisms and committee structures included a range of strategic, operational, planning and quality assurance groups. Reporting structures included the following committees: HE Curriculum & Standards Committee, HE Curriculum & Quality Group and HE Boards of Studies. Three large institutions confirmed they had implemented differentiated reporting mechanisms for the consideration of higher education matters which were well understood by staff. Two large providers confirmed that their preparations for applying for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) had focused their attention on ensuring the management infrastructure for higher education was appropriate and effective. Both institutions indicated they had revised their committee structures to include an Academic Board.

Most managers reported that preparations for both strands of the QAA’s Integrated Quality Enhancement Review (IQER) process - Developmental Engagement and Summative Review, resulted in the opportunity to overhaul their reporting and planning mechanism for the management of higher education provision. In addition, this had provided extensive staff development opportunities for all staff engaged with the management of higher education.

The respondent from one large institution confirmed that it considered higher education matters through engagement with existing FE systems and processes, but confirmed they utilised a differentiated HE Quality Cycle, reporting to the College’s Academic Standards Committee and Academic Board. Another large institution acknowledged that their joint HE/FE system was unsatisfactory: it wasn’t totally clear and coherent and was not particularly well understood by all staff. This was, however, being addressed.
Six institutions delivering both direct and in-directly funded provision confirmed that they implemented differentiated committee structures. One medium sized institution said that they implemented the reporting structures and mechanisms of their partner university, including a Route Operations Committee meeting 3 times per year, Scheme Approvals Boards, Route Examination Committee and Scheme Board of Examiners. The majority of institutions delivering HE described a range of differentiated committees including: HE Committee, HE Quality & Standards Committee, HE Strategic Management Group, HE Quality Sub Committee and HE Strategic Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee.

One large MEG institution confirmed a comprehensive reporting structure with overall strategic direction devolved to the HE Directorate under the leadership of the Director of Higher Education. This structure provides a common rationale and strategy for all HE provision, generic aims for all existing and new awards, economies of scale for the management and administration of HE provision and opportunity to identify and disseminate good practice.

Those institutions operating without an Academic Board confirmed that Curriculum & Standards and Academic Standards Committees undertook the responsibility for the consideration of higher education issues, reporting internally to the Senior Management Team and the Board of Governors.

Representatives from colleges that have undergone IQER, or were in the process of implementing the self assessment process, acknowledged that this had had an impact on their procedures. Most had developed and implemented higher education practitioner forums providing additional opportunities for course leaders and staff practitioners to contribute to the identification and dissemination of higher education issues.

On the whole colleges concluded that their reporting/committee structures, whether dedicated to the function of higher education or absorbed into a central college HE/FE system, constituted a robust and effective mechanism for assuring the quality and standards of higher education provision.

3.8 Provision of specific HE administration support

Over 50% of colleges said that they had some form of dedicated administration support for higher education provision but most roles, whilst supporting HE, also engaged with further education matters. All institutions confirmed MIS support was from a central college resource, but some colleges were moving towards a minor reorganisation that would enable them to recruit specialist data management staff. It was noted on several occasions that an understanding of data was particularly important and several colleges were hoping to recruit from nearby universities.

Two large institutions had dedicated HE administrative support through the provision of a HE Registrar, HE MIS Officer and a HE administrator holding responsibility for UCAS applications, student finance, HE marketing & publicity and the office receipting of assessed student work. Three large institutions confirmed strong administrative support for higher education, but this came in the form of a central college resource for both FE and HE. One medium sized
institution benefitted from dedicated resources for high education administration through: HE Validation Officer, HE Administrator, HE Liaison Officer, HE Departmental Administrators and a HE Directorate Administrator.

3.9 **Are there clear roles & responsibilities for all those involved in teaching and delivery of HE?**

Most respondents noted that HE teaching staff had exactly the same roles and responsibilities as FE staff. The general view was that they were teaching in an FE setting and that the prime requirement was to teach. Five colleges offered staff a differentiated contract, but this was still based around FE terms and conditions. One large institution confirmed that staff delivering higher education were employed on a separate contract being required to teach no more than 500 hours per annum. This HE-focused contract ensures that all staff have access to up over 1,000 hours per annum for research and scholarly activity which is monitored through a Performance Management Audit system. The college took the view that it was essential to offer this opportunity to staff to ensure that emphasis was not just focused on teaching, but facilitated the development of a culture which challenged staff to continually develop themselves and the curriculum for the benefit of students.

One respondent noted that his college teaching establishment was already pared to the minimum, such that he would find dealing with long-term sickness of an HE teacher difficult to cover. Whilst the development of generic modules within, say, Fds, would enable a better ability to cover for absent staff, there was still a need to ensure that sufficient staff were able to teach at HE level to guarantee continuity for students. This then raised the question of staff contracts, which normally avoided mentioning the nature of the teaching commitment, specifying only the number of contact hours. Another Director noted that the HE elements were not specified in contracts. In her college, an HE Academic Handbook had been created and the Staff Net has an HE area.

Although rarely mentioned as such, the issue of staff contracts was present throughout the discussions. College staff seek to recruit from HEIs in order to obtain specialist skills just as much as they fear losing staff to HEIs because of what is perceived to be better terms and conditions. Some staff are contracted to 860 hours, others nearer 800 and those on differentiated contracts have different term dates and a different deployment of contracted time.

Staff from large, medium and small institutions expressed a large degree of frustration with the terms and conditions of the “generic HE/FE contract”. In addition to contact teaching, staff drew attention to the additional tasks they are required to undertake. Most interviewees confirmed that the requirement to teach up to 24 hours per week seriously impacted on the ability of HE in FE staff to engage with continuing professional development activities.

3.10 **HE Liaison**

All institutions confirmed that formal liaison was undertaken by the senior strategic manager holding responsibility for higher education. Most colleges said that they had developed strong and productive relationships with their awarding body partners with whom, largely out of strategic choice, validation
of their Foundation degree provision resides. They also reported that collaboration between awarding body link tutors and college staff promoted the development of a shared understanding of partner responsibilities in relation to teaching, learning and assessment, often leading to the identification and sharing of good practice. All, however, noted that the generation of good relationships requires a heavy investment in time.

3.11 **Role of the Quality Unit**

Colleges only adopt specialist processes where size and scale demand this approach. Most institutions confirmed that they managed higher education quality assurance through a central cross-college HE/FE system, but commented that in many cases they had a dedicated HE Manager who held specific responsibility for higher education standards and quality assurance. In these cases the HE Manager liaised with the college’s central quality facility. Where colleges did not have an HE quality system or HE quality manager, quality assurance management was devolved to Head of Department level. There was a varied range of management models in place to monitor higher education quality.

**Figure 3: Differentiation of quality systems by volume of HE provision**

In many cases, the success of colleges in developing systems aligned to their validating partner(s) was due to the result of intense time commitment on the part of key staff. Several have commented that HE requires an investment in relationship building: many noted that they spent as much time on the premises of their HEI(s) as they did in college.
All institutions confirmed that staff had a good understanding of processes for considering higher education, as most had been involved with, or were preparing to engage with, the IQER process. It was generally accepted that this exercise facilitated a greater awareness of issues relating to HE standards and Quality Assurance.

Of the institutions operating through an FE QA system, all implemented some, or all, of the awarding body QA systems, adhering to their Annual Quality Cycle and Annual Programme Review/Monitoring process. All stated that arrangements were confirmed within the Memorandum of Agreement/Co-operation between the college and awarding body.

Some colleges confirmed the Annual Programme Monitoring/Review process was totally awarding body-driven using standardised templates. In the case of institutions holding multiple partnership arrangements the implementation of partner systems can often be burdensome, particularly if the HEI insists on the use of their branded templates and models. One large college commented that this meant seven separate sets of documentation: others spoke of four or five partners who were unwilling to engage with even the notion of “shared principles”. Some were in a more flexible position. In several cases, staff commented that whilst they were expected to adopt the HEI’s processes, the HE liaison staff were prepared to listen and did appear to value their comments about procedure. Some had evolved an approach that produced an amalgam of the best of both systems.

One large institution confirmed it had developed fully independent and differentiated HE processes including: a HE Code of Practice, agreed by validating HEIs, with regulations being implemented in preparation for application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) Staff were kept fully informed and updated about quality assurance systems and processes through a dedicated HE Quality Handbook. This institution confirmed that there was no university presence within a fifty mile radius and the HE in FE provision they provided was vital to learners in the local and regional area. In addition, four medium sized in-directly funded colleges had convinced their HEI’s that their own processes were commensurate with those in their own institutions. One had developed a model which shared precepts from all partner institutions.

Most indirectly funded colleges noted that the management and administration of Assessment Boards, the appointment of External Examiners and staff development activities in relation to the Academic Infrastructure (AI) were all provided by university partners.

Many respondents made the point that their ability to manage and maintain the consistency of quality and standards of their higher education provision is reflected in the responses they give to their awarding bodies via outcomes of Annual Quality Review (AQR) processes. Institutions confirmed that AQR provided an effective vehicle for demonstrating how they assure standards and quality and that they meet and fulfil obligations to their awarding bodies, aligned to the requirements of the Quality Assurance Agency’s Integrated Quality Enhancement Review process (IQER).
3.12 Where in the management of college strategic priorities does HE reside?

Virtually all institutions regarded higher education as strategically important. It was referred to in the strategic plan and was usually housed within the HE Committee or the Quality Committee.

One large institution, however, stated that whilst HE provision was 13% of college provision and 20% in revenue, it was still seen and treated as a significantly lower priority than other college provision.

Summary of key points.

- Majority of colleges confirmed the use of FE systems and processes for the monitoring of HE matters
- Application for FDAP has focused attention on ensuring the management infrastructure for higher education is appropriate and effective.
- IQER has focused each college’s approach to evaluation of management structures and development of HE Strategies
- Colleges are reinstating Academic Boards to strengthen monitoring process
- Middle managers generally expressed the view that, where senior managers held the delegated responsibility for higher education, there was a sense that the overall management and co-ordination of higher provision, including liaison with awarding body partners was unofficially delegated to middle management staff.
- NPHE is generally managed within subject areas
- Broad majority of respondents said that HE should not be managed separately suggesting that, as it was only a small percentage of their college’s business, it was rightly located within the FE structure.
- Over 50% of colleges confirmed they had some form of dedicated administration support for higher education provision but most roles, whilst supporting HE, also engaged with further education matters.
- Many large institutions confirmed they delivered higher education provision in separate locations, suggesting that at some stage in the development of increased provision, critical mass influenced and shaped delivery arrangements
- The development of a mature HE culture and ethos was seen as a high priority by the majority of large and medium sized institutions, reflecting the specific needs of older learners, who need to study locally.
- Most staff confirmed that the requirement to teach up to 24 hours per week seriously impacted on their ability to positively engage with continuing professional development activities.
- Most noted that HE teaching staff had exactly the same roles and responsibilities as FE staff.
• One large institution confirmed that staff delivering higher education were employed on a separate contract being required to teach no more than 500 hours per annum.
• Most institutions confirmed that they managed higher education quality assurance through a Central Cross College HE/FE system, all confirming they implemented some, or all, of the awarding body QA systems.
• Seven large institutions delivering both direct and in-directly funded provision confirmed they used dedicated higher education quality assurance systems.
• There is a sense that colleges only adopt specialist processes where size and scale demand this approach.
• Most institutions confirmed that higher education was strategically important to them, describing it as very important and of high status.

4. HE in FE Partnerships

This section looks at the number and nature of FEC/HEI partnerships. The table below illustrates the extent to which some colleges have developed multiple partnerships. A total of sixty six (66) colleges are holding thirty six (36) partnerships. The number of partnership arrangements will ultimately diminish as a result of the current funding situation facing HEIs, as some colleges with large and complex arrangements have indicated they will be reviewing these as part of their on-going strategic development.

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Asked how they came to be working with these HEIs, all noted that the relationships were a combination of historical developments, local/regional strategic positioning, reputation and subject relevance. Some colleges stated that they had been proactive in seeking out a partner for progression and validation because of the specialist nature of their provision.
4.1 What are the main benefits of working with an awarding body and what are the drawbacks?

All institutions referred to the necessity of working with HEIs for validation purposes, but didn’t necessarily see this as a “benefit”. It was noted that FDAP would reduce the dependency of FECs on HEIs in the area of Foundation degrees. All institutions agreed, however, that there were a number of key benefits around processes such as Validation and Quality Assurance, Continuing Professional Development, currency by association (branding) and potential for growth.

In addition, staff could benefit in a variety of ways. Being linked to a research intensive HEI which provided good support was a huge benefit to teaching staff in terms of knowledge transfer. The link to research-led HEIs also provided credibility for the awards delivered by colleges through validation. More generally, a college’s credibility was enhanced through association with the partner University’s brand, and having access to comprehensive Continuing Professional Development programmes for college HE staff was also cited as an advantage. For most in-directly funded colleges, HEIs provided comprehensive validation and Assessment services. A “hands off” approach by some HEIs with validating relationships was seen as positive and promoting confidence.

That said, there are irritations. Without exception, all institutions agreed with the following issues which impacted on their on-going relationships with awarding bodies:

- Inflexibility and slowness of response
- Lack of trust
- Duplication of effort (Separate Annual Quality Review often required on university template)
- Certification issues
- Poaching of staff
- Huge, complex organisations – difficult communications
- Insecure funding
- Independent bids often not supported (indirectly funded college)
- Heavily bureaucratic with intrusive administration
- Unilateral change of University mission

Security of funding was high on the list of concerns for indirectly-funded colleges, who expressed their worry and frustration at the fragile arrangements which constitute their Memoranda or contracts with their partner HEIs. Most arrangements were agreed and signed for the duration of one academic year, giving little opportunity for colleges to plan strategically and with confidence. With the cap on Additional Student Numbers (ASNs), and the uncertainty of the extent to which HEIs may have no option but to reduce the amount of current business undertaken with colleges, there is a general worry that real losses will be incurred in the near future. Indirectly-funded colleges confirmed this to be a critical issue when factored together with the reduction in the Targeted Allowance for Foundation Degrees and the significant losses of LSC funding including the Adult Responsive Budget. Most institutions confirmed that the loss
of LSC funding would result, in some cases, in significant redundancies of staff. In institutions where the majority, if not all staff, taught both HE & FE provision, staff losses would inevitably impact on the delivery of higher education subjects.

4.2 If indirectly funded, what % of income do you receive from your awarding body?

The majority of institutions with indirect funding arrangements reported that they received between 70% & 80% income. One institution received only 50% income from one of its awarding body partners and at the other extreme, one large institution with only one partner received 90% income.

Most institutions confirmed that their own college then top sliced this income by between 5% & 15% as part of a contribution to core costs, resulting in HE programmes receiving between 65% to 70% of the HEFCE unit of funding to deliver programmes.

4.3 In what way does your awarding body partner support staff teaching higher education programmes?

Without exception, all institutions confirmed that their awarding body partner/s provided staff development opportunities. Whilst these arrangements varied in amount and content, colleges confirmed they received good access to continuing professional development opportunities, both within the university and externally. Opportunities included ranged from attendance at Annual Partnership Conference and on-going Quality Assurance training, to specific Academic Infrastructure training in preparation for IQER. In some colleges, staff benefitted from reduced fees for both Master and Doctorate studies. In addition, where subject specific links were strong, staff in colleges were able to develop fruitful relationships with awarding body “link tutors” strengthening approaches to curriculum design and development and personal scholarship activities.

Staff development was often focused on staff new to teaching higher education programmes. A number of institutions said that staff had direct access to HEI Learning Resource Centre and IT resources including Web portal.

However, a significant number also reported that due to the geographical locations of both FEC & HEI, staff encountered some difficulties in taking up these opportunities. In many cases, the CPD on offer was driven by the needs of University staff, rather than tailored to the development of staff in partner colleges.

Summary of key points.

- Majority of colleges held no more than 3 partnership at one time
- All confirmed that relationships were a combination of historical developments, local/regional strategic positioning, reputation and subject relevance
- The majority of institutions with indirect funding arrangements confirmed they received between 70% & 80% income.
• Some colleges “top sliced” up to 15% of income before distribution to subject areas
• All institutions confirmed that their awarding body partner/s provided staff development opportunities.
• However, more could be done to share good practice and support between colleges and HEIs – there are some good examples of mutual CPD but in many cases college staff are able to capitalise on working with their validating partner

5. The Student perspective

This section of the telephone discussion looked at why students choose to study HE in FECs. We asked our interviewees to give us their perspective on the benefits that students derive from this setting, as well as how colleges measure student satisfaction. We also asked how their colleges judged teaching quality.

5.1 Why students study HE at an FEC

Respondents were asked to consider why their students chose to study HE at their particular college. There was unanimity across all respondents: most cited one or more of the following:

• it was local - students need/want/have to stay local due to family/work commitments
• it was familiar to them with safe surroundings and environment; many have studied before in FE and are familiar with the College premises, ways of working and teaching staff
• confidence in the strong and sympathetic support for adult learners; many students choose to study in an FEC because of high levels of support with lower student to staff ratios (smaller group sizes)
• it had the specialist subject they wanted e.g. Marine Engineering, Land Based/Environment
• lower entry requirements
• vocational subjects not available at university i.e. a specialist vocational focus
• good value for money - fee levels had a strong influence on their student market
• no top up fees - cheaper than a University even if fees increase this year
• convenience / near to home
• they received a degree from a good university
• had good progression routes into it – a sense of continuity through internal progression opportunities
• flexibility of delivery modes i.e.: WBL/PT and Blended Learning
• reputation of college was high
• less intimidating than a University

Specialist college respondents were keen to emphasise that their colleges recruit nationally and often offer a niche in the market – one college was the first choice of 95% of its applicants.
One GFC ran its own survey of why students enrolled and discovered that 30% said they have studied at the college previously, 30% wanted to study locally and 27% regarded it as having a good reputation.

A number of older students are following bespoke courses designed for the Police or NHS. In these instances the college is meeting local labour demand and also giving the students a specific skill that is valued in their particular professions - and which thus enhances their future employability.

It should be noted that respondents did not specify a difference between prescribed and NPHE.

5.2 Do students benefit from studying HE in FE? How?

Respondents were asked whether they thought students benefitted from studying HE in a FEC as opposed to an HEI, and if so, in what way. As in the previous section, there is a remarkable degree of agreement amongst the respondents as to the benefits students derive from studying their HE in FECs:

The general opinion of most institutions confirms that FE provides a more supportive environment appropriate to most students. Many HE in FE students are identified as having a widening participation profile, coming from non-traditional backgrounds and are more likely to be intimidated by the traditional model of higher education delivery employed within UK universities. This was thought to be particularly so in the case of learners who may lack confidence to begin with and those who have progressed from FE courses, where continuity and transition to HE was easier as a result of previous experiences. Many students lack self esteem and confidence initially and need to be supported in ways that would not be possible in the university system.

Environment and ethos plays a huge part in inducting and retaining learners. FE facilities, whether differentiated or shared, are often small enough to ensure that learners are not intimidated and adequate for successful delivery of provision.

Foundation Degrees, confirmed earlier as the dominant HE award in HE in FE, provide time for adults to acclimatise to higher level study. Many adults study part time, managing a work/life balance including a range of individual domestic and work based responsibilities. Generally, FECs provide responsive programmes of day/evening time study appropriate to learner and employer requirements.

Some key benefits provided in FE institutions:

- Personalised learning patterns
- Strong additional learning support/mentoring related to need
- Small group sizes with closer staff contact and more personal relationships with staff
- Qualified teaching staff, often offering 1:1 tutorials
- Wide range of teaching & learning methods aligned with the specialist or generalist nature of the programme
- Extensive class contact (teaching hours – up to 18 hrs per wk)
Awareness of individual need with differentiated teaching
Cost – some institutions confirmed value for money was a key difference for students between college and university study

In addition one respondent reported faster feedback on assignments and for the Specialist colleges there were better specialist materials and equipment and vocational expertise.

5.3 Teaching differences FE and HE?

Respondents were asked whether they thought there was a difference in the teaching delivered in an FEC compared to an HEI and in what way this differed.

All institutions, with the exception of two, agreed that there were significant differences in the nature of teaching delivered in colleges. These two institutions confirmed they made little or no concession to HE in FE learners, making fewer assumptions about their capabilities or readiness for a different style of learning.

Most institutions, however, confirmed that the very nature of the FE environment appeals to students who require smaller, more intimate surroundings. The Fd, centred on work based learning and the development of applied skills requires different teaching styles compared to those of a traditional academic degree. There is greater emphasis on confirming learning is taking place through the establishment of underpinning knowledge and practical activities for skills development

Key areas include:

- Awareness of individual need/differentiation
- Closer monitoring (at risk students)
- Open door tutor practice
- Focus on learning in all sessions
- Extensive class contact (teaching hours – up to 18 hrs per wk) and more pastoral care
- Group size is usually 12 – 20, so significantly less than in an HEI
- Quality of teaching is better – staff have to be qualified and are often more motivational in their style as a result of being trained and being used to delivering FE
- Staff are professionally current
- Several colleges noted that external examiners had said that the quality of their resources and equipment was often better than that found in HEIs – it was often at industry standard, particularly if it had been developed and was shared with employers.

Comfort of learning in a familiar place is tempered by a determination on the part of tutors to foster independent learning skills, so that students can then go on to University and undertake Honours years successfully. Some colleges
put a big focus on teaching independent learning skills, and do so from last term of Level 3. Critical thinking is also embedded by some FECs.

5.4 Student satisfaction

Respondents were asked how satisfied their students were with the HE teaching in the college and how they benchmarked this against other colleges or HEIs.

All colleges have internal student satisfaction surveys and HE students take part in these; 90% of the colleges take part in the National Student Satisfaction survey. However 42% of colleges that used the NSS survey did not reach the minimum number of students required. Half the colleges confirmed some form of difficulty in engaging with the NSS, regardless of funding source, with numbers too small to be of any value in external benchmarking exercise. One college reported that the partner HEI had incorporated the college’s responses into their own. Many respondents reported difficulty in getting their students to complete the NSS survey and there was a feeling that students are becoming ‘over-surveyed’. There were reports that the mechanism for selecting students to take part was confusing, especially where students were on Fds.

In the medium to small colleges the NSS survey was not felt to be very useful and they preferred their internal systems. Some colleges also take part in the QDP survey, and some have asked QDP to split out their FE and HE results. A few colleges referred to the Framework for Excellence which governs the way they assess quality and satisfaction.

All colleges have their own surveys which may be common to all students or specifically designed for their HE cohort; a few colleges that run their own college-based surveys use the same questions as in the NSS survey (particularly when they know that their numbers will not enable them to take part in the NSS survey).

All colleges appear to carry out some form of benchmarking exercise, whether internally with other HE courses or FE programmes, or externally with similar colleges (particularly specialist colleges) or against local competitor providers. In one college there is benchmarking with the partner HEI. One large MEG institution confirmed they benchmarked against other MEG colleges. Another college is introducing HE KPIs.

From the outcomes of the various surveys that colleges carry out, respondents reported that satisfaction is high. Where colleges take part in the NSS survey more than half of those interviewed considered that they did well and also compare well with nearby HEIs. All specialist colleges tend to do well in the NSS survey. One specialist institution confirmed (by NSS survey) that their teaching was appreciated the most out of all the colleges in the HEI consortium.

Colleges found less satisfaction amongst their HE students over having to study with 14 – 19 year olds. Many L4 students would prefer to have separate facilities and a number of respondents acknowledged that a separate social
area for HE students, if not a discrete teaching block, would be welcomed by most such learners. Some respondents also reported that student access to their partners’ HEI facilities and resources was limited, either by location or time, especially for part-time students.

5.6 Peer Review or Teaching Observation

Respondents were asked whether their college practiced peer review of teaching as opposed to teaching observation and asked to describe any models they used.

Without exception, all colleges carry out some form of teaching observation related to their quality monitoring processes. In many cases the teaching observation was standard across the college using an FE or OFSTED model. There was some difference of opinion as to whether the OFSTED model was suitable for HE programmes – 16 respondents were clear that all teaching should be observed with a focus on teaching and evidence of learning and said that the OFSTED model works well. Others were less comfortable with the OFSTED approach and were developing teaching observation that was more appropriate for HE. However, they were clear that part of the unique selling point of HE in FE was the quality of teaching within the sector. Many colleges graded the lesson observations on the OFSTED criteria.

More than half the colleges undertake peer review and many are piloting or looking at developing it for their HE. Those using peer review use it alongside teaching observation. The colleges that have peer review processes reported that it is popular with staff and worked well for HE. A variety of models of peer review exist including the following:

- internal peer review within HE subjects
- internal peer review within HE programmes
- peer review with HEI teachers paired with the university
- peer review across partner colleges
- peer review with other regional colleges as part of the FE Peer Review Group

All institutions confirmed that the peer review method facilitated a developmental approach to teaching and learning which was aligned, where appropriate, with the college’s graded lesson observation process. For specialist courses visiting professional staff acted as moderators.

Many colleges are developing a hybrid approach; there seems to be a move towards the evolution of a model that combines the best of both worlds. It was felt that teaching observation alone was not necessarily appropriate for HE; one institution confirmed they employed a joint peer review and lesson observation system which staff were required to undertake once year. Observation is overseen by Vice Principal-Curriculum & Quality with Director of Higher Education and staff peer reviewer. In addition a HE Teaching & Learning Champion provided support for staff identified as having areas for improvement. They further confirmed that peer review was undertaken informally throughout the academic year.
Without exception, teaching observation and peer review are linked to performance review and appraisal. Most institutions confirmed that outcomes of the processes included:

- Evaluations
- Outcomes and action plans
- Appraisal
- Central Staff development

Summary of key points

- Students were seen to be active and positive in choosing to study HE in an FE college
- All interviewees said that students benefit from studying HE in FE
- Some colleges clearly have specialist provision and therefore have a national rather than local catchment area
- Many colleges tried to use the NSS survey but did not reach the minimum number of students required - some said the HEI had incorporated the college responses into their own; generally the NSS survey was not felt to be very useful to colleges and they preferred their internal systems
- All colleges have internal student satisfaction surveys and HE students take part in these; there is internal benchmarking across the college
- Many colleges have organised progression opportunities for students moving internally; generally though internal progression is relatively low – 20-30%; colleges saw that this was an area they could work on – but also expressed concerns about numbers
- With respect to lesson observation – all colleges have a system – there were reports by some colleges that the OFSTED inspection does not work well for HE – it is too prescriptive and they were looking at a more flexible model, including peer review; others were adamant that all teaching is observed in the same way and there should be no difference between HE and FE teaching observation
- Half of the colleges use or are introducing peer review; some colleges peer review with their university partners; volume of activity is not linked to monitoring quality as all colleges undergo some form of quality review
- FE Colleges are primarily and overwhelmingly about teaching. The Student Survey shows how important students consider good teaching, staff approachability, understanding and knowledge about their subject. Colleges could do much more to market this aspect of their HE in FE work.

6. Student Support

This section of the interviews looks at advice and guidance and progression, both into and out of HE programmes.

6.1 Access to impartial IAG

Respondents were asked what information, advice and guidance their college provides to students who wish to progress to HE.
All colleges offer IAG – this can be formal HE progression weeks, taster days, HE open days or, on a more personal level, access to drop-in advice sessions and booked guidance interviews with qualified staff. These included:

- HE Progression Co-ordinator
- Divisional Personal Advisors
- Internal Progression Liaison Officers
- Careers Tutors
- Course leaders

All colleges commented that subject tutors were more likely to be the first port of call for careers advice – they were accessible and most of those teaching vocational courses were still industry-active and thus up-to-date in their knowledge of career options within their sector. 50% colleges reported they had good links to their local LLNs and Aimhigher networks, which provided additional sources of advice.

A wide range of activities were on offer e.g.:

- one institution confirmed it employed 4 Aimhigher Organisers to facilitate targeted activities to raise participation in HE amongst a specific cohort of non-traditional applicants. In addition, the institution confirmed they delivered Lifelong Learning Network funded HE and related IAG activities including group work and one to one guidance.

- one institution confirmed it received £200,000 Aim Higher Funding to provide Level 3 promotional workshops for HE progression.

- one institution confirmed it produced School Action Plan for Progression from Level 3

- one institution invited local schools in, ran summer schools and had parents’ evenings for potential students

The main distinguishing feature amongst the colleges was the ease with which an employed student would be able to access college-based IAG. In a third of cases, the IAG staff only worked from 09.00 – 17.00, so unless the student took time off work, their access to specialist guidance would be limited to the days when they attended college. Alternatively, they could book an evening appointment or use the college’s on-line guidance system, but each of these was less than equal to a 1:1 discussion with an impartial guidance officer. Other colleges offered ‘all-hours’ systems that enable students to access a range of support services.

### 6.2 Progression routes

Respondents were asked whether they had clear progression routes for students to move from FE to HE courses, including NPHE courses.

All colleges reported that they do have clear progression routes for their students. Two main points emerged.
Firstly, where colleges were partners in their local LLN (or LLNs) this meant that a number of Progression Accords had been developed to Fds or Honours courses. This meant that students did not have to apply through UCAS.

Secondly, notwithstanding this, the greatest threat to progression from Level 3 to Level 4 provision in most cases was that of an increased awareness of course viability. This was a direct result of reduced or standstill funding from HEFCE: in order to be able to survive, most colleges reported that they would no longer run courses which attracted only small numbers of students year-on-year. The days of Fd courses with only 5 or 6 students appear to be over.

Currently, most colleges offer progression from Level 3 to Level 4 in the same subject. Some Level 4 subjects did not have a Level 3 base (some of the specialist Music or Social Care courses). Others noted one or two subject gaps but in the main colleges have tried to establish ready-made progression routes through their own provision. Whilst colleges generally had comprehensive coverage of progression opportunities, there was evidence of occasional difficulties in creating good progression routes.

One small college confirmed that, due to the size of its HE provision, it was difficult to achieve full progression routes in all disciplines.

A specialist art institution confirmed it was restricted by its validating partner in developing higher education programmes in multi-media subject areas. As a result, Level 3 students, wishing to pursue a career in multi-media, were unable to continue with their studies at the college.

One institution confirmed difficulties in providing appropriate higher level opportunities from HNC Construction.

One college reported that the Diplomas had given good new progression routes from schools and they had established a progression route through from age 14-21.

NPHE was seen as being particularly at risk as it had no clear funding priority from LSC or its successor organisations. It appeared to be wholly reliant on employer or student funding.

6.3 Internal progression

Respondents were asked to assess the percentage of their students that progressed from their FE to their HE programmes.

This varied tremendously. Internal progression rates are very much dependent on the types of course available - where there is specialist, niche provision internal progression can be as great as 80% -100%. Where provision is less specialist it may be as low as 5-10%

In some particular subjects such as Counselling or Podiatry there was an almost uniform 100% progression within all colleges. This is not surprising, as the
colleges are often the only provider of relevant Level 3 and Level 4 provision in these subjects. Apart from these examples, all colleges noted that in some subject areas, the figures were notably higher than others (e.g. performing arts) and that it was difficult to provide a meaningful average figure for their institution.

Many colleges were uncertain about this figure but most respondents could make an educated guess or knew for certain. Average figures varied from 60% pull through to their own HE down to 4.5 %, with most colleges suggesting that 20% may be a reasonable figure. There was no difference between directly, indirectly or mixed funded institutions. Some colleges with low internal progression are reviewing this to improve the rates where possible. Several colleges did not evaluate or measure internal progression and indicated that it was an area they should be looking at.

Only in one instance could a correlation be found between volume of HE undertaken, nearness of other providers and pull-through to the college’s own HE. In all others, there appeared to be no obvious reason for a particularly high or low rate of internal progression. One respondent noted that most of their students did not in fact progress into HE but went straight into employment.

The point was often made that many of the colleges’ A- Level students chose to study elsewhere, as did those preferring full-time level 4 provision. One college noted that whilst only just under 6% of its students continued to Level 4 within the college, 58% went on to other HE in nearby HEIs. Another respondent noted that of those students progressing to HE 30% of its students progressed internally while 70% went elsewhere.

Of interest was the types of programmes that students were progressing from internally – several respondents reported that they did not get A-level students progressing internally but that all their internal progressions were from Access or vocational courses, such as BTEC National diplomas.

Respondents were also asked to consider progression from their HE courses; many colleges offer top up degrees which ensures a progression route through from their level 3 to Honours. There were clear articulation arrangements with their partner or franchising HEIs.

6.4 Progression differences

Respondents were asked whether there was an age, gender of ethnicity difference related to progression and whether they had monitored or analysed this.

Colleges do monitor their progression data but not as much as they should; several colleges said they would be looking at this more closely; most data is at an aggregated level and is often unreliable and they want to look more closely at course level.

Virtually all colleges reported that the HE community reflected that found at FE level. Some noted some gender stereotyping on, e.g., Beauty or Construction courses but noted that they were aware of this and trying to counter such
trends. One institution confirmed it has 3 times more ethnic students within the college than in the city, while another reported only 1% ethnic minority. Many colleges reported strong 19+ and Adult progression.

6.5 Opportunity differences

Respondents were asked to reflect whether there was a difference in progression routes for full and part time students and if so, why.

Some respondents reported that there were equal opportunities for FT and PT progression while others admitted that there were more progression opportunities for FT over PT.

One respondent noted that FECs have to get separate HEI validation for the mode of delivery as well as the actual subject qualification, and that sometimes their partner HEIs were reluctant to make a subject available in both full-time and part-time modes.

Several made the point referred to above, namely that financial motives were also in play in terms of course viability – whilst ideally all options would be available, if the course wasn’t viable it simply would not run. Unless a minimum number of students could be guaranteed, year-on-year, the college would not offer the course in both full and part-time modes.

Employers and professional bodies also have preferences and stipulations.

Summary of key points

- All colleges offer IAG – this can be formal HE weeks, tasters, course leader interviews or may simply be careers advisers in the college
- All colleges have developed progression pathways
- Internal progression is very much dependent on the types of course; where there is specialist, niche provision progression can be as much as 80% internal; where provision is much less specialist internal progression may be 8-10%
- Vocational progression routes internally are much more common – most students progress from BTEC or Access programmes, very few from A-level
- Colleges do monitor their progression data but not as much as they should; several colleges said they would be looking at this more closely. Most data is at an aggregated level rather than at course level.

7. Costs of HE in FE

This section of the interviews focused on how HE in FE is funded. With the exception of four medium-sized colleges which operate a differentiated funding system, all our respondents confirmed that HE is funded according to the FE model. A further three large colleges are considering a revised funding model.

Virtually all colleges take a top slice of HE funding for their central services. This is usually about 40%.
Virtually all colleges devolve the HE budget to faculties/departments/schools unless the income is very small, in which case it goes into the main college income stream. Most colleges specifically relate devolved funding to targets and provision and what they are contracted to deliver.

HE is perceived to offer good value. All colleges claim that their HE income covers the cost of delivery of the HE course. Most say that their HE courses generate income and a surplus for the college, particularly if recruitment is on target and it is possible to grow critical mass. Colleges regard HE funding as representing 1.5% more income per HE head than FE head.

The funding enables a higher standard of equipment to be made available within the subject centre as, realistically, FE students within the same department are not refused access to HE resources. The HE curriculum, equipment and resources influence the L2 and L3 curriculum, ensuring that FE students are taught current approaches and techniques.

Employer engagement in many colleges is organised through a central team or department rather than the curriculum team or subject specialists. Most colleges have a Business Development Team which coordinates this aspect of the college’s work, although some also have an HE Development Manager role. The funding of employer engagement is almost always embedded in the delivery budget. Lifelong Learning Networks also provide a small amount of funding in some cases in order to promote specific projects linked to Progression Accords.

Working with employers and assessment in the workplace is part of a lecturer’s contact time in all cases. Relatively few colleges use employers for assessment – where this happens, it is often in subjects such as Counselling or Osteopathy where there is confidentiality between a student and patient and rarely in more mainstream subject areas. That said, a small number of colleges use employers to assess but not grade.

Finally, directly-funded respondents were asked how they apportioned Widening Participation funds. In most cases, colleges could identify specific posts which were funded through this means. Most were related to Learning Support: occasionally the money funded additional hours that had been built in to curriculum delivery. In half a dozen cases, specific resources had been purchased and/or specific students had been targeted for additional learning support.

**Summary of key points**

- HE in FE is good value. Tuition is delivered by qualified teachers at a lower unit cost than is the case in HEIs
- HE and FE share curriculum resources to the benefit of both sets of students. These are often to industry standard, particularly where the college is working closely with a national employer.
- Widening participation funding can be tracked to point of delivery. Whilst the funding is usually translated into specific posts, these have a remit which is directly related to the purpose of the funding.
8. External issues and Tipping points

This section was largely a free discussion area, enabling college representatives to set out the threats and opportunities that they perceived to be facing them in Spring 2010. The questions covered the following broad topics:

8.1 How will FECs take a larger role in delivering HE in line with Government expansion targets and links to the Skills Agenda?

There was a general consensus that stability of funding was a key driver in delivering government expectations with regards to higher-level skills. In the absence of Additional Student Numbers, little progress would be made. However, one indirectly-funded college had a target that each programme area would offer at least one HE course, and was confident that it could still achieve this, given what it knew of local economic conditions.

Many indirectly-funded institutions confirmed a reluctance on the part of their validating HEs to fully-embrace the development of short-cycle modular options due to resource costs. Many HEIs are becoming increasingly reluctant to invest the necessary resources in validating groups of standalone modules for colleges. (It costs them the same to do this as it would do to validate a full award but full costs cannot justifiably be passed on to colleges.) This, by implication will reduce the availability of appropriate modular offers to meet employers’ demands for flexible, responsive provision. Proposals to overcome these challenges include:

- Increased commercial income through full cost-recovery modules (e.g., increase NPHE)
- Greater involvement with the co-funding process
- Provide more niche provision
- Continue to develop Level 4 Apprenticeships
- Obtain FDAP in order to benefit from greater freedom to offer short-cycle provision.

8.2 What do you think about the proposed expansion in short cycle degrees? How will your college take this further?

The majority of institutions were in favour, in principle, with regard to these potential developments. Directly-funded FECs in particular understood the need to deliver three-year courses in less time, but were mindful of the quality implications surrounding this decision. They highlighted a range of concerns:

- Quality assurance implications re:validation and assessment
- A sense that this was cramming, not learning
- Reluctance of HEIs to expand provision
• Increased need from students for extensive academic support.

A number of institutions reported that they were already involved in pilot studies with their validating HEIs. All institutions said that the development of 2-year degree programmes in colleges will only happen with the agreement of their validating HEIs, but benefits could include reducing the level of debt faced by students and lower delivery costs for the college. Two specialist Art colleges suggested that 2-year awards would be an advantage to the Creative Arts.

Most students following Fds were anxious to complete as soon as possible – they were often pursuing education alongside work and family lives and there was an element of wanting to get their studies over and done within the shortest possible time.

In the main, college staff concluded that as they did not have the final say over degree developments, it was very much a case of “wait and see”, whilst validating HEIs developed their approach to such strategic questions.

Opportunities exist to review current three-year structures to reduce to two-year delivery. However, about a third of all interviewees said that non-traditional students might find the demands of such intensive provision too great and would need extensive additional support. All were in agreement that any such plans needed to target

• Work-based learning – particularly delivery in the workplace
• On-line learning
• Blended learning
• Work with larger employers, rather than SMEs

8.3 Do you think the Government could do more to promote HE in FE or should this remain with other organisations such as the HE Academy, QAA, AoC, MEG, HEFCE or the college itself?

All institutions considered that much more could be done by Government. The lack of recognition given to the work of FECs in the recently-published “Higher Ambitions” was felt to be symptomatic of a view which equated HE with HEIs. Most respondents made the point that HE in FE is about higher skills, not the form of higher education traditionally associated with red-brick HEIs.

About a third of all respondents said that the lack of direct access to the HEFCE Strategic Development Fund was a significant limiting factor in their ability to design and develop new provision. If this was reviewed in favour of FECs, it would be a genuine acknowledgment of the strategic role FE colleges play in the delivery of HE.

All institutions said the Government could do more to recognise the HE untaken in FE but that this would not be forthcoming whilst franchising was a preferred funding route. Increased direct funding for FECs, coupled with the freedom to deliver modules of qualifications, was seen as the best way of
meeting employer demand and thus also Government targets for raising the skills of those already in the workplace.

8.4 **Do you think that HE is vulnerable to budget cuts proposed by the Government? What will be the impact on your college of such cuts?**

All respondents suggested that more funding reductions will inevitably impact on HE. The message of “More with Less” had become established fairly rapidly as the extent of the cuts in public funding became obvious. The continuation of the policy to cap student numbers will halt any new developments in HE delivery although many colleges said that they would be implementing rigorous reviews to renew and refresh their curriculum offer. This would result in a purposeful drive to reduce non-viable programmes: courses which year-on-year failed to recruit above a minimum level (probably 15 students) would not be continued. Sector-led priority provision would become more important – but only if numbers were sustainable.

Further cuts, coupled with the impact of LSC funding losses, might force colleges to make redundancies. Given that most staff teach both HE and FE, this would in turn affect their ability to maintain both their FE and HE course offers. The combined impact on the ability to deliver FE and HE could lead to the closure of some small colleges.

Asked how they thought their HE partners would respond to Government cuts, most college representatives felt that they would either take a moral stance and say that they were committed to widening participation and collaborative working, or they would take a hard-nosed commercial approach and seek to close down franchise agreements. If HEIs took the latter route, most indirectly-funded FECs would be in difficulty. An alternative to cutting numbers was to cut the unit of resource available from the HEI to the FEC, and some respondents were expecting their partners to propose this as an interim way forward in difficult times.

Concern was expressed that if numbers were incrementally cut over the next few years, not only would this have an impact on college staffing levels and the number of courses that could be run, it would also have a significant effect on the widening participation and skills agenda. Colleges would struggle to keep appropriate frameworks in place for the development and delivery of higher level courses. It was also likely that HEIs would seek to reduce partnerships which could now be described as non-strategic, such as long-distance relationships which had no obvious impact on either local economy.

8.5 **In what way will your college be able to make a significant contribution to the regional-strategic development of HE in your area?**

Most colleges said that LLNs and SSCs were their main links into regional planning. Whilst there were examples of collaborative working with the RDAs, most respondents felt that these organisations were more distant in terms of their impact on HE in FE. Where there was contact, it was largely over the development of the NINJ agenda in area such as alternative energy supplies.
8.6 **In a risk analysis of your HE provision, what are the main factors/challenges or barriers to the successful maintenance and further development of new programmes?**

All respondents agreed that the following represented the greatest risk:

- Extended cap on funding and the resultant impact on retention and development of HE in FE staff
- Losing staff through redundancy
- Ageing college workforce – loss of experienced staff could lead to knowledge gaps in curriculum teams
- Quality called into question through poor QAA/IQER performance
- Failure to recruit
- Failure to recruit good students and consequent loss of the college “brand” locally
- Over-recruitment
- Maintaining relationships with HEIs
- Lack of direct funding for short modular courses
- Lack of employer involvement as the recession impacts on their desire and ability to engage in education and training

Despite this, most colleges were confident in looking to develop different types of HE to replace courses which were becoming non-viable due to small numbers of students – more part-time, more employer-facing work, more full-cost recovery work in order to reduce dependence on HEFCE and ensure a healthy range of provision.

**Summary of key points**

- Most respondents working in indirectly-funded colleges were aware that they were in a potentially difficult position that was ultimately determined by the clarity of their contract with their HEI. Many had already been notified of reductions in student numbers at relatively short notice
- Key areas of concern were the ability to recruit and retain staff and to maintain the quality of their HE offering
- Most had clear ideas about how to open up alternative sources of HE funding but were aware that the impact of the recession would affect these sources too
- Directly-funded colleges were particularly hamstrung – despite having good reputations with local employers they were unable to offer the publicly-
funded modules of HE that employers would value in difficult times and may choose to pay for in future once the recession had eased.

9. Conclusions

- Higher Education (FHEQ levels 4,5 and 6) delivered in FEC is seen by Government as strategically important. The sector has a long tradition of delivering employer responsive and vocationally focused HE
- FECs deliver high quality provision which is industrially relevant and provides a distinctive and highly-valued curriculum offer for students and employers
- HE in FE responds well to the Government’s skills agenda and wishes to continue to be able to do so
- The opportunity for colleges to provide flexibly delivered HE which is module-based within a credit framework will be vital to their ability to respond to changing market and employer needs
- FECs should continue to build on their developing HE Strategies, to ensure that they have robust and well developed structures to develop, manage, review and risk assess their higher education provision
- Higher education in FECs is perceived by students to be of high quality and provides students, often without a family history of HE participation, with a first choice alternative to university entrance
- FECs should continue to provide high-quality teaching that is accessible to students through lower fees, but which responds to employer and student needs, and focuses on career development and employability
- Colleges should consider introducing a differentiated programme of staff development related specifically to the needs of their higher education provision
- Colleges should develop more strategic approaches to establish and support a culture of scholarly activity which ensures currency of curriculum and high quality delivery of their higher education
10. College Provision – a snap shot

The telephone interviews were undertaken with 66 colleges, half of which belong to the Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG). MEG is a membership organisation composed of 32 colleges, each with a minimum of 500FTE of HE students. A list of MEG colleges is attached as Annex 3. The 32 colleges offer the following provision:

Looked at in more detail, this covers the following sectors:
11. Conclusions

This pattern of provision is broadly consistent with that reported in Section 1 for the Sector as a whole. The balance between final Honours and “sub-degree” provision is striking, although it is the latter category which has seen the most growth. As might be expected, Post Graduate work does not figure significantly.

The vast majority of the work done by MEG members lies in vocational higher education directly related to skills needs. Response to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and SIVs (Strategically Important and Vulnerable subjects) is less marked.

The specialised nature of some HE in FE provision is highlighted by the large numbers of Art and Design students included. In some cases, MEG Colleges are major regional and national providers in this field, having a history going back many years.

Annex 1 – List of colleges taking part in the telephone interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barnet</th>
<th>Leeds City College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basingstoke</td>
<td>Leeds College of Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Metropolitan</td>
<td>Lewisham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn</td>
<td>Loughborough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackpool &amp; the Fylde</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bournemouth &amp; Poole</td>
<td>Mid Cheshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford</td>
<td>Myerscough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calderdale</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>Nescot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHENEL</td>
<td>New College Durham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chichester</td>
<td>New College Nottingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City &amp; Islington</td>
<td>Northbrook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City College Norwich</td>
<td>North West Kent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Bristol</td>
<td>Runshaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colchester Institute</td>
<td>Sparsholt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland College A &amp; D</td>
<td>Solihull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craven</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croydon</td>
<td>South Essex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derby</td>
<td>South Tyneside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing Hammersmith &amp; West London</td>
<td>Southport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farnborough</td>
<td>St Helens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gateshead</td>
<td>Stockport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire</td>
<td>Sunderland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimsby</td>
<td>Sussex Downs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>Tresham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hadlow</td>
<td>Tyne Metropolitan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hartpury</td>
<td>Warwickshire</td>
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<td>Havering</td>
<td>West Notts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highbury</td>
<td>Weston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hull</td>
<td>Westminster Kingsway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendal</td>
<td>Wigan &amp; Leigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingston Maurward</td>
<td>Worcester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster &amp; Morecombe</td>
<td>York</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Annex 2 – Telephone questionnaire used in Strategic options, Operational challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue/Line of Enquiry</th>
<th>Response/Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Context:</strong> Use HE Strategy to complete before interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Is HE provision Directly/Indirectly/multi member ‘partnership’ HEFCE funded, or LSC (NPHE) funded, or a combination of all?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 What percentage of the college’s work is HE? (Use headcount not FTE; include prescribed and NPHE) Has this increased/decreased or remained about the same over the last 5 years?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 How many HE courses are currently run? How many of these courses are non-prescribed HE? (LSC funded)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 What is your curriculum profile? ie: NVQs/HNs/BAs/MAs Confirm total number in each category</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 How many students study on HEFCE funded programmes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 What percentage are Full Time – Part Time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Staff and Staff Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Approximately what percentage of your staff teach • only HE programmes • a mix of HE and FE courses?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 What in percentage terms is the split between full-time and part-time staff on the HE programmes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Do you give remission and/or support for scholarly activity/research by your HE teachers, including NPHE staff? If so, how much?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>How are these activities funded – do you have a differentiated HE in FE teaching and learning fund/budget allocation which support remission?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>What do you consider to be the most important aspect of scholarly activity in your college? e.g. professional updating; attendance at conferences and seminars; original research; writing articles and peer reviewed papers; developing teaching skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>How do you monitor the impact of scholarly activity on a) the students b) the as a whole?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>What is the value-added a) your staff b) the college gains through teaching HE programmes? Does the college have a different costing model for its FE and HE teaching?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Structures and Quality Management

| 3.1 | How is your college organised in terms of the management of HE? |
| 3.2 | Do you have a single HE department/faculty/centre or are HE courses located alongside FE provision in the same curriculum areas? |
| 3.3 | Does the college have clearly designated roles and responsibilities at all levels, for the management of HE provision? Is there a member of the Senior Management team whose prime responsibility is for HE in the College? |
| 3.4 | Are all your HE courses managed in the same way, or are the non-prescribed HE programmes managed by the subject department? |
| 3.5 | Do you think that HE should be managed separately or should the programmes be integrated into the mainstream of college activities? |
3.6 Does the college have a clear committee structure that is understood by all staff and is this differentiated for the consideration of HE matters? If so, how well is this understood by staff at all levels?

3.7 Do you have specific administrative support for your HE courses i.e. someone who understands the data requirements for HEFCE?

3.8 Are there clear roles and responsibilities for all those involved in teaching and delivery of the HE programmes in the College?

3.9 How is liaison with HE partners managed?

3.10 What role does the Quality unit play in effectively managing and assuring the security of HE academic standards? To what extent have HE processes been implemented?

3.11 If indirectly funded, to what extent do you implement the QA systems of your validating partner and how is this managed, monitored and maintained?

3.12 Where in the management of college strategic priorities does HE reside?

4. **HEI partnerships**

4.1 How many HEIs do you currently work with? Are you part of a multi-membership partnership?

4.2 How did you come to be working with these HEIs? E.g. subject relevance; progression routes; history of working with a particular organisation; strategic development of HE in the region

4.3 What are the main benefits of working with an HEI? What are the main drawbacks?

4.4 If you are indirectly funded, what percentage of income does the college receive? What do you receive in return?

4.5 Does your HEI support the staff
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5.</th>
<th><strong>Student Perspective</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Why did your students choose to study HE at your college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Do you think the students benefit from studying HE in an FEC as opposed to an HEI? If so, in what way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Do you think there is a difference in the teaching delivered in an FEC compared to an HEI? If so, in what way and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>How satisfied are your students with the HE teaching in the college? Do you benchmark this against other colleges/HEIs using the NSS? Do you use any other benchmark comparisons (internal or external)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Does the college practice Peer Review of teaching, as opposed to teaching observation? Please describe the model you use and how this promotes quality improvement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6.</th>
<th><strong>Progression</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>What IAG does your college provide to students who wish to progress to HE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Are there clear progression routes in your college for students to move from your FE to your HE programmes, including NPHE professional courses?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Approximately what percentage of your students progress to HE in your college compared to HE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Is there an age, gender or ethnicity difference related to progression? Have you monitored/analysed this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Is there a difference in progression routes and/or opportunities for full and part-time students? If so, why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td><strong>HE Funding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Does the college cost the delivery of HE separately from FE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Do you think the HE work generates more or less income in relation to the cost of the delivery and associated activities (e.g. facilities, staffing, validation, quality assurance, data processing, administration etc) than FE and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Would you say that it is good value to deliver HE programmes? If not, why not? What are the opportunity costs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>How is employer engagement funded?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>If directly funded, how do you apportion HEFCE WP allocations in support of delivery and retention of students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8.</th>
<th><strong>Threats and Opportunities</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>How will FECs take a larger role in delivering HE, in line with the Government expansion targets and link to the Skills Agenda?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>What do you think about the proposed expansion in short cycle degrees? How will your college take this further?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Do you think the Government could do more to promote HE in FE or should this be the role of other organisations such as HEFCE, QAA, HEA, AoC, MEG etc or the College itself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>In what way will your college be able to make a significant contribution to the regional/strategic development of HE in your area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Do you think that HE in FE is vulnerable to budget cuts proposed by Government? What will be the impact on your college of such cuts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>How do you think your HE partners will respond to government cuts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>Is HE in FE a high priority for your College? Do you think the number of competing initiatives in FECs is likely to affect your college’s ability to deliver HE in FE? What will be your College’s main priority in the next 2 years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>In a risk analysis of your HE provision, what are the main factors/challenges or barriers to the successful maintenance and further development of new programmes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Annex 3 – List of Mixed Economy Group of colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Name</th>
<th>Partner College Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blackburn College/East Lancaster</td>
<td>NESCOT (North East Surrey College of Technology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute of Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackpool &amp; the Fylde College</td>
<td>New College Durham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bournemouth and Poole College</td>
<td>New College Nottingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford College</td>
<td>Newcastle College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Sunderland College</td>
<td>Northbrook College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland College of Art &amp; Design</td>
<td>Solihull College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colchester Institute</td>
<td>Somerset College of Arts &amp; Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croydon College</td>
<td>South East Essex College of Further and Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farnborough College of Technology</td>
<td>South Tyneside College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimsby Institute of Further &amp; Higher Education</td>
<td>St Helens College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guildford College</td>
<td>Stockport College of Further &amp; Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadlow College</td>
<td>The Manchester College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartpury College</td>
<td>Warwickshire College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havering College</td>
<td>Weston College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull College</td>
<td>Wigan &amp; Leigh College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds City College</td>
<td>Worcester College of Technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic Options, Operational Challenges

Appendix B:

College perceptions of Risk surrounding HE in FE: An analysis of the Risks set out in College HE Strategies

1. Background

In March 2009 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) requested all further education colleges (FECs) in receipt of direct or indirect funding to submit higher education (HE) strategies by 11 January 2010 (Request for higher education strategies from further education colleges, 2009/13). Strategies were to cover all the HE delivered by a college including non-prescribed higher education (NPHE), international students and other students not publicly funded or publicly funded by other funders such as the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), National Health Service (NHS) and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA).

The guidance provided in 2009/13 indicated:

We expect the strategy to cover:

- a high-level statement explaining what the strategy is about
- a rationale for the strategy
- elaboration about specific objectives showing they have the potential to be realised
- assessment of high-level risks.

(paragraph 6)

Whilst HEFCE was not prescriptive about the format of the documentation, paragraphs 18 to 31 set out the elements the strategy should address and colleges were requested to include 'an assessment of high-level risks and the mitigation planned to manage them' (paragraph 31). A list of indicative content was provided as Annex B.
2. Participation in the MEG project

The project set out to establish the factors that are of most concern to colleges currently delivering HE in FE. In addition to wanting to be able to list these risks we also wanted to form a view about the ability of college senior management teams to recognise and mitigate risk to HE provision.

Participants in the project were asked to send, in confidence, a copy of the section dealing with Risk in the college HE strategy or the whole document. In total 64 colleges (26% of colleges providing higher education) submitted documentation including 45 Strategies.

The project did not set out to present a statistically representative sample. However, the contributing colleges represent the diversity of the provision of HE in FE. There is a range in terms of:

- size of college (total number of learners)
- type of college (general FEC, specialist and specialist designated)
- geographical distribution
- volume of HE provision (headcount)
- percentage of the college’s provision that is HE
- distribution of HE provision across subject areas (comprehensive, focused and niche)
- funding source and mix (direct HEFCE funding, indirect HEFCE funding, LSC funding and fees only).

The most recent validated data for 2007/2008 reports that 112,595 students were studying on HEFCE recognised HE programmes, of which 13,445 were on non-HEFCE funded and 99,145 on HEFCE funded programmes at 271 FECs and Sixth Form Colleges.

In 2009-10, HEFCE funds 130 HEIs and directly funds 125 colleges. The majority of these colleges also receive funding indirectly through one or more HEIs. The provisional funding allocations for 2010-11 indicate 123 colleges will be directly funded by HEFCE.

In some colleges, funding received from the LSC for NPHE and full cost recovery provision funded by fees from students or employers as well as international student fees (for prescribed and non-prescribed HE) forms the majority of the income derived from higher education.

Table 1 summarises the number of colleges in the project sample by volume of prescribed HE (student headcount) and HEFCE funding stream. The majority of the members of the Mixed Economy Group (MEG) of colleges and of the 157 Group

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15 Recurrent grants for 2009-10: Final allocations, 2009/42. This follows mergers, the choice of two colleges to move to indirect funding and the choices made by colleges previously funded as part of a HEFCE-funded consortium. From 2009-10 HEFCE-funded consortia is no longer a form of indirect funding and colleges were asked to choose between receiving direct funding or indirect (franchise) funding. Four colleges chose to be directly funded, one to be indirectly funded through an FEC (a partner in the previous, FEC-led consortium) and the majority opted to remain indirectly funded through the lead (an HEI) of the former consortium.

16 Recurrent grants for 2010-11 (Provisional), 2010/08.
contributed to the project and, thus, colleges with larger volumes of higher education are over-represented in the sample and colleges with provision of less than 200 headcount very significantly under-represented.

Table 1: Colleges by volume of provision and funding stream

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEFCE funding Headcount</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-199</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-899</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900+</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>37</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>13</strong></td>
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<td><strong>%</strong></td>
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<td><strong>39</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

N=64

Notes:
The information is taken from documentation submitted by the colleges and relates to 2009-10.

Direct = solely or mainly (80% or more) directly funded by HEFCE
Indirect = solely or mainly (80% or more) indirectly funded by HEFCE (franchise from one or more HEIs)
Mixed = both modes (with one or more franchise partners)

The quantitative analysis of the approach to risk assessment demonstrated in college HE strategies which follows lays no claims to being statistically representative of HE in FECs as a whole or of small providers of HE in particular. Most of the data is presented for the whole sample but some analysis was undertaken by volume and by dominant funding stream.

3. Risk assessment processes

The approach taken to reporting the college’s assessment and management of Risk in the HE strategy\(^\text{17}\) varies significantly. In the majority of cases (70%) a separate section and/or an annex on Risk is included in the strategy; in others strategic risks are identified in the text; in a small number risks are explored in the text and

\(^{17}\) One college has a single strategy for its FE and (majority) HE provision.
summarised separately in a table. However, in some cases (8%) HE-specific risks are not explicitly addressed in the documentation received.\textsuperscript{18}

Presentation of the Risk Assessment is also very varied. In some cases risks are scored or prioritised; in others not. In more than half of the sample control or mitigation of risk are not set out.

Figure 1 summarises the presentation of Risk in the strategies. The bars indicate the number of colleges:
- which have a section in their strategy addressing Risk
- the number where no HE-specific risks were identified, in a section or in the text\textsuperscript{19}
- the number of strategies where the HE specific risks are:
  - rated by level of risk
  - rated by the potential impact of the risk
  - responsibility for managing the risk is identified
  - actions to mitigate risk are identified
- the number where it is indicated that the process of managing risk is embedded into college-wide processes.

\textsuperscript{18} Colleges were requested to submit (Annex D in 2009/13) a form indicating where certain elements of the strategy were addressed in the documentation, including assessment of high-level risks. As this form was downloaded in electronic form from the HEFCE website it was frequently not included in the documentation supplied to the project team alongside a complete strategy which meant it was not possible to use this to identify where risk was addressed. However, where there was no separate section the strategies were carefully scanned and sometimes no reference to risk was found.

\textsuperscript{19} In some of these cases there was a section on risk but it only related to college processes and no risks were identified.
Figure 1: Presentation of risks

N= 64
In some college strategies risks are simply listed (sometimes very briefly).

In others they are identified, within a Risk Assessment section, in relation to strategic themes, aims and/or objectives. Examples include:
- Students, staff, learning and teaching; Research and knowledge exchange; Facilities; Management
- Learning and teaching; Development of partnership work; Widening participation; Research; Marketing
- Governance, leadership and management of HE; IQER; Recruitment and retention of students; Staffing; Employer needs.

In some cases where there is no separate Risk section, the college strategy is presented by strategic theme with aims, objectives and associated risks. In others risks are identified against themes or key performance indicators as well as summarised in a separate section.

In one case risks are included in a SWOT analysis; in another as part of a Curriculum Analysis.

Only a minority of the college strategies include an assessment of the level or impact of risks. Where this is identified, usually presented in tabular form, it ranges from a simple, 'low, medium, high', to more complex formulae. The latter approach includes scoring of Risk (commonly: chance x impact) rated to give the level of significance (for instance, 'low, housekeeping, contingency, significant'). More complex approaches address the gross risk and the residual risk as mitigated by college controls.

In some strategies the risks included have been extracted from the college Risk Register; in one case a hyperlink to the risk register was provided to HEFCE and the relevant extracts passed to the project team. In other cases, risks appear to have been identified outside the college-wide system as part of the process of writing the strategy. One college included, as an annex, a specific HE Strategic Risk Register, noting that the wider college risks are contained in the college strategic risk register.

Some colleges noted, either in their strategy or in communication to the project team, that producing the strategy had led to a change in practice. One college reported that in the current Risk Management Action Plan and Risk Register for the college, risks associated with HE were subsumed within the risks identified for FE but that they plan to highlight the specific risks associated with HE under each of the more general headings in the plan. The HE-specific risks to be included in the college plan are set out in the strategy in a table (risk, level and actions). Another college reported that the management, delivery and growth of HE formed part of the corporate process of managing risk but that, additionally, in the process of developing the HE strategy a risk assessment had been undertaken. This is demonstrated in the document by a clear identification of the goals and the ways in which the college intends to achieve these goals, with an action plan to manage and monitor the HE work of the college. Another college reported to the team that the college Risk Review identified risk at a high level and that teaching areas
subsequently interpret and report on these risks in the annual planning process. Higher education is dispersed throughout areas and this upward reporting had not been completed for 2010 at the point when the strategy was completed. The manager responsible for HE is proposing to present a separate, high-level, Risk Assessment to area leaders to form the basis of their planning for 2010-11 and in the future the HE strategy will have its own risk assessment.

It is important to note that many of the strategies reported that the assessment and management of risks specific to HE is embedded in the college Risk Assessment process and these risks can be found in the college Risk Register and monitoring reports. Thus, the absence in some strategies of explicit reporting or rating of risks and their management should not be taken to indicate the college is not identifying and managing risks in relation to the provision of HE. In the case of most of the five strategies where no HE-specific risks were reported, a description of the college Risk Management policy was given. One college which has no Risk section and only mentions risk briefly in the text of the strategy has a comprehensive action plan and an implementation plan for HE included as annexes. The latter identifies strategic aims and for each objective includes ‘critical success factors’ which, by implication, addresses risks.

Nonetheless, in some cases a reading of the strategy provides no evidence that risks have been addressed and evaluated. In others the description of the risks is minimal and, as the level of risk and the controls in place are not identified, the strategy provides little information for the reader regarding the perceived risks of delivering HE in colleges. In the request for strategies HEFCE indicated the strategies should support the strategic development and quality of HE in FECs. Analysis of the Risk Assessment included in some strategies suggests that the evaluation supplied on high-level risk would not support some or all of the purposes of a strategy identified by HEFCE. The good practice demonstrated in other strategies could usefully be shared.

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20 In the request for strategies (2009/13) HEFCE provided an answer to the question ‘Why have a higher education strategy and a strategy document?’

An HE strategy has several uses:

- as a prerequisite for improving HE provision
- raising the profile of HE within the college and with important stakeholders
- as evidence for the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review through which the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) reviews the management of standards and quality of HE in FECs
- supporting the development of widening participation strategic assessments
- as a resource for HEFCE institutional teams in understanding the provision of HE in FECs and, more specifically, to inform our dialogue with FECs about the development of their HE, for example in the context of funding related to any initiative or recruitment within the specified limit of the grant.

(Paragraph 17)
4. **Risks presented in the strategies**

A wide range of risks is identified in the submitted strategies. The number of risks identified and the detail in which they are set out varies substantially. In terms of numbers, risks varied from three to over 30. In terms of evaluation, at one extreme a few bullets were included with no evaluation of the level and potential impact of risk and no response to the risk; at the other extreme, macro and micro level risks were identified and evaluated in the context of the external policy climate and the college management structures and client group, with monitoring processes and mitigation set out.

The risks cited have been grouped into:

- the impact of external policy, the economy and demographic shifts
- the funding system
- engagement with employers
- learners and their needs
- staffing of HE
- curriculum
- accommodation and resources
- governance and management
- quality
- partnerships with HEIs
- regional strategy and competition
- non-prescribed higher education

Figure 2 illustrates the profile of risks identified. This is an aggregation of the more specific risks illustrated in Figure 3. In the case of the funding system, the number is greater than 64 as some colleges cited more than one of the risks (Targets, Income, Fees/costs) which have been aggregated here.
Figure 2: Aggregated risks

N = 64

Note: the total number cited for each aggregated category in one case exceeds the number of colleges. Figure 3 shows the individual risks.
The complete set of risks is summarised as follows and presented in Figure 3. Annex A gives examples of the way these were expressed in the strategies.

Risks included:

1. General references to government initiatives, policy change and perceptions of HE in FE.
2. The impact of the economic recession.
3. Demographic change and the potential client group.
4. The challenge of meeting student number targets and avoiding both over and under recruiting.
5. The impact on college income of current and anticipated cuts in funding, the availability of student numbers and failure to develop alternative income streams.
6. Fees and costs posing a deterrent to students.
7. Changes in employer demand (including the impact of the recession), failure to meet the needs of employers, the failure of employer engagement strategies, unwillingness of employers to engage with work-based learning.
8. Failure to identify and respond to the needs of learners, to respond to student feedback and litigation by dissatisfied students.
9. Poor retention, completion and achievement by students and poor teaching, learning and assessment strategies.
10. Poor progression rates and routes.
11. Failure to widen participation or engage with the expectations of these students.
12. Inability to recruit, retain and develop staff; conditions of service.
13. Failure to develop a research culture or to engage with scholarly activity.
14. Failure to achieve Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP).
15. Insufficient curriculum development to sustain innovation and meet changing needs.
16. Inadequate accommodation and failure to obtain funds for new builds.
17. Inadequate resources and facilities for provision.
18. Failure of the corporation to adequately monitor provision.
19. Inadequate leadership and management, inadequate management structures and processes and poor communication.
20. Failure to obtain market intelligence; failure to market; costs of marketing.
21. Failure of management information/business systems to produce timely and accurate data as required by HEFCE or partner HEIs.
22. Quality systems/committee structure not adequate to address HE-specific quality assurance.
23. Unsatisfactory outcome of IQER.
24. Unsatisfactory outcome of Ofsted inspection of NPHE or failure to meet quality assurance requirements of NPHE awarding bodies.
25. Inadequate or deteriorating HEI partnership(s) and competition from HEIs.
26. Validation and audit issues with HEI(s).
27. Loss of franchise numbers and inability to obtain further numbers from HEIs.
28. Failure to respond to local and regional strategies, failure to develop regional partnerships and competition within regions.
29. Miscellaneous. Risks identified by single colleges.
Figure 3: Risks cited by colleges

N=64
It is evident that the greatest concern for colleges relates to funding; in particular to meeting HEFCE targets and avoiding under- or over-recruiting and to concerns about growth plans when additional student numbers (ASNs) have been restricted. This is explored in the section on numbers and growth below.

The ability to recruit, retain and develop staff to deliver higher education is also highlighted, along with general concerns about quality and quality management and more specific concerns about the outcomes of IQER and Ofsted inspections (of NPHE). Concerns about meeting the needs of employers and learners are high on the agenda and this is linked to staffing with concerns that the quality of teaching and learning will affect retention, achievement and progression. Partnerships with HEIs were problematic for many colleges, including in relation to validation and to indirect funding streams.

Figures 2 and 3 give an overview of the risks identified across the sample of colleges. However it is important to note that where a college has reported a risk the strategy may also have reported that this risk, while potentially high in impact, is a known risk which is unlikely to occur because systems are in place, or will be developed, which manage and mitigate it. In other words, this is a risk, not a cause for concern about HE in FE.

In the more comprehensive treatments of risk this is evident. For instance, the ‘external’ risk of restrictions on additional student numbers may be addressed by a strategy to generate alternative sources of numbers, through full fee paying part-time students on professional programmes (perhaps supported by their employer) or full-time international students. The risk of an unsatisfactory outcome of IQER may be addressed by controls to ensure that the appropriate systems and processes are in place and operating effectively at college and programme level. Identifying the potential threat to stability of HEFCE income (direct or indirect) of ineffective data collection and information management indicates the college recognises the specificity of the requirements and the crucial differences from the LSC funding model and that it is managing the process to produce accurate and timely returns; arguably not mentioning such a risk is a cause for concern.

5. Numbers and Growth

When HEFCE consulted on HE in FECs in 2006 (Higher education in further education colleges. Consultation on HEFCE policy, 2006/48) and the pilot of college HE strategies was conducted in 2007-08, this was in the context of a strategy for growth. However, by 2009 when the strategies for submission by 11 January 2010 were being produced, heads of HEFCE-funded institutions had been informed of a cap on numbers21 for 2009-

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21 In November 2008 a circular letter to the heads of directly funded institutions (Higher education finances for 2009-10, 32/2008) advised Vice-Chancellors and Principals that the Secretary of State had asked HEFCE to allocate no more than 10,000 ASNs for 2009-10. Since almost 10,000 ASNs had already been allocated no further allocations would be made for 2009-10 and none for 2010-11. Institutions were asked to review their planned recruitment for 2009-10 in order to avoid any further increase in full-time undergraduate and PGCE entrants above the level of their actual admissions in 2008-09 plus any ASNs already allocated to them for 2009-10. Additionally the letter advised that HEFCE had been asked to develop contingency measures that could be used to reduce the risk of over-recruiting, where, given current resources, such over-recruitment could threaten either the sustainability of student financial support or the maintenance of the unit of funding.

The current position following the receipt of the grant letter from the Secretary of State on 22 December 2009 is set out in the Circular letter sent to heads of institutions in February 2010 (Funding for universities and colleges in...
10 and 2010-11, advised to review their recruitment for 2009-10 and alerted to potential financial penalties for any over-recruitment.

In addition to summarising the risks explicitly enumerated by colleges, the strategies were searched for reference to the funding context for 2009-10 and 2010-11 with regard to the availability of student numbers and for the strategic implications for the college. Thirty eight colleges (59%) make reference to the capping of ASNs in the text of the strategy and/or a section on risks. Of the colleges that did not, 10 had only provided the section of the strategy that addressed risk to the project team and may have addressed the issue of numbers elsewhere in the strategy as part of the context for the college’s plans for higher education. In 16 cases (25%) where the full strategy was provided this development was not referenced.

A small number of strategies remain focused on growth without recognition of funding constraints, although in some cases this growth is anticipated in STEM subjects. In the (small) majority of strategies the impact of the restrictions on ASNs is recognised and the colleges refer to the requirement to remain within contracted numbers. However, the potential financial penalties are rarely mentioned.

One college reported in its strategy that one of its partners had already withdrawn numbers for a new intake in autumn 2010 in order to keep ASNs for its own use; other indirectly funded colleges expressed concerns that partner HEIs would ring fence their ASNs.

The great majority of colleges have premised their strategic development on growth but most recognise that this is, at least in the short to medium term, not going to be possible using direct or indirect HEFCE funding and have adjusted their strategy to reflect what one college described as the ‘new reality’. They look to alternatives including LSC (now SFA) funded NPHE, full cost fee provision, collaborative provision with employers, expansion of international student numbers and a focus on part-time provision.

Colleges identified the restrictions flowing from the ASN policy, illustrated by some examples below.

**Uncertainties persist** at national level with regard to the strategic priorities and funding strands. This calls into question how the objective to progress 50% of FE students into HE programmes of study can be met within the inevitable limits that result from static levels of FTE funding. (Small volume, indirectly funded)

**There remains an ambition to grow** to 2000 FTE, but the financial constraints on public spending and their impact on HE numbers nationally mean that achieving this ambition in the near future is unlikely. (Large volume, indirectly funded)

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2010-11, 02/2010), this includes the intention to ‘make appropriate adjustments’ to the allocations of institutions which over-recruited at a rate of £3,700 per head.

22 Where there were only very general references to the availability of ASNs to support growth – as has always applied – this was not counted. However, even brief references were counted where there was mention of capping of ASNs.

23 Colleges did however express concern about the security of funding for NPHE and some had already seen a decline in NPHE through withdrawal of LSC funding.
There was an expectation [when the college undertook an HE review in 2006] of marked growth and an availability of additional student numbers and the review was premised on this increased capacity to expand both directly funded and franchised provision in all curriculum areas demand dictated. … 2008-09 has seen a change in the college’s long term strategy predicated by the overall cap on growth, the reduction in FE LSC Developmental funding and the suspension of capital build funding. (Medium volume, mixed funding)

This strategy for HE has been written at a time when a global recession has placed serious limitations on current and future public spending, and has in particular brought about an imposed cap on the availability of funding to support growth in student numbers through the distribution of additional student numbers (ASNs) by HEFCE. However, the long-term aims and ambitions of the college have not been tempered by these events, and the strategy aims to clarify the direction of travel and required actions in order to move towards these planned outcomes. Current events do of course affect the timing and feasibility of some actions and this has been reflected in the drafting of the document. (Medium volume, directly funded)

The current cap on growth imposed by HEFCE in 2009 provides an opportunity to reflect upon the nature and composition of the HE offer. (Large volume, directly funded)

The number of our HEFCE-funded learners will remain virtually unchanged due to government restrictions, while our international learners will increase. (Large volume, indirectly funded)

Perceptions of financial risk and the degree of uncertainty have increased in the period since completion of the strategies and their submission for 11 January 2010, particularly in the light of the December announcement of the £3,700 financial penalty for over-recruitment. This is reflected in the interviews reported in Appendix A: Identifying the Issues. However, since directly funded institutions were alerted in a circular letter in November 2008 to the restriction on numbers and advised to avoid over-recruitment (see footnote 7 above) it might be anticipated that the risks would be cited by a greater number (than 38) of colleges and in more specific terms, including potential financial penalties. A rare exception is the risk cited below:

Any over-enrolment in HE may make the college liable to a financial penalty imposed by the awarding body/HEFCE. (Risk cited by medium volume, indirectly funded college)

6. Perceptions of risk by volume of provision and funding stream

The focus of this analysis is on risks identified by colleges delivering HE in FE. As indicated above, a particular focus is on the external risks deriving from changes – current and anticipated – in policy and the economy and their impact on recruitment and growth.

Many of the colleges participating in the project (a disproportionate number compared to the providers of HE in the FE sector) have a large volume of HE provision, several of which have higher education centres and are committed to continued expansion where possible. Where a college has direct funding from HEFCE it is not vulnerable to changes in policy of franchising HEI partners. However, directly funded colleges must work within their target allocations: indirectly funded colleges may, in the past, have been given leeway by their funding partner(s).
Figures 4 and 5 present the colleges identifying the challenge of meeting student number targets and avoiding both over and under recruiting by volume of provision measured by headcount and by funding stream.

Figures 6 and 7 break down the risk relating to HEI partnerships – in general; in relation to validation and quality; and in relation to franchise funding and numbers.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 indicate the number of colleges identifying a risk. In the following figures, the intention is to measure whether identification of a risk reflects volume of provision or funding stream; consequently, the bars in the figures represent the percentage of the colleges in that category which have identified the risk. As previously noted (see Table 1, colleges by volume of provision and funding stream), the distribution is particularly unrepresentative for small providers with only three colleges (5%) of the sample falling into this category. Further, all of the colleges with small HE provision are indirectly funded and 54% of the colleges with large provision are directly funded; this correlation between volume and funding stream means caution needs to be exercised in drawing conclusions about the relationship between either volume or funding and identification of risk.
Figure 4: Risks relating to targets and income cited by colleges with small, medium and large volumes of provision as a % of the number of colleges in that category

N= 64  Notes: 1-199 = 3 colleges; 200-899 = 37 colleges; 900+ = 24 colleges

Figure 5: Risks relating to targets and income cited by colleges with direct, indirect and mixed funding as a % of the number of colleges in that category

N= 64

Notes: Directly funded = 26 colleges; Indirectly funded = 25 colleges; Mixed = 13 colleges.
Figure 6: Risks relating to HEI partnerships cited by colleges with small, medium and large provision as a % of the number of colleges in that category

N= 64

Notes: 1-199 = 3 colleges; 200-899 = 37 colleges; 900+ = 24 colleges

Figure 7: Risks relating to HEI partnerships cited by colleges with direct, indirect and mixed funding as a % of the number of colleges in that category

N= 64 Notes: Directly funded = 26 colleges; Indirectly funded = 25 colleges; Mixed = 13 colleges
With the caveat, above, regarding sample size and, in particular, the number of colleges with small provision, Figures 4 and 5 suggest that neither volume of provision nor funding stream are significantly influencing perceptions of risk. However, it is perhaps surprising (Figure 5) that colleges with indirect funding were less likely to cite meeting targets as a risk than those with direct funding. It is speculative, but this may reflect an assumption that the HEI will (has previously) offer flexibility in meeting targets.

In Figure 6 the apparently significant result that small colleges were the most likely to identify concerns about funding from an HEI needs to be read in the context of the sample: 67% represents two out of three colleges in this category, and, all three are indirectly funded. In Figure 7 the fact that no directly funded colleges identify funding from an HEI as an issue merely serves to validate the figures.

In the strategies (and reinforced in the interviews analysed in Identifying the Issues) many indirectly funded colleges, particularly providers with large volumes of provision from a single HEI or within a single HEI led partnership, expressed confidence in the stability of their funding streams. Some colleges noted that collaboration with established partners was stable but more uncertain with new partners. One reported that partner HEIs had in the main honoured their commitments to new developments commencing in 2009-10 but that there was some reduction in allocation of numbers for existing programmes and anticipated growth in prescribed indirectly funded provision would be limited in 2010-11. The college further noted that it would transfer provision to HEIs with ‘the greatest commitment and capacity’.

7. Critical mass

Attention is often drawn to critical mass with the presumption that it supports effective and efficient management of HE in FE.

The colleges in this sample which have small and/or niche provision (whether directly or indirectly funded) express a continued mission for and intention to make this provision. One college which had previously offered some degree programmes had decided in 2001 to focus on its FE, leaving bachelor programmes to the neighbouring HEIs, but it continued to provide sub-degree programmes and professional qualifications, and to do so more part-time than full-time. The provision is focused on meeting the needs of the local and regional community, contributing to community cohesion and addressing skills shortages. Another college with less than 100 FTEs has considered whether it should offer HE but is clear about how and why it continues to provide for local adults who are more likely to progress into higher education if provision is made locally in an HE in FE environment. At another provider the small amount of provision had originally been directly funded but the numbers were passed to the main HEI partner some years ago; the provision is continued because it is seen as important in supporting local economic regeneration. This college recognises that there are HEIs within travelling distance of most full-time learners and it does not seek to duplicate this provision but instead to offer provision which is either not available or accessible to certain learners. Almost half of its higher education in 2008-09 was funded by the LSC, predominantly NVQs at levels 4 and 5.

24 If the analysis had demonstrated concerns the coding would need to be checked since this would have been illogical.
Several colleges report high proportions of their level 4 and above work being LSC funded. Concerns about the stability of this funding are also reported.

8. **Key messages from the analysis**

On the basis of the strategies (and risk sections) submitted some conclusions can be drawn.

- Colleges are developing HE-specific Risk Assessment processes and procedures. While risks to HE may be included in college wide risk registers, it appears they are not commonly set out and monitored separately.
- At present it is not common practice to include within HE strategies a comprehensive assessment of high-level risks with associated controls and mitigation.
- A significant minority of colleges did not address the risks to or the impact on provision of the cap on ASNs.
- The risk of financial clawback for over-recruitment in 2009-10 was very rarely set out.

9. **Conclusions**

For the future some messages can be derived.

- Where risks are known and mitigated their identification is a cause for confidence rather than concern.
- The experience of producing HE strategies in a time of economic and policy uncertainty should inform revisions.
- Some strategies provide good practice with respect to the identification and moderation of risk which could usefully be shared.
- Whilst institutional autonomy is to be respected, there are advantages in a common format being prescribed for the collection of national information. This piece of analysis was made more difficult by the lack of a stipulated format for the construction of the HE Strategies. We are left with the concern that without any alternative means to monitor HE in FE, HEFCE will be limited in any attempt to use these documents to inform future planning decisions as they do not enable like to be compared with like.

**References**


HEFCE 2009a, *Request for higher education strategies from further education colleges, 2009/13*

HEFCE, *Recurrent grants for 2009-10: Final allocations, 2009/42*

HEFCE, 2009c, *Funding for universities and colleges in 2010-11, 02/2010*

HEFCE, 2009b, *Recurrent grants for 2010-11 (Provisional), 2010/08*
### Annex 1 - List of Colleges providing Risk sections or HE strategies

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Annex 2 - Risks identified and examples from strategies

External policy, demographics

Government initiatives/policy change
General (does not include specific changes to funding etc.)
That there is a change in central and government policy leading to a reduction in funding and/or a change in the structure of funding bodies and the introduction of new priorities which are not consistent with the college’s objectives

Lack of understanding of role of HE in FE

Revisions to immigration legislation

Recession/economic environment
Unspecified general risk (i.e. not related to numbers, employers etc.)

Change in nature of international market/global environment

Demographic change

Funding and numbers

Student number targets/recruitment
Failure to meet numbers

Failure to recruit

Lack of demand

Recruit significantly above or below contract

Failure to utilise recent ASNs

Shortage of people with skills at level 1/2/3 [in the area] able to benefit from HE

That we fail to understand and respond to the environment and competition resulting in a failure to attract sufficient students, thereby leading to reduced income

Income/growth/cuts
Anticipated HEFCE cuts

HE funding going through a period of uncertainty

Reduction of HEFCE and/or LSC funding unit of resource

Cap on ASNs

Insufficient ASNs are allocated or available

Inability to increase income for HE

Inability to diversify funding streams, in NPHE, full cost and international

Failure to develop full-cost provision

FD funding
Inability to draw down modular funding (directly funded)
Fall in international students
Potential impact of ELQ

**Fees/costs**
Reduction in applications due to high fees/costs
Minimum fee level is too high to enable the most needy students to progress to HE
Students are deterred from attending by cost factors
Assumptions being made as to fee income leading to reduction in funding from HEFCE

**Employers**
Failure to meet/respond to employers’ needs
Change in employers needs
Strategy to engage employers fails
Unwillingness of employers to engage in curriculum development, delivery, assessment
Failure to engage with SSCs, work-based learning providers and employers
Loss of HE employer contracts
Impact of recession on employers
Employers not making necessary investment
Failure to develop key industrial partnerships

**Learners and delivery**

**Learners’ needs**
Failure to meet/respond to learners’ needs
Student expectations unmet
HE expansion means student expectations will be higher
Failure to provide sufficient/appropriate learning support
Insufficient account take of the high support needs of typical ‘HE in FE’ students
Failure to match teaching, learning and assessment strategies to learners’ needs
Inability to develop flexible learning methods
Students opt not to be involved in shaping the development/enhancement of practice
Failure to respond to student feedback
Increased litigation by dissatisfied students
**Performance/retention and achievement**

Non completion rates

Inability to improve retention and achievement

Poor student retention and success rates

Poor teaching impacts on retention and achievement

Low quality provision results in withdrawal of students/funding streams

Not achieving consistency of high performance delivery, teaching, learning, assessment and course management

Inability to deliver high quality teaching

Lack of research and referencing skills resulting in plagiarism

Lack of opportunities for students to find out about the workplace impacting on their employability

**Progression**

Poor progression rates

Failure to ensure effective communication with internal learners on level 3 programmes to enable internal progression

Failure to address progression between the college and the university

Appropriate progression pathways are not established

Failure to embed appropriate IAG for level 3 students and internal progression agreements

Failure internally and externally to ensure progression opportunities and opportunities for lifelong learning are maximised

Limit on full-time recruitment impedes development of progression routes from vocational programmes

**Widening participation**

Inability to engage with minority groups

Cost of marketing strategies and support systems to widen participation

Competition for these students

Failure to attract full and part time students from low income backgrounds

Failure to contribute to the widening participation agenda

That we fail to meet expectations regarding recruitment of students from widening participation backgrounds
Staffing

Staff and CPD

Inability to recruit, retain and develop staff with the required experience, expertise and qualifications
Failure to maintain employee relations and staff morale
Dependence on small number of staff
Loss of key staff and failure to plan staff succession
Loss of key staff: curriculum management and delivery; quality and administrative systems management and operation
Staff shortages
Inadequate CPD budgets
Insufficient staff development to deliver strategic outcomes
Staff teaching on HE are not supported in their CPD
Dated staff skills and knowledge hindering innovation and development
Operational demands inhibit opportunities for sharing of good practice and discussion
Failure to develop appropriate c.o.s

Research culture

Failure/inability to create a research culture
Lack of engagement with scholarly activity
Failure to develop quality research and knowledge exchange to contribute to HEI partners’ activity
Failure to secure external funding or to manage staff timetabling effectively to allow remission for research
Reduction in budget previously supported by TQEF

Curriculum development

FDAP

Failure to achieve FDAP
Decision not to go for FDAP

Curriculum Development/planning

Insufficient curriculum development to sustain/stimulate demand
Failure to develop new products
Failure to be responsive to current and future needs
Failure to develop or recruit to Masters
Lack of investment in curriculum development/lack of financial support to develop curriculum
Inability to convert HNs to FDs
Need to achieve economies of scale and tailor provision for employers

**Accommodation and resources**

**Accommodation**
Finances not available for dedicated HE build
HE Centres/University Challenge developments restricted
Inability to secure ‘New University Challenge’ funding for joint capital build project
Need to improve accommodation
Insufficient college funds remaining to build HE centre
Business difficulties arising from insufficient appropriate teaching accommodation

**Resources**
Physical resources not available to match programme requirements
Resource demands and planning not following the rise in student numbers
That we are not able to carry out our full investment programme and that the management of teaching resources may prove insufficient to maintain the college’s position and reputation
Lack of HEFCE capital funding via validating partner impacting on the quality and quantity of resources for students
Cost of top-slice to the universities impacting on the quality of the resources and environment

**Management and governance**

**Corporation**
Insufficient oversight by corporation of new HE partnerships
Failure of governors to monitor
That failure to raise the college’s profile leads to an inability to recruit and retain effective governors

**Management**
Insufficient leadership and management of HE at each campus
Ineffective business plans
Ineffective communication between campuses
Poor internal communication with the HE team
Failure to have a comprehensive understanding of HEFCE funding
That we fail to comply with HEFCE conditions of funding
Failure to maximise HE funding
Failure of financial controls

Failure to maintain the financial health and stability of the college

Failure to recognise and manage risks

Poor internal communication

Failure to achieve ‘buy in’ of staff

That we fail to manage the reputation of the college appropriately in unforeseen circumstances, e.g. due to the activities of a student

**Marketing/market development/intelligence**

Failure to market appropriately

Failure to brand and market curriculum offer

Failure to produce marketing materials and provide market intelligence appropriate to the needs of curriculum planning

Failure to identify new markets and/or respond to these

Market intelligence not adequate to inform curriculum planning

Cost of employing specialist resources to target specific groups of learners

**MIS/business systems**

Failure to produce and make effective use of MIS

Failure to provide accurate and timely management information

Failure to produce accurate management information and utilise it effectively

The college fails to make accurate and timely returns to HEFCE of student numbers leading to a failure to claim funding for students who have enrolled or an overclaim and subsequent clawback for students who have left or are funded through another funding stream

That we fail to manage our financial position and maintain solvency, for example through incomplete or inaccurate information returns or inability to monitor student performance and attendance

Failure to support business systems

**Quality**

**Quality systems**

Quality/committee structure not appropriate

Quality monitoring processes not implemented

College fails to ensure adequate quality controls are in place

Failure to devise and implement QA systems specific to HE

Ensuring the quality of the HE learning experience in a mixed FE/HE environment

Failure to meet quality PIs
IQER/QAA
Poor outcome of IQER
Failure to satisfy IQER
Less than successful IQER damages reputation of qualifications

Ofsted/other audit
Poor Ofsted
Failure to maintain external QA procedures set by awarding bodies

HEI partnerships

General comments on partnership
Costs involved in maintaining active and good partnership from the strategic to the operational level
Poor communication with partners
The deterioration of key HE partnerships
HEI remove collaboration
Loss of HEI partners
Complex relationship with HEIs
Competing strategic priorities of partner universities
Failure to increase student exchange between college and university which could negatively affect course development
Competition from HEI

Validation and quality issues
A strategic university partner withdraws from validating college courses
Change in policy of validating HEI partner resulting in termination of validation of programmes
Failure to revise collaborative agreement with each validating HEI
Failure to get existing HEI partners to respond and validate programmes quickly enough to meet employer needs
Inadequate contribution to university QAA audits
Difficulty in funding validation for specialist provision

Funding/numbers
Loss of franchise numbers
Change in policy of franchising HEI partner resulting in termination of franchise
Restrictions on funded student numbers from the universities
Partnership arrangements do not function as planned leading to failure to build Higher Education income

HEIs will be short of numbers themselves and this will put a strain on partnership arrangements

Indirect funding via HEI with no direct line of communication to HEFCE

Poor communication over non-completion rates

**Regional strategy**

Failure to respond to local/regional strategies

Local/regional competition

Unsuccessful (partnership) bid for a university centre

Lack of coherence of vision between the College and partners in the County will mitigate against the development of a facility in the City which can be available to College students.

**NPHE**

Withdrawal of funding for NPHE by SFA

Failure to gain and retain accreditation and recognition by professional and statutory bodies

Failure to expand NPHE

**College specific and miscellaneous**

Includes:

Progress of TDAP application

Consequences of merger

NHS contract transferred from college

Failure to exploit opportunities for HE Centres of Excellence

Internationalise curriculum and develop national/global reputation with international brand

Negative publicity

Significant and unfunded increase in the cost of pension schemes
Strategic Options, Operational Challenges

Appendix C: Staff Perspectives of HE in FE

The results of a survey carried out by IfL as part of this research.

1. Background

The survey of staff was undertaken on behalf of the Mixed Economy Group (MEG) of colleges by IfL between 12 - 22 March 2010. There were 3072 respondents from a range of staff involved in teaching, managing and supporting the delivery of Higher Education in Further Education colleges. The survey provides feedback from staff in FECs about the extent to which they are involved in the delivery of HE programmes, and at what level of study on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) they were teaching. This is a large volume of responses and it offers a valuable snapshot of the CPD experiences of a distinctive cohort of college teaching staff. The survey responses are confidential to IfL and MEG and so are not reproduced in detail here.

The survey asked nineteen wide-ranging questions related to the support mechanisms that had been available to staff teaching HE, and what continuing professional development had been undertaken by staff. It asked participants to evaluate which of these activities had been most effective. The two final questions allowed respondents to provide free textual comments. These set out, firstly, to establish which current support mechanisms and continuing professional development for teaching HE were most valued; and secondly, how staff perceived and would prioritise their changing needs for professional development over the next few years.

2. Questionnaire

The survey identifies that whilst 26% of respondents spend less than 10% of their time teaching on HE programmes, more than 16% teach exclusively higher education. The levels at which staff teach reflect the diversity of provision within the further education sector. Whilst many staff teach across a mix of levels, mainly FHEQ levels 4-6, 48% identify they teach on Foundation Degrees and 23% at Bachelor level, with 55% of staff teaching a mix of higher nationals, post graduate study at masters level, and a number of professional and post-graduate programmes.

Responses to the questionnaire indicated that staff had undertaken a broad range of professional development activities during the previous 12 months. The most positive responses were for subject updating (identified by 48% of those who responded) and assessment (36%). The emphasis on the latter may be related to institutional responses to the focus of the IQER Developmental engagement on assessment, which all colleges are required to undertake.
The reported use of new technologies as part of the learning process varies significantly. More than 75% of all respondents indicated that they used the virtual learning environment, and of these 27% said that this was used a lot. However 17% stated that they did not use this at all as part of their teaching.

Interactive distance learning activities using new technologies were undertaken by 47% of respondents, who reported using these sometimes, a lot, or quite a lot. Only 12% of those surveyed had engaged in any learning that involved the use of mobile technologies.

Respondents were asked to identify activities which they had undertaken to improve teaching and learning. Of these 86% had been part of a peer observation process, 36% had taken part in work shadowing and 26% had been on industrial placement. Nearly all respondents identified that they had made use of online resources. Over 60% had undertaken academic research.

The activities that are identified as having the most positive impact were the use of reflective practice at 96%, use of on-line resources at 93%, and e-learning 85%.

Respondents to the questionnaire identified that during the last 2-year period CPD which supported HE delivery, had been provided through a wide range of sources. The most positive response, from 60% of staff, was for peer interaction with other FE colleagues, both within their own college and through wider partnerships. The second most positive response related to support received from employers (50% of respondents.) The support from validating partners was positive in the eyes of 31%, but only around 18% of all questioned had been involved with the work of the Higher Education Academy during this period. Of those who had responded positively to engagement with the HEA, 32% identified themselves as members of the Academy, and 42% said that their involvement was through the HEA subject centres.

Over 60% of staff interviewed felt that the range of teacher training courses they had undertaken had not given them any specific preparation for their work as higher education teachers.

More than 40% of respondents said that their validating partner provided ongoing access to CPD, with a further 18% stating that this was available, but only very occasionally. Bespoke training provided by validating partners had been available to 27% of respondents with a further 20% saying that this was available very occasionally.

The final questions of the survey allowed respondents to say which aspects of CPD they valued most. They were also asked to say how they felt these needs might change, what key priorities they would identify, and what form these might take.

3. Staff Comments

Overall, 50% of those who completed the survey took the opportunity to provide comments. These show a wide range of potential areas for continuing professional development. The following analysis provides an indication of what priorities are emerging from the survey of HE in FE staff.

- **E learning environment**

  The availability, use and impact of new technologies within the learning environment is of interest to by far the greatest number of respondents. More than 10% said that this was their main priority. Proposals include the need for CPD to develop a much better understanding of the huge potential for e learning, including the use of blogs, social network sites, mobile devices, and web 2 technologies etc. Many staff felt they
needed greater competence in the use of new classroom technologies such as the use of smart boards.

Additionally, the virtual electronic environment was seen by many as an increasingly important vehicle for CPD, not only within colleges, but also across subject groupings nationally and internationally. This would allow for flexible delivery and interactive for a in the wider academic community.

- **Remission of teaching time**
  The need for colleges to allocate time to staff teaching on HE programmes, and provide remission from teaching duties, is specific to a significant number of respondents. Around 6% stated this was the single most important factor in colleges supporting and facilitating continuing professional development and scholarly activity. The clear rationale for respondents is that there should be a greater parity between staff teaching on programmes at the same level in FEC and HEI. Remission of teaching duties would reflect the need for regular subject updating and the greater time required for HE preparation, teaching, learning and assessment.

  Apart from the many specific comments about remission of teaching duties, many of the other responses and priorities for CPD (for example those about undertaking higher qualifications) identify that these can only realistically be undertaken if time is allocated to staff. There are many comments from staff about what they perceive to be the unreasonably high teaching loads, when compared with those of staff delivering in the university sector.

- **Greater engagement with HEI partners and the wider academic community**
  More than 5% of all respondents would prioritise the significant opportunities for further CPD undertaken with and through their validating partners. The corollary to this is that there are many positive comments about the interaction with HEI partners through link tutors, partnership activity and other events. Proposals for further development come in a number of broad areas: engagement with subject specialist staff at partner universities; shadowing counterparts in the HEI sector; mentoring of staff new to delivery of HE; more interaction with staff from partner colleges.

- **Research and scholarship**
  Many respondents, about 4%, felt that there was a need to develop research and scholarly activity in colleges. Staff felt that students on HE programmes delivered in FEC should be taught by staff with current in-depth knowledge and understanding of their subject, and that research-informed teaching would support honours level delivery. However, many staff felt that college managements were yet to establish a culture of scholarly activity as part of strategic approach to continuing professional development. Staff felt that this was vital both for the currency of teaching and credibility of HE programmes being delivered.

- **Higher qualifications**
  Around 4% of respondents highlighted support for higher qualifications being a key area. There appears to be evidence that colleges are good at supporting staff in undertaking higher qualifications, and that higher degrees are often undertaken in conjunction with validating partners. A surprising number of staff are paying the fees for these qualifications themselves. The greatest number of comments related to staff wishing to undertake, or who are already undertaking, work at doctoral level. Many commented that even where colleges supported the payment of all or part of the fees for higher qualifications, there was generally no reduction in duties or remission from teaching to undertake this higher level study.
• **Industrial updating / employer and workplace staff development**
  The is a clear desire from more than 5% of all staff to undertake CPD in the workplace so they understand the changing needs of specific industries and the expectations of employers. This they regard is a key way of ensuring the currency of course curriculum. This is seen as a high priority area in terms of CPD. Many respondents made specific suggestions for possible secondment to industry and the potential for shadowing workplace activity.

• **HE-focused, in-college CPD, especially that related to learning and teaching**
  Many respondents felt that their college did not provide HE specific CPD. Many staff consider that their own college’s staff development is dominated by the requirements of FE, and the expectations of Ofsted. However many respondents feel that there is a real opportunity to develop HE specific staff development in colleges, and that this should be prioritized as a key support mechanism for HE in FE staff. Respondents wanted the focus to be on learning and teaching, possibly through the establishment within colleges of an HE forum where good practice could be shared. The virtual electronic environment was identified as an emerging vehicle for CPD activity.

• **Assessment focused CPD**
  Around 3% of staff requested further CPD in relation to assessment. This ranged from an understanding of ‘levelness’ and how to assess at HE level 4/5/6 (perhaps through support from HEI or other college partners) to aspects related to modes and types of assessment.

• **Specific training for additional learning needs**
  A small number of respondents wished to prioritise CPD related to specific additional learning needs. Most of these are specific and individual comments, and included requests for autism training, deaf awareness etc. There were additionally a number of related proposals about support for staff in developing study skills for HE learners.

• **Regulatory framework QAA etc**
  These responses related to the need identified by about 1% of respondents to have staff development in understanding of the expectations of elements of the QAA Academic Infrastructure, the IQER process and related aspects of quality assurance and enhancement.

• **Peer observation**
  It is clear from the responses in the survey that staff undertake and value peer observation. A small number wishes to prioritise this area.

• **Part time tutors’ focus**
  There were a small number of responses from part time staff who feel they need more support.

• **Curriculum and course development**
  Further training in developing course materials and designing new curriculum and writing new modules was given as a priority by a small group of staff.

• **Funding**
  The small number of staff who identified funding as a priority wished to have a clearer understanding of the changes to the HEFCE and non prescribed funding processes.
4. Conclusions

The survey, conducted by IFL, attracted responses from over three thousand staff delivering higher education within further education colleges. The range of involvement of those who responded varied considerably, but significantly more than 16% taught mainly or exclusively on HE programmes.

It is clear that a significant amount of valuable professional development is undertaken currently within colleges, and much of this is valued by staff. However, many practitioners felt that professional development for staff teaching on higher education programmes is provided on an ad hoc basis.

They identified the need for college managers to develop clear strategies for continuing professional development, which would support the specific needs of those teaching higher education. There was a clear preference for opportunities to undertake scholarly activity and to work as part of an HE community of learning with staff in partner HEIs. While staff valued interaction with colleagues within the FE sector, a significant number felt that validating partners and HE support organisations provided much greater CPD opportunities.

In addition, many staff felt that the e-learning environment provided significant challenges and opportunities, and that staff development related to the impact of new technologies should be prioritised.

5. Recommendations

5.1. College managers should undertake a more strategic approach to identifying and supporting the continuing professional development of staff delivering higher education programmes

5.2. Managers should consider introducing a differentiated programme of staff development related specifically to the needs of their higher education provision

5.3. Colleges should support the development of a culture of scholarly activity, including funding higher qualifications, research and subject updating and by providing remission from teaching duties where appropriate; the impact of this should be evaluated

5.4. Colleges should proactively develop a community of higher education practitioners by encouraging staff to work more widely with their validating partners, and other support organisations such as the Higher Education Academy and the Subject Centres.
Strategic Options, Operational Challenges

Appendix D: Student Survey

In March/April 2010 an online survey of students pursuing their HE in FE was set up by the Association of Colleges on behalf of the Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG.) Initially this was intended to be a sample drawn from 3 colleges within each of the 9 English regions: the college representatives who had been interviewed (see Appendix A: Identifying the Issues) were asked to encourage 20 full-time (FT) and 20 part-time (PT) HE students, studying a mix of prescribed and non-prescribed HE, to complete the online survey. The target was to receive responses from 1,000 HE in FE students studying in the sample of 27 of the 66 colleges that participated in the research.

In the event, 828 students from 17 of the sampled colleges completed the survey (See Annex 1 for a list of participating colleges). The majority of students were over 25 (53%), with broadly equal numbers of 18-20 year olds and 21-25 year olds. 53.5% students were FT and 46.5% PT with the majority of FT students falling into the 18-20 age band (41%) and the majority of PT students in the over 25 age (82%). Only 4% of 18-20 year olds study PT.

The survey sought to discover why students had opted to study HE in an FEC, what was important to them in selecting their course of study, and what they hoped to achieve as a result of their studies. They were also asked to provide information about whether they studied full or part-time, how many hours a week they were taught and what age band they fitted into. In addition, they were invited to add any other comments about their course and college.

The individual survey responses were made in confidence but the results have been analysed by age, full-time or part-time study mode and subject studied. An analysis of the responses is given below.

1. Why did you apply for the course?

Students were asked to respond to the question: Which of the following reasons led you to apply for a place on this course at this college? They were given 9 options and asked to specify the main reason.

Fifty three percent of students applied to the course because it was near to where they lived and easy to get to - there was little difference between FT and PT, or age of students with 55% FT and 50% PT giving this reason.

Students were also asked whether they chose the FEC because they did not want to move away from their local area. This was an important consideration for 32% of FT and 26.5% of PT 18-20 year old students but less of a concern amongst the older FT students and of little significance to other PT students (10%)

When the responses are combined from the two options this gives a clear indication that many of those studying their HE courses at FECs specifically chose them because they are local.
The second most frequent response was that students were familiar with the college (38% of FT students) but for PT students it was that their employer had specified the course (45%).

Significantly, 45% of young (18-20) and 40% of 21-25 year old FT students chose a college because the course fees were cheaper than they would be at university.

Less than 5% of students stated that they had applied to a university but were unsuccessful and these were all FT students, with the majority being age 18-20. HE in FE was the first choice for this group of students.

A good reputation in the subject was important for FT students with overall 36% citing this; when looked at by age 42% of 18-20 year old FT students thought this was important. For PT students 21% cited this as important. For some students the subjects they are able to study were important – overall 20% of students mentioned this with little difference between FT or PT and age of students.

Of interest was the very low response to the requirement for childcare facilities; only 0.6% responded to this question and responses were spread evenly across FT and PT modes of study.

**Summary**

- From the 812 responses to this question, these results show that students are making a positive choice to study at an FEC due to its location, its reputation and its specialism.
- HE in FE is a deliberate first choice for many younger students and not a second choice to University.
- Employers of PT students are also selecting the FEC for specific courses.
- Lower course fees are important but child care facilities are not.

2. **What is most important in terms of the course being studied?**

Students were asked to respond to the question: *Which of the following are most important to you in terms of the course you are studying?* They were given 10 options and asked to tick all that apply.

The most frequent response was that staff are good at teaching; 79% of respondents rated this as the most important to them. Interestingly, FT students over the age of 21 rated this more highly than the younger age group, but for PT students the 18-21 year olds rated this most highly with 93% reporting this was most important.

Staff approachability and enthusiasm about their subjects were both rated highly at 72% and 71% respectively.

There is a slight difference with mode of study: PT students rate both these aspects more highly (75% PT compared to 70% FT) whilst over 25 year olds consider both these attributes to be of importance – 76% rate enthusiasm and 73% regard approachability as important.
Overall, 68% regard staff being good at explaining things in lessons as being important to them; when the figures are disaggregated this was highest for the 21-25 age group at 74% FT and 71.7% PT.

The next most important aspect was staff being up to date in their subject (64% of all responses); when looked at by age and mode of study this shows that the 18-20 age group view this as less important (48% FT and 57% PT) than the older age groups, while PT students, especially over 25 year olds rate this as important to them (71%). This is unsurprising, as most such students are likely to be employed and following a work-related course – they will expect their tutors to be up-to-date and aware of current practices and are able to make such judgements.

Students were also asked whether staff undertaking further research into their subject as well as teaching it was important to them - 34% rated this highly, with little difference between FT (35%) and PT (33%).

When asked questions about class size, extra support and being in a good HE environment, 33% rated these as important. FT students consider small class sizes to be more important than PT students (50% compared to 36 %) with little difference regarding age. Extra support with studies is rated most important by 50% of 18-20 year old PT students, but otherwise is rated surprisingly low by other groups. As regards a good HE environment this is more important to FT students (37% FT compared to 27% PT) and in particular to the FT 21-25 age group.

Least important amongst this group of students is access to impartial careers advice, with only 11% of responses rating this as a significant factor. PT over 25 year olds in particular considered this to be least important (5%) – although this is unsurprising as these students are likely to be in employment and probably not looking for careers advice. Overall, 14% FT students thought this important.

**Summary**

- From the 821 responses good teaching, enthusiasm and knowledge about the subject and keeping up to date are most important to students; in addition, being approachable and good at explaining things are important.
- Students are less concerned about staff undertaking research, additional support, small class sizes and an HE environment, with least importance attached to impartial careers advice.

**3. Outcomes of studies**

Students were asked: *What do you hope to achieve as a result of your studies?*

There were 6 options and students were asked to tick all that apply.

From the overall responses 75% stated they wanted to open a wider range of career choices. This was most important to PT over 25 year old students (81%) but less important to FT 18-20 years olds (67%). This group considered getting a good job more important (85% compared to 54% FT and 33% PT over 25 year olds). These responses are not surprising as the PT students are most likely to be in employment. PT students also responded that getting promotion more quickly was important (42% compared to 20% FT) with the 21-25 year olds considering it most important.

Students were asked whether meeting a wider range of people was important to them. 24% considered it was, with FT students rating this more highly than PT (29% compared
to 20%) but both FT and PT 18-20 years olds rating this more highly than older PT students.

When asked about whether their studies were giving them more time to think about what to do, or having the experience of being a student, FT students considered these to be more important than PT (22% compared to 8%). When looked at by age it was the 18-20 FT students who thought reflecting on their options and having a student experience were more important; this was least important to PT 21-25 year olds.

Summary

- From the 808 responses in this section the predominant outcome students wish to achieve is related to employment – opening a wider range of career choices, getting a good job or getting promotion. In addition younger students think meeting a wider range of people is important to them.

- Of less importance to students is having time to think about what they want to do, or having the experience of being a student.

4. Teaching hours

Students were asked: How many hours a week are you taught? (Please include lectures, tutorials, lab/studio, clinic sessions – any formal situation where a teacher is in the same room as you)

This question clearly delineates FT and PT hours; only 2 PT students reported receiving more than 11 hours teaching, whilst there was considerable variation on FT hours between 5-25 hours.

There appears to be a variation in reporting between the age groups. Amongst PT students 69% of over 25 year olds report receiving 0-5 hours, while 43% 18-25 year olds report this amount. By contrast, 57% of 18-25 year olds report receiving 6-11 hours teaching, but 30% of over 25 years olds report this number of hours.

The picture is more complicated for FT students as the range of hours reported runs from 5-25. Overall, 47% FT students are taught 12-16 hours. There does appear to be variation between age groups on the number of hours reported e.g. 53% of FT 18-20 year olds report being taught 12-16 hours, with 50% of 21-25 year olds and 35% over 25 year olds receiving this number of taught hours. Compare this to 38% of FT over 25 year olds reporting they receive 6-11 hours teaching, 25% 18-20 year olds and 33% 21-25 year olds.

The younger FT age group report a greater number of teaching hours than the older groups – 17% report being taught 17-20 hours compared to an average of 8% over 21 year olds. 4% FT students receive 21-25 hours of teaching.

Summary

- Of the 786 responses to this question 361 were PT students. The vast majority of PT students receive up to 11 hours teaching. This is to be expected since most will be in employment and on day release or doing evening courses.

- The picture is more confused for the 425 FT students that responded with a range of hours being reported, but the majority between 12-16 hours.

- There may well be some confusion as to what constitutes taught hours for these students - younger students generally report a larger number of hours than older
students. This could be more to do with the students' behaviour – staying in the college, accessing the facilities etc than the number of hours of tuition. In addition, many courses designated as FT may be predominantly work based in the work place so that students may not consider their teaching time to be part of this activity.

- The definition of FT and PT modes has created difficulties (e.g. some PT students can experience more contact hours per week than some FT students). It is becoming more so as different styles of teaching and learning are developed which are less easy for staff to define against conventional funding criteria. It is not surprising that students find it the distinction difficult to articulate.

5. Keeping in touch

Students were asked: *Does your teacher also keep in touch with you by phone, email etc about your course?*

The majority of students reported positively for this question; 89% stated there was contact.

There was little difference between FT and PT students in this question. With regards to age and mode of study – 98% of FT and 92% of PT over 25 year olds reported their teacher keeping in touch.

Summary

- From the 786 responses there is very clear evidence was that there is contact between teachers and students.

- The type of contact is not identified but the fact there is such consistency of responses indicates a high level of support being provided by teachers to their students over and above the taught hours.

6. Any other comments

Students were asked: *Please add any other comments that you wish to make about why you have chosen to study at this particular college*

The response to this section was much lower than for the other questions – 260 students completed this question, 145 FT and 115 PT students. In terms of age 53 18-20 year olds, 59 21-25 year olds and 147 over 25 year olds replied.
The comments were grouped as follows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any other comments on reasons for choosing to study at their particular college</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is familiar to me / I had studied at the college before / progression within same college</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is near to where I live and work and is easy to get to / didn’t want to travel or move away from the area</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers disabled student support</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has a good reputation in my subject / excellent programme delivery / great facilities</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was the only place where I could study my subject – no local universities or other colleges offer it</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The course fees are cheaper than they would be at a university</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I applied to university or elsewhere but was unsuccessful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer specified this course and this college / the company is paying my fees</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college has a good reputation in general</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly working and studying environment / Knowledgeable teachers and lecturers</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for personal development</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional study support and/or extracurricular activities available</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of course (e.g. PT, length) and ability to balance study with work commitments, children, leisure activities, etc</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation from friends and colleagues / know people that attend course/college</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work at the college</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent progression opportunities i.e. HEIs, links with employers, offers work experience</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t choose the college - thought course would be taught at university</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t want to go to university but wanted to do a HE qualification / Course verified by a HEI</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement between school/colleges</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These comments match well with the answers to questions on why students chose to study HE in an FEC and what was most important to them. Students clearly value the reputation of the college as well as friendly, supportive teachers and a good environment.

We further looked at the results from the survey in terms of subjects studied. The subjects were grouped into 4 main areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject groupings</th>
<th>Number (%) of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts, design, media and communication (includes fashion, textiles, beauty therapy)</td>
<td>116 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and IT (includes law, housing, accounting, travel and tourism)</td>
<td>275 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>227 (27.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths plus Agriculture, Animal care and veterinary science and sports science)</td>
<td>206 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>4 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>828 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We also looked at the number of hours taught in each subject area. The majority of students are studying Business and IT courses PT (43% on these courses). In Education 81% of the students report less than 5 hours tuition. This may be because students may not consider observed teaching practice part of "contact" as defined in the survey. For the Arts and STEM subjects most students are on FT programmes.

In terms of qualification level the following were reported:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>% studying that level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation degree</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC/D</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BSc</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCGE/Cert ED including CTLLA/DTLLS/GDTLLS</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional qualifications</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSc</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition we analysed the level of courses studied and age variation:

**Analysis of level by age - percent within level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>18 – 20</th>
<th>21 – 25</th>
<th>Over 25</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA/BSc</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma L4</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FD</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HNC/HND</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSc</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGCE / Cert Ed</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Grad Diploma</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTLLS/DTLLS/GDTLLS</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Qualification - CIPD, CIH</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not specified / no answer</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24%</strong></td>
<td><strong>23%</strong></td>
<td><strong>53%</strong></td>
<td><strong>0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students under 25 are on degree and higher national programmes whereas students over 25 are studying for a wide range of qualifications with the majority undertaking professional or teaching qualifications.

7. **Conclusions**

This was a large scale survey of a representative range of students. The clear messages that emerge are:

- Students are making a positive choice to study at an FEC due to its location, its reputation and its specialism.
- Employers of PT students are selecting FECs for specific courses relevant to their business needs.
- Lower course fees are important but child care facilities are not.
- Good teaching, enthusiasm and knowledge about the subject and keeping up to date are most important to students; in addition, staff being approachable and good at explaining things is important.
- Students are less concerned about staff undertaking research, additional support, small class sizes and an HE environment, with least importance attached to impartial careers advice.
- The predominant outcome students wish to achieve is related to employment – opening a wider range of career choices, getting a good job or getting promotion. In addition younger students think meeting a wider range of people is important to them.
- Of less importance to students is having time to think about what they want to do, or having the experience of being a student.
• The majority of PT students receive up to 11 hours teaching; most FT students receive between 11-16 hours teaching but this is offset by some courses being predominantly based in the workplace.

• There is regular contact between teachers and students. The type of contact is not identified but the fact there is such consistency of responses indicates a high level of support being provided by teachers to their students over and above the taught hours.

• There are a wide range of HE qualifications studied in FECs including post graduate and professional qualifications

• The majority of students are studying for part-time (up to 11 hours teaching) Business and IT courses, many of which are professional qualifications

• Foundation degrees are the most frequently studied courses with 53% of over 25 year olds on this programme
### Annex 1

**Colleges attended by students responding to HE in FE student survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basingstoke College of Technology</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury College</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chichester College</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City and Islington College</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing Hammersmith and West London College</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucestershire College</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartpury College</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambeth College</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds City College</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loughborough College</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New College Durham</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New College Nottingham</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle College</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solihull College</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tresham College</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warwickshire College</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Nottinghamshire College</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester College of Technology</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Not Specified</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>828</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic Options, Operational Challenges

Appendix E: The FE College as a partner in economic development

1. Introduction

Colleges consider that they are key contributors to their local communities. In order to test this perception, we consulted a number of agencies and organisations. Some RDAs and SSCs were unable to respond within our timescale but we were pleased to discuss the perception of HE in FE with: North West Regional Development Agency, One North East, Yorkshire Forward, East of England Regional Development Agency, South West England Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands, Skills for Health, Skills for Logistics, Science, Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies, Textnet, Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network, Higher Futures and the Electrical Contractor’s Association.

The main purpose of engagement with these wider agencies has been to establish:

- How HE in FE is perceived by regional/national planning and support bodies
- The extent to which mechanisms are place to enable colleges to contribute to decisions concerning the provision of higher level skills
- Examples of good practice, e.g.: where RDAs/SSCs/LLNs and FECs have collaborated and made a difference through the provision of higher level skills education and training

2. Discussions

Respondents were asked to scope their contact with FE colleges (FECs) by setting out the mechanisms that enable them to understand what FECs do and how this is determined. The first three questions were:

*To what extent do you work with the further education colleges to develop the regional economic strategy? What structures are in place to enable you to be aware of, and influence the development of HE in FE in the region? How do you ensure awareness of both university and college HE provision?*

All agencies, with the exception of one employer organisation, confirmed that they worked with further education colleges in a wide variety of ways, with levels of involvement and contact ranging from “extensive” and “on-going” to “very little”.

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) worked with Colleges at both strategic and operational levels. They sought to develop regional economic strategies, employing specialist advisors in subject-specific areas in order to promote the development of focused sector intelligence relating to industry priorities. Effective communication was achieved through the Regional Skills Partnerships, which in turn implemented a range of strategic and operational groups. One RDA had seconded a college staff member to
work with the agency, offering a strengthened approach to the sharing and transfer of higher skills knowledge

Most RDAs confirmed that Regional Skills Partnerships bring together both funders and suppliers, including universities and colleges. An example of effective partnership working in the West Midlands can be seen through the regular engagement between the local college, the Association of Colleges (AoC) representative, the CBI and the Managing Director of Jaguar. Skills partnerships operated both formally and informally.

FEC/RDA engagement, in the main, happens as a result of collaboration with either a university partner or Sector Skills Council, or both and in some cases with Lifelong Learning Networks. All Regional Development Agencies confirmed they worked extensively with and through other support organisations such as “Business Link” and in some cases the regional University Association, focusing on higher levels skills brokerage. In the North West, the development of a database effectively utilised as a brokerage tool, “Discover HE”, ensures the RDA keeps an up to date overview of HE provision in the region.

Most RDAs confirmed that a major vehicle for ensuring continual renewal of economic strategies came through the provision of funding mechanisms, available to all providers of higher education. The North West Higher Level Skills Partnership (HLSP) is an example of how the RDA brokerage mechanism and the provision of funding enabled collaborative working between HEIs, FECs, Sector Skills Councils and Employers. Successful collaboration between all partners has resulted in the development of a specialist Foundation Degree in Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing for the textile industry.

In regions where there are relatively few universities and transport links are poor, RDAs confirmed that HE in FE is vitally important. Colleges become the means of ensuring that learners have access to the kind of higher education appropriate to their needs. This is clearly evident in the development of the University Campus around Suffolk College plus others in Southend, Peterborough and Harlow. These are all co-located around a college and all have been partly funded by the RDA.

All RDAs noted that, due to the variability of engagement with the skills agenda across their respective regions by some providers, employer-related organisations and employers, they had recently instigated projects specifically directed at building capacity in colleges.

The SEMTA National Skills Academy involves seventy eight training providers, seventy of which are colleges, and brings employers together with the specific provision they require, covering a range of higher skills such as productivity, competitiveness, technical expertise and leadership & management. One project in the north of England identified huge employer demand for specialist ICT training. Through the “ICT Vendor” project, it provided essential resources in the form of staff training, physical resources/equipment and accreditation to promote bespoke training to meet the needs of local and regional employers.

Support was also evident in the work of the small number of Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) and Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) who took part in our survey. They confirmed that their regional teams worked with the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) and local colleges, with one SSC actively engaging with the Association of Colleges (AoC). The SSCs drew attention to their work in support of the development of National Skills Academies through engagement with networks of further education colleges.
Lifelong Learning Networks were required to focus on three core aspects (IAG, Progression Agreements and the development of new ways of teaching and learning to aid vocational progression) as a condition of their funding. Partnership development has been achieved through specialist employer and education-focused staff working with colleges and universities in support of vocationally-focused curriculum developments. Progression Agreements to higher level study are enhanced through the provision of comprehensive Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services. In addition, curriculum mapping exercises have ensured that Lifelong Learning Networks developed a clear, coherent and comprehensive understanding of higher education provision within universities and colleges and were able to feed this back to employers.

Most LLNs committed substantial funding and human resources to the development of IAG Databases of Level 3 and Level 4 provision in all higher education partner providers. A key aspect of this facility is the ability for prospective learners to access all available agreed Progression Agreements and Progression routes.

Discussion with RDA, SSC, LLN representatives and further education staff suggests that HEI support in bid writing activities is crucial for most further education colleges. Specialist research expertise available in HEIs was seen as a key success factor for colleges, when they were faced with the need to engage with the extensive and often burdensome project criteria found in the competitive bid process. FECs acknowledged the expertise and capability of university research staff in contributing extensively to the development process.

There was variability between the experiences of some Sector Skills Councils in their engagement with FE colleges, but in the main, experiences were acknowledged as being positive. Whilst one SSC confirmed minimal engagement with the further education sector, others said that close working relationships had been developed over the past three years. As a result of their involvement as a partner in a bid for Regional Development Agency funding, one SSC noted the ability of colleges to respond effectively and successfully to the rigour and demands of competitive funding bid processes and the need to identify and engage with employers in the development of curriculum matched to industry needs. Another Sector Skills Council spoke with some admiration at the drive and determination of colleges in engagement with a number of regional and national initiatives, which has contributed to the development of a National Skills Academy.

All Sector Skills Councils confirmed they had developed effective mechanisms to ensure awareness of the curriculum offer across the regions utilising a variety of approaches. One particularly effective model highlighted the role of Regional Team Managers, whose direct contact with both universities and colleges ensured curriculum developments were closely aligned with employer needs.

Working across six English regions, through a “hub” and “spoke” framework, close collaboration between the SSC and a range of colleges including Middlesborough, Basildon & Thurrock, West Nottingham, Bridgewater, Hull, Wakefield and Gateshead, is leading to the emergence of a National Skills Academy for Logistics. A key focus of this collaboration is the development of curriculum from Entry level through to Foundation Degree, Honours Degree and Masters.
A similar approach by one SSC on behalf of Health sector employers has seen collaboration with colleges, the Association of Learning Providers (ALPs) and the AoC at both strategic and operational levels. Wider SSC engagement on behalf of the Health sector has included working with the university sector, Edexcel and the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) in support of aligning HE provision with NHS National Occupational Standards.

At the end of these discussions, three key themes emerged as important in the further development of higher level skills.

- Increased involvement at regional level by the AoC
- Development of the regional & national profile of HE in FE
- The sharing of good practice

Subsequent questions to respondents sought to gauge their opinion of the HE in FE offer, particularly in response to local employer demand. **What are your views of HE in FE, in terms of responsiveness to employer demand, raising higher level skills, economic well-being, widening participation and progression to higher education?**

All agencies noted that responsiveness by colleges was either good or positive but this was variable across the country. Lifelong Learning Networks appreciated the work of FE colleges who, they felt, strived to be responsive to employer need, but encountered difficulties when dealing with research and development.

Regional Development Agencies felt generally positive about the reaction of further education colleges and were aware that colleges engaged positively with regional agendas through, e.g., the evidence provided by Higher Level Skills Partnership funding opportunities. In the main, RDAs confirmed that colleges were able to respond more effectively than HEIs. It was felt that the often complex nature of the university faculty structure, which fostered an element of unilateral decision making, contributed to the institution’s inability to react quickly to the demands of the sector.

In Eastern region, the low carbon agenda offers opportunities for the coastal counties. The building of a new nuclear power station at Sizewell is underway and there is potential for the construction of wind farms. Both need L3 staff now and will need L4 in near future.

The RDA is active in trying to grow skilled staff in these sectors. It has encouraged Lowestoft College to offer all-through courses related to both industries, so that region can meet future labour needs from amongst the local population. (The College offers an Energy Engineering Fd which pulls through from apprenticeship and courses in Instrumentation and also IT, all of which are needed in the nuclear industries.) UEA will then offer a top-up in Nuclear Engineering. The main activity at the moment is constructing the power station, so there are skill needs which the RDA and FECs are working together to address. This will be followed by maintenance needs, which are higher order skills. The economies of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex are set to benefit from nuclear power.

Sector Skills Councils were in agreement that college responses to employers were generally good, but some degree of variability across all regions was evident. SSC respondents were concerned that colleges hadn’t picked up on the message that employers were looking for value-for-money solutions. It was accepted, however, that as
the decline in public funding continued, employers were more likely to contact colleges because they often found universities daunting.

One SSC confirmed it had engaged extensively with Lifelong learning Networks over recent years, leading on the management of collaborative forums in support of regional developments across a number of collaborative colleges and universities. These regional partnership networks also work closely with Work-Based Learning providers, ensuring that employer demand is tracked and responded to, particularly by colleges.

FE responsiveness is generally accepted as being better than that of universities. However, it was felt there was a need to be more adaptable to the business and employer base and develop a clearer understanding of industry needs.

Our next question was: **How do you perceive the college HE offer when compared to that of universities?**

In the main, RDAs confirmed that colleges were able to respond more effectively than HEIs. Sector Skills Councils said they didn’t have a real grasp of the curriculum offer in either HEIs or FECs in the regions, but confirmed they were impressed with colleges’ ability to collaborate in engaging with regional priorities.

Lifelong Learning Networks were clear that HE in FE had been developed over many years of providing curriculum focused on the needs of local and regional demands, hence the ability of colleges to respond to positively to the Government’s call for growth over the recent years. FECs worked closely with LLNs as a result of the allocation of additional student numbers (ASNs). The ability to respond effectively and rapidly can be evidenced by the significant growth in Foundation Degrees, many of which are delivered in FE colleges.

One RDA noted that colleges often have industry advisory groups and panels which are usually better developed and more effective than those in the HEI sector. University work is more national and internationally focussed whereas FECs are more effective locally.

One Employer Association expressed a profoundly different view however, effectively saying that employer engagement was limited in their sector. Both HE and FE appeared unwilling, or unable, to work with employers effectively, usually because engaging with an employer’s business involves too much compromise in the way that colleges deliver their products. Learners rather than employers are seen as the customer.

All agencies were less clear about how universities operated regarding higher level skills developments. One SSC felt that there wasn’t a great deal of evidence of successful achievements by HEIs in raising higher levels skills. The respondent considered that universities would only engage in meeting employer demands where they had significant academic resources to provide a comprehensive and well-researched mechanism for curriculum developments.

In recognising this potential barrier to regional economic improvement, one RDA, through its Innovation Team, set up the “Knowledge Rich” project which aimed to provide a “one stop shop” approach to employer engagement with the HE sector. This initiative provided employers with a streamlined, comprehensive overview of the sector, facilitating greater understanding of higher education training opportunities.
What more could you do to work with institutions to promote demand for employer provision? Do you think colleges are making a sufficient contribution to the development of higher level skills in the region?

Increased partnership working was seen as fundamental to achieving success in meeting the needs of employers and improving regional performance levels. SSCs, LLNs and RDAs felt that much more needed to be done in addressing the development of the "new industries" for instance low carbon and carbon capture. There was a need to strengthen advocacy as well as a brokerage system for referring employers to appropriate HE providers.

One RDA confirmed that its Principal's Group felt that greater promotion of the business case for higher-level skills was required, whilst another confirmed its Skills Funding Agency was targeting initiatives to facilitate planning and development activities in the area of the "new" industries. A Carbon Capture & Storage Project aligned with a new power station development, aimed to reduce the carbon footprint associated with coal usage.

RDAs were unanimous in their view that courses must lead to employment. Ideally this should be in the NinJ sector, where demand is not yet obvious and in Construction. Skills shortages are predicted in the construction sector as large numbers of worker are set to retire, leading to potential opportunities for colleges to play a leading role in training and skills development.

One RDA felt that there was still a mismatch in provision, as some colleges are still strategically driven by the supply of students and their subsequent demand for programmes which may not be aligned to specific regional priorities. Easier student access to impartial information and guidance (IAG) would serve to broaden their horizons.

Related to this, another RDA suggested that both FE and HE in FE needs to be more focussed on the needs of employers. FECs face a dilemma over who they cater for – school leavers or employers - and where their market should be and what curriculum is relevant and leads to employment. The comment was made that there appear to be far too many FE leavers who are hairdressers whereas the RDA would like to see greater focus on the STEM subjects and related areas. They would also prefer to see far greater emphasis on entrepreneurial skills and the employability agenda, as well as the skills required for self-employment.

RDAs suggested that Colleges should develop greater awareness of the bigger regional picture when developing their institutional mission and vision statements and their Higher Education Strategies.

Do you have any examples of good practice?

2.1 All RDAs and SSCs noted the impact of National Skills Academies on local economies and the role that FECs continue to play in their development.

2.2 NWDA Higher Level Skills Partnership

2.3 One North East Progression Challenge Fund
This project enables partnerships led by FE colleges but including the region’s Work Based Learning (WBL), Higher Education (HE) sectors and employers to work collaboratively to support the progression of young people from Level 3
2.4 Yorkshire Forward RDA - Skills Funding Agency Project
Carbon Capture & Storage Project – taking carbon out of coal. Also the “Knowledge Rich” project - one stop shop employer referral initiative

2.5 The SW RDA has specifically supported and invested directly in a number of colleges e.g. Bridgewater College’s Nuclear Skill Academy which responds to the RDA high priority area of nuclear energy development.

2.6 EEDA is committed to the NINJ agenda and sees this as a way forward for the local economy. The existing links with Lowestoft College reflect this, and the financial commitment that it has made to the five new University Campuses signal its support for HE in FE.

3. Conclusions

- Further Education Colleges work effectively with a wide range of planning and development agencies
- In regions where there are relatively few universities and transport links are poor such as the SW and parts of the Eastern region, HE in FE is vitally important in ensuring that learners have access to the kind of higher education appropriate to their needs
- Colleges must be able to access regional funding mechanisms: bid writing skills are important
- Sector Skills Councils appear to be more aware than RDAs of the HE curriculum offer across the regions
- Regional Development Agencies consider that Colleges engage positively with regional agendas and confirm that they respond more effectively than HEIs to both employer demand and regional priorities
- Colleges are perceived to be closer to business and to have a better sense of economies of scale (i.e. being able to deliver for business at a good commercial rate) than universities
- Colleges are forward-looking. They are gaining an increasing reputation for being “futures orientated” by reacting positively to the “new” industries, with examples of innovation in low carbon developments
- The University sector is perceived as being driven by other factors including ensuring recruitment on to current programmes: it appears less responsive to the immediate needs of employers
- In the North East, it is recognised that Colleges have a positive approach to addressing the low skill base of the region. They contribute to economic well being through job creation across all sectors and help meet regional targets
- Employers are looking for value-for-money solutions and FECs must offer these. They need to be more adaptable to the business and employer base and develop a clearer understanding of industry’s needs
There is a need to strengthen advocacy and brokerage for employers.

4. **Recommendations**

- RDAs to work more extensively with colleges in order to align curriculum developments to the Regional Skills Strategy and the demands of employers.

- Using its regional structure, the Association of Colleges (AoC) should take the lead in promoting partnership working between Colleges, Universities, Regional Development Agencies, Sector Skills Councils, Employer Associations and Employers.

- As part of this role, the AoC should promote the regional and national contribution of HE in FE in the development of the “new” industries.

- Colleges are advised to look at their strengths, review their strategic capabilities and develop increased capacity in curriculum developments aligned with sector priorities.