



**Exploring scholarship and scholarly activity in college-based
Higher Education**

A report by the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges

Acknowledgements

In 2013, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) made research funding available to the Mixed Economy Group of colleges. The Education and Training Foundation, LSIS's successor body, has continued this support. Our remit was to examine the current arrangements surrounding scholarly activity in those FE colleges which also deliver HE and to draw up a Practice Guide which would be of use to the wide range of colleges currently providing HE in FE.

As a result of this funding we have been able to draw up three potentially standalone documents. Part 1 offers a literature review of the subject and leads into our main research output, the results of a survey of scholarly activity amongst 60 colleges. Part 3 is the Practice Guide which emerges from the survey. We are grateful to LSIS for enabling us to carry out this work.

Many people contributed to this research. We are grateful to all of the college staff who took part in our survey, some of whom subsequently provided examples of practice which is successful in their context. We appreciate their willingness to discuss their approaches with other colleagues in other colleges who may be trying to resolve similar issues.

A number of professional bodies also provided information about their approach to scholarly activity. This enabled us to compare definitions and expectations between those concerned with Prescribed and Non-Prescribed Higher Education and added to our information base.

Our Focus Group of practitioners helped to shape the Practice Guide. As a result it is a short document with hyperlinks and contact details, rather than a longer handbook with case studies.

Finally, our Reference Group offered a constructive overview of all three components of our work. We are grateful for their measured approach, which ensured that we maintained an appropriate balance between evidence and debate.

Madeleine King,
Dr. Jane Davis, Carl Flint and John Widdowson, CBE
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Part 1. Context and Issues

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1. Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the role of research, scholarship, scholarly activity and continuing professional development in supporting the delivery of programmes of HE in FE colleges. In doing so it reviews the definitions of these terms used by some universities, colleges, regulatory and professional bodies and considers how they have changed (or been interpreted) in response to changes in the HE landscape over the last three years.

1.1 Refreshing the Perspective

The overview takes as its baseline two reports produced by the Mixed Economy Group of colleges (MEG) in 2010. It notes the changes that have taken place with regards to HE policy over the last three years and then raises a number of questions which will be pursued in more detail across the next stage of our research.

Whilst only 10% of all undergraduates study for their Higher Education in an FE college, HE in FE is a well-established part of the HE landscape. It is recognised as being distinctive and as making a major contribution to widening participation in HE. All political parties support the growth of college-based HE, partly in recognition of its distinctive nature, partly because it is perceived as offering better value for the public purse. In addition, the current Coalition government is keen to enable private institutions to receive public funding in order to deliver HE qualifications. All political parties, however, are clear that whilst the providers of HE may become more diverse, the quality of their product must meet stringent quality assurance standards. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) remains the uncontested guardian of HE standards and its expectations, set down in a number of documents, remain the baseline for the award of Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) and Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) to any provider of HE in the UK.

As we will see in later sections, scholarly activity on the part of teaching staff is an expected component of the HE environment but no one definition exists which both succinctly describes this activity and is also accepted as such by all providers. Of the many in circulation, most are predicated on a traditional university-based setting and thus do not transfer easily to HE delivered in FE. (Or, it may be argued, a more diverse range of alternative providers.)

As the nature and validity of college-based Higher Education continues to be of interest to policy makers and practitioners alike (Parry et al, 2012), the concepts of teaching informed by research and scholarly activity continues to gain prominence. In their introduction to the report by the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges, "Scholarly Activity in Higher Education delivered in Further Education" King and Widdowson (2010, p3) suggested,

“there is an emerging need for a new dimension to both our definition and our approach to what constitutes appropriate activity by teachers in supporting the delivery of high-quality, vocational skills-based HE.”

The report reviewed the definitions in use amongst the MEG colleges, looked at those used by partner universities and examined the debate between universities and colleges and private providers such as BPP. The report proposed a definition of scholarly activity in HE in FE:

“An activity or activities with the potential to:

- create or affirm knowledge and/or expertise of a subject or discipline
- develop or enhance understanding of a subject or discipline
- develop or enhance methodologies for the delivery of a subject or discipline

To be accepted as R&SA this activity must be shared with peers, disseminated across the institution and possibly beyond and archived in ways which are easily accessible to all staff.”

Four research questions formed the basis of the 2010 research activity, underpinning the development of recommendations that were to provide

“a first step in giving shape and direction to the development of an approach to scholarly activity which satisfies the requirements of validating bodies, quality assurance agencies, employers and students” (King and Widdowson, 2010 p20).

The research sought to explore:

- How is scholarly activity defined in HE?
- Are existing definitions of scholarly activity fit for purpose in the developing HE landscape, including HE delivered in the context of the FE college?
- Do they need to be redefined or supplemented to apply to vocational HE delivered in FE?
- How can we measure the impact of such activity upon teaching, learning and the student experience?

The recommendations from the study addressed issues of both policy and practice. This included the need for political recognition of the value of ‘vocational scholarly activity’ (p21), professional and industrial development, and the development of teaching skills; the need for ‘equal and direct access to development funding’ (p21); the call for further development of communities of practice and ‘teaching-related scholarly activity’ (p22). The recommendations for colleges included the need for locally-published, supported and monitored definitions of scholarly activity appropriate to the professional development of staff teaching HE.

Later in the same year MEG produced what still remains one of the largest-scale surveys of English HE in FE, including a report on the CPD needs and sources of

support for staff teaching HE in a college setting. In “Strategic Options, Operational Challenges” King et al concluded that

“...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.”

The report concluded that

- 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

The report was produced as the full extent of the global recession became known. In the same year a Coalition government was elected which set out to address the economic difficulties besetting the country, with emphasis being put on the need to generate a high-skills economy. In short succession, the funding arrangements for HE were radically overhauled and a more market-based approach to the delivery of Honours and Foundation degrees was introduced. This has renewed the debate around scholarly activity. It has also raised questions about how strategic colleges are, in terms of their approach to the delivery of high-quality HE, in a much more competitive market.

This paper seeks to establish the extent to which definitions, expectations and practice have changed, with particular reference to the recommendations of the original reports.

2. Policy Perspectives

2.1 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

The QAA publishes sectorial expectations for engagement with research and scholarly activity both in its criteria for Foundation Degree (or Taught Degree) Awarding Powers and in Section 3 Learning and Teaching of The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (“the Quality Code”).

The Quality Code avoids the use of the terms ‘research’ and ‘scholarly activity’ in its preamble, suggesting:

“Effective learning and teaching activities and practices are enabled through, and depend on, staff who are appropriately qualified for their role and who engage throughout their career in continuing professional development, in the evaluation of their

practice, and in developing their understanding of their subject and the learning process as it relates to their subject.”

[p5]

However, the ‘Indicators of Sound Practice’ within this section are more specific. Indicator 3 states, “Learning and teaching practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.” The explanatory text expands on this expectation:

“Scholarship and research lie at the heart of higher education, but their nature will depend on the academic level of the programme, the subject area and the provider or providers of the programme. Scholarship may include conventional research (discovery of new knowledge), innovative application or integration of existing knowledge, for example in professional practice, or the study of learning and teaching processes and practices ... In subject areas such as clinical medicine, music or performing arts among others, or where learning is taking place in the workplace, evaluation of professional practice directly informs student learning. The requirements of professional, regulatory or statutory bodies are also taken into account where applicable.”

[p13]

In contrast, Indicator 4 publicises the expectation of appropriate levels of qualification and continued professional development, “*staff are expected to have the necessary skills and experience to facilitate learning in the students they are interacting with, and to use approaches grounded in sound learning and teaching scholarship and practice.*”(p14)

The Code touches on the impact of subject, level and provider context on scholarly activity:

“For example, scholarship in support of the Foundation Degree is likely to involve an employer-driven focus and a tightly structured approach to learning, reflecting the vocational orientation of the qualification. Bachelor’s and taught master’s degrees may also have a vocational orientation, as in the case of business, law and nursing for example, but they are also likely to have a greater subject focus and academic orientation, reflected in more open-ended enquiry and the development of students as independent learners.”

The guidance provided for colleges seeking FDAP or TDAP makes explicit reference to ‘scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff’ (2013, p5). The advice notes that:

“The very nature of Foundation Degrees means that they have a clear vocational orientation which is based on the presumption of close interaction with employers to establish their wants and needs. Given the distinctive nature of the Foundation Degree, keeping up with employer trends is an important form of professional development. However, the positioning of the Foundation Degree as a higher education qualification calls for staff to have the necessary knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline area. This reflects a concern to integrate academic and work-based learning and to ensure an appropriate balance between intellectual and practical skills. The evidence submitted by an applicant needs to provide confidence that the staffing base is appropriate to support Foundation Degree students and enable them to demonstrate integration of, and balance between, theory and practice as part of their learning experience.”

The text looks for the establishment of processes that underpin the monitoring of scholarly activity through the review of learning and teaching (including observations). Potential evidence includes publication, presentation, professional or commercial activity (exhibitions, reports, contribution to practice, speaking at professional events, consultancy etc.) as well as the demonstration of more personal skills based development. Whilst the distinction is clear in terms of the absolute and differentiated requirements in relation to TDAP and FDAP, the emphasis is put on the purposeful approach to scholarly activity, of all types discussed, and its impact on the development and delivery of curriculum and the learning experience.

A strategic approach to “*the development and maintenance of a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community*” (p6) is anticipated. The range and nature of institutional expectations of scholarly activity should be clear and should reference both individual professional development and that appropriate to the enhancement and assurance of the community as a whole. The particular reference to the need for an inclusive community is further underpinned by explicit reference to both Full and Part Time staff, the mechanisms for the allocation of resources to support implementation of the strategy, and the promotion of a shared understanding of scholarship as a concept, in addition to its outcomes and impact.

This latter is important. Minutes from an early meeting of the QAA HE in FEC Policy Advisory Forum (2009) illustrate that at an early stage in the movement towards FDAP QAA recognised that there was a need for a shared understanding of the term “scholarly activity.” The Minutes record that members wanted to use the outcomes of review and scrutiny as part of the training and development of reviewers as well as a vehicle to share good practice and clarify uncertainties.

2.2. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

In March 2009, HEFCE proposed that all FE colleges which offered Prescribed HE, however funded, should produce an HE strategy. The intention was that this would become a benchmark document for both QAA and HEFCE and thus a key part of the HE in FE planning process. The HEFCE Circular March 2009/13 “Request for higher education strategies from further education colleges” sets out the expectations of HE strategies, which were to be developed and submitted to the Funding Council by FE colleges with Higher Education provision. The strategies were required to cover all

provision at or above Level 4, a departure from the usual focus on Prescribed HE. No similar request was made of HEIs.

HEFCE's expectations of the role of HE in FE are set out in Annex A of the Circular. The authors reiterate the policy indicated within an earlier consultation letter (HEFCE 2006/48) concerning the role of HE in FE. The document makes plain that there is recognition of sectorial diversity but nonetheless requires of FECs that they, "ensure that staff involved in HE provision are appropriately qualified, have opportunities for scholarly activity and are supported by adequate learning resources, in order to ensure a high quality learning experience for the learners" (p7).

Further explicit direction follows in the indicative content for HE Strategies. The listing indicates the need for "more specific information about the planned changes, or a brief statement about the existing position and how it is being taken forward unaltered, regarding ... continuous professional development and scholarly activity, which includes professional updating" (p8). However, no detailed definition of scholarly activity is offered in the document.

In parallel to the approach taken in the QAA publications, there is a requirement for a strategic approach to continuous professional development and scholarly activity, with an implicit acceptance of a wide range of activities. The emphasis is, again, upon the provision of a "high quality learning experience". The Circular reflected the circumstances prevailing at the time: HE appeared to be secure, with no funding cuts in view, and college-based HE was growing. The priority in 2009 was to ensure that FE in HE developed on a planned basis with due regard to other provision in the same locality. Scholarly activity was not an overt priority at that point.

2.3 The Requirements of Professional Bodies

Whilst the QAA and HEFCE have regard to Prescribed HE, the professional bodies are concerned with ensuring that individuals meet the standards required to practice in a particular profession. Prescribed HE (i.e. an Hon degree, Fd or HND/HNC) may be a stepping stone to a licence to practice but the professional bodies also require additional practical experience and often success in their own qualifications in order to reassure themselves that individuals are competent to practice. In some cases they offer alternative routes to a professional qualification via their own examinations.

There are also expectations on those who teach these higher level qualifications. Based in colleges and universities, teaching staff will have been required to meet the demands of an external approving or awarding body, some of which will have concerned CPD or scholarly activity. A wide range of approaches to these two areas was taken by the various professional bodies that were contacted as part of this research.

There is much current debate within the professions around the nature and purpose of CPD. Many professional bodies are reviewing their approach to the matter, most notably the legal profession, which in June 2013 published the outcome of the Legal Education and Training Review. Having studied a number of parallel approaches to CPD both within and without the profession, the reviewers concluded that the link between CPD

and professional competence was not automatic, that informal CPD was as important as more formal, regulated CPD and that there appeared to be two approaches to CPD across most professions, namely one which focuses on compliance and another where the focus is on personal development.

In relation to this latter, the reviewers noted that

“ A related distinction can be seen between regulatory schemes which record and regulate inputs (hourages, participation in mandatory elements) and those which seek to achieve the much more difficult task of measuring and recording outputs (learning, impact on personal practice.) Evaluation, where it occurs, may be limited to a questionnaire focusing on quality of delivery rather than impact on practice (and if such impact is assessed in the questionnaire it will only, by definition, be immediate impact, see Muijs and Lindsay, 2008, p.196.) In the latter study, (p.201) which tested a possible model for more in-depth evaluation of CPD activity, evaluation questionnaires used in assessment of teachers’ CPD were found always to ask about “participant satisfaction” in 35.2% of cases, but about participants’ use of new knowledge and skills in only 6.2%”

In reviewing the perceived purpose of CPD across a range of professions, the authors note that “*The existence of a mandatory scheme (for CPD) may be seen as an appropriate regulatory defence*”. The general public expects their lawyers, engineers, accountants, etc. to maintain high standards of competency and thus regards the existence of a mandatory scheme of CPD as evidence of a means of ensuring at least minimum competence. Amongst professionals, there was a sense that individuals were best placed to decide on the areas of work that would benefit from additional attention and that they could be trusted to do this without having to log hours of CPD.

Some professional bodies, such as The Institution of Engineering and Technology have no formal requirement to evidence CPD: a voluntary opt-in scheme is in place. This suggests that 30 hours of CPD per year is appropriate and lists as qualifying activities training courses, work experience, academic study, volunteering, attending events and seminars and self-study. As in many other professional bodies, a random sample of scheme members is then selected to have their annual CPD records checked by a team of suitably qualified volunteers.

The Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx) and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), like a number of other professional bodies, are now moving away from an hours-based approach to one of reflective study linked to impact measurement. Most professions would probably agree with the sentiment of the CILEx definition of the purpose of CPD, namely: “*To maintain, improve and extend the skills and qualities necessary for the proper performance of professional and legal duties and compliance required by IPS, to ensure confidence in the professionalism and competence of CILEx members.*”

However, there appears to be little agreement over what constitutes CPD as opposed to scholarly activity. A review of professional body websites carried out for this overview revealed some overlaps in definition around reading professional journals, attending conferences and courses but also examples where there was no definition of CPD (e.g.

the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants) and others, such as CIEH which veer towards scholarly activity and research by including *“implementing research into issues and problems arising out of current practice which cannot be solved by existing knowledge and skills”* alongside general updating activities.

A similar range of variation is found with regards to the expectations of those who teach HE level professional qualifications. Amongst the majority, the view is that where entry to the profession is at graduate level, the expectations of QAA and the institution itself (usually a university) are sufficient to assure the professional body that staff have the requisite level of expertise to teach their qualifications.

Exceptions to this include CIEH, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), where there is a strong preference for those teaching at HE level to be qualified and current in their membership of CIEH, RICS and CIPD and also to be undertaking scholarly activity. In their interpretation of this phrase, all three professional bodies veered more towards the "applied research" definition than the "maintaining currency" approach followed by most HE staff who teach in FE colleges. Similarly, the Chartered Institute of Builders seeks assurance, during institutional accreditation process, of a strategic approach to programme development that contributes to knowledge and best practice, links with industry and/or research projects, and engages with knowledge transfer. There is an expectation that lecturers engage with scholarly activity, in the form of active research and continued professional development, and that this is formally supported at faculty or institution level.

Research-led teaching was an expectation, in these cases, with the “dual professional” seen as the ideal person to do this. In reality, there was often a tendency for university staff, as a result of their contractual basis, to focus on the theory rather than current practice.

In conclusion, the professional bodies appear to seek the same ideal combination in those who teach their qualifications as do college Principals. However, most also display a similar lack of clarity over where CPD ends and scholarly activity begins.

2.4 Capacity-building: the work of other agencies

2.4.1 The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)

Until 2013, LSIS was a key player in the promotion of college-based research and offered a number of important action research programmes with partners. These always included a focus on HE in FE matters and this area of college work was a priority within “Strategic Intentions 2011-2014”, the Service’s final planning document. With a strapline of “Research for the sector by the sector”, it developed and delivered an extensive research strategy and practitioner research programme with an accompanying programme of support, particularly in regard to building research capacity. It organised research conferences which showcased and promoted practitioner research and published a research Newsletter (*“Inside Evidence”*.) During its time, LSIS provided a means of professional development

for both senior staff and practitioners in delivering HE in FE colleges. In doing so, it often worked with other organisations which offered a supplementary expertise.

LSIS worked with the Leadership Federation for HE over the delivery of a three-module programme aimed at senior managers wishing to know more about college-based HE. Separately, the LSIS Research Development Fellowships (RDFs) supported practitioners to carry out their own action research projects. First introduced in 2009, they provided the sector with small-scale, practice-based, research studies which could be used to improve teaching and learning. The Service funded Practitioner Research Programmes for some years and in 2011-2012, a number of these focused on HE in FE matters. The case studies which emerged from this plethora of activity were summarised in [Inside Evidence](#) and published on the Excellence Gateway. They include a review of the PRG projects which focused in HE in FE colleges.

2.4.2 The Institute for Learning (IfL)

The IfL was formed in 2002 and is an inclusive professional membership body for teachers, trainers, tutors and other professionals in the Further Education and Skills sector. Membership of the Institute is subject to formal qualifications.

Since April 2012 the Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status conferred by the IfL is recognised by the Department for Education as being equivalent to a teacher in the school sector holding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Once an individual registers with the IfL there is an ongoing commitment to CPD with a formal annual requirement to submit the number of hours of CPD that have been completed. The Institute recommends a minimum of 30 hours CPD per year and publishes an annual summary of how members use their CPD time. However, there is no national agreement over the nature or the level of this expected CPD.

Whilst “Scholarly Activity” is not a term used in IfL publications, “Practitioner Researcher” is categorised and promoted. In September 2012 the IfL undertook a pilot in partnership with SKOPE (the Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance) at the University of Oxford aimed at developing research and publication skills for participants. The first research papers to emerge from this exercise are now available on the IfL website.

2.4.3 The Learning and Skills Research Network (LSRN)

Established in 1997 by enthusiasts from FE and HE, LSRN is a network rather than an institution. Its aim is “to help people, in going about their professional practice, engage with research and development”. It seeks to do this by:

- demonstrating the value of research and development
- helping build the capacity of the sector
- exploring ways of increasing the influence of findings.

After a decade of strong support by FEDA and then LSDA, it reorganised in 2006 as a voluntary association of individuals to which a range of sector bodies lent active support. In this form it has regional conveners, regional meetings, national research events, a website and newsletter. In recent years the principal funders and providers of services have been LSIS, NIACE, Pearson College, IfL and City & Guilds. Administration, planning and regional coordination have been the action of volunteers.

2.5 A Perspective from Private Providers of HE

2.5.1 BPP University

BPP Holdings is part of the Apollo Group Education Network and has developed 16 University sites in England. In September 2007, BPP University made history by becoming the first publicly-owned private company in the UK to obtain degree awarding powers. The Privy Council's approval of degree awarding powers and the subsequent status as a University College enabled the company to expand its operations in the HE marketplace significantly. In 2013 BPP University College met the criteria for full university title and became BPP University in August 2013.

BPP's credibility has been underpinned by positive Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Institutional Reviews, the latest being 2012. QAA identified two areas of good practice from a national perspective:

- (1) The process of planning, design and approval of new provision
- (2) The approach to supporting and developing staff.

Support for research and scholarship is clearly made in all BPP University documentation, with a particular focus on applied scholarship. The point is specifically made that BPP does
Not carry out blue skies research. The University describes scholarship as

“ the application of the most current knowledge of a discipline or professional specialism to broader activities and practice, communicated in ways which are validated by peers and influence others beyond the organisation. This definition is especially relevant in professional disciplines such as law, accountancy and tax, business and health”.

In defining scholarship, BPP takes the view that “...scholarship includes developing and updating curriculum, publishing, attending and giving papers at conferences and external work engagements with academic or professional institutions”.

BPP encourages scholarly activity amongst its employees, aiming to produce scholarship outputs which ensure evidence-informed learning and teaching alongside evidence-based practice which supports the professions they serve.

Asked to sum up the University's approach to scholarship, Sally-Ann Burnett, BPP Deputy Dean, Learning and Teaching and Director of Scholarship and Research, said "*Ensuring that all our faculty give scholarship priority, in our applied context, means that learning and teaching is relevant to the professions that we serve and that our graduates are employment ready.*"

2.5.2 Ifs University College

The ifs School of Finance is a not-for-profit professional body and a registered charity. It began life as the Institute of Bankers in 1879. It was the first professional body to make its professional award a degree and the first to be able to award its own degrees. In 2013 it was granted the title University College.

Research and Scholarly Activity is perceived in a more traditional way than is the case at BPP University. Ifs describes a commitment to scholarly and research activity as being central to its academic community. The University College's Research Policy provides a rigorous set of Key Principles underpinned by statements of what is understood by research and scholarly activity. Ifs offers the following definitions, which parallel those of Boyer (1990).

Pedagogic research

Pedagogic research involves activity and investigation leading to the enhancement of the theoretical and/or conceptual understanding of the process of learning and teaching; the experiences of the teacher and learner; the impact of the environment, context or mode of study of learners; and the interrelationships between the teacher and learner and the learning process and outcome.

Discipline-based research

For the purpose of the HE Research Assessment Exercise, the broad definition of research is: 'the original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction'. Within the context of the research policy, discipline-based research is distinguished as that relating to a particular subject or cognate area, such as economics or accountancy, and as distinct from pedagogic research as defined above.

Programme development research

Programme development research refers to the systematic collection and analysis of data to provide a greater understanding of subject matter and to inform the design of products. In the context of the ifs, programme development research is undertaken in either primary (ie directly from respondents) or secondary form (by analysis of published information) so as to inform the development of educational programmes.

2.5.3 Regent's University

Founded in 1984 Regent's College became only the second UK Private University in March 2013. The not-for-profit college gained degree awarding powers in 2012 and was granted University title in 2013 from the Department Business, Innovation and Skills. It is the largest provider of undergraduate education outside of the state system with 4,500 students. It is twice the size of the University of Buckingham (the first private university) which gained its title in 1983.

Like Ifs, Regent's University adopts a traditional approach to the delivery of HE. The Research & Enterprise section on its website signposts visitors to an extensive range of scholarly activity, research and consultancy opportunities through the University's research centres, specialist-interest groups, publications and events listing. The University plans to invest £30M over the next five years to achieve research-degree awarding powers (RDAP) by 2020.

These three private providers offer different perspectives on the style of HE delivery by the private sector. Their approaches echo the stance taken by a range of college and university-based providers but are notable for the clarity of their definition and purpose.

3. National Perspective on Good Practice

3.1 The Higher Education Academy (HEA)

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) sets out to provide the national focal point for the HE community in order to enhance the quality and impact of learning and teaching. It achieves this by recognising and rewarding excellent teaching through a number of initiatives and also provides the HE community with a professional recognition service, networking and development opportunities, and career advice and support.

The HEA provides Teaching Development Grants to stimulate evidence-based research and encourage innovations in learning and teaching that have the potential for sector-wide impact.

With respect to continuing professional development, the HEA provides an accreditation service for CPD delivered by higher education institutions. Accreditation provides external confirmation that institutional provision is aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework. The UK PSF provides a general description of teaching and

learning within the HE environment. The framework is underpinned by the Dimensions of Good Practice Guide and it is here that reference is made to aspects of scholarly activity. A further section focuses on the use of evidence-informed approaches, the ability to draw on and contribute to many sources of evidence and to use them to inform teaching and learning practice.

Recognising the different setting of college-based HE, the HEA has devoted a section within its Resource Centre to HE in FE and has included a section on scholarly activity which contains a number of useful documents.

3.2 The HEFCE Good Practice Guide

“Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges” (HEFCE, 2009) was provided as an updated Good Practice Guide for colleges, being largely informed by practitioners across the HE in FE sector. Whilst much has changed in the HE landscape, this Guide is still often the first port of call for college-based HE staff.

An entire chapter of the Guide is devoted to staff development of different types and covers topics that range from the need for institutional strategies and policy, issues in relation to conditions of service of staff within colleges, the need for academic and professional qualifications, enhancement of teaching and learning, and subject updating.

The subject of Scholarly Activity is given particular attention, the range of appropriate practice being acknowledged. In one of the few attempts by any agency to define scholarly activity, activities suggested for inclusion in the term are:

- keeping up to date with the subject
- curriculum development, particularly foundation degrees, often with HEIs
- curriculum development that involves research
- updating ICT skills
- taking higher qualifications – masters, doctorates and teaching qualifications
- consultancy to industry and other agencies
- industrial secondments or work shadowing
- involvement with SSCs
- research and publications
- practitioner/applied research
- personal development – action research and reading
- attending staff development events within the college
- attending conferences and workshops externally.

[p166]

The majority of the activities listed under Scholarly Activity have appeared earlier in the Guide in the overarching chapter on staff development and yet the need for the formalisation of such activity under this descriptor appears to have merited the additional section. Certainly the text continues to reference the QAA guidance for those colleges applying for FDAP.

The Good Practice Guide celebrates the “*commitment and enthusiasm*” (p157) of colleges and the inventive forms of activity that support staff development in its wider sense. It brings to the fore the benefits associated with specific, disaggregated HE staff development funding and emphasizes the integral nature of the assumed equivalence with university provision in, firstly, the teaching allocation and by implication the higher fee levels.

“When the HEFCE Development Fund for Learning and Teaching was introduced for directly funded colleges, it made a significant difference to the amount of staff development available, not least by funding the time required. This funding was used to support activity for subject and support staff, including studying for higher degrees, industrial secondments, developing links with HEIs, personal development and specific training, especially in ICT. Although the funding did not continue to come into colleges separately and has been embedded in the mainstream grant, it is the same funding.” [p158]

The subsequent removal of this explicit targeting of the monies potentially lessened the external pressure on colleges to set aside development time for their higher education practitioners. This adds to the debate around the terms and conditions of staff teaching HE in an FE college.

3.3 QAA Good Practice Publications

The QAA publication “Outcomes from IQER 2008 - 10: Staff development” (2011) is suggested as a supplementary report to the guidance for those seeking Foundation or Taught Degree Awarding Powers. The report is intended to identify good practice which has been noted by the review team during the process. In this context, good practice is defined as “*practice that the IQER team regards as making a particularly positive contribution to the college’s management of the student learning experience*” and as such considers both activity and impact. Although the report focuses on the wider remit of “staff development” or “continued professional development”, particular attention is paid to scholarly activity, both in the preamble to the report and in a designated section of the document.

The introductory section of the report refers to a number of publications in order to provide a context for the review teams’ findings. The authors reference the report “Scholarly Activity in the context of HE in FE” (HEA, 2006) and highlight the reported lack of contractual obligation in the case of staff employed at FECs to undertake research, asserting that scholarly activity is centred around the updating of subject knowledge. This is helpfully contrasted by consideration of the evolutionary development of scholarly activity within colleges and partnerships as indicated within “Scholarly activity in higher education delivered in further education: a study” (MEG, 2009).

Considerable variation of practice is noted, and in cases applauded, within the wider document, which provides examples that include and extend well beyond the updating of subject knowledge. However despite acknowledgement of forward movement in this domain, the reviewers noted a lack of strategic and inclusive staff development

specifically designed to support those teaching on HE programmes. There was much reliance on the commitment of staff. This appears to be at odds with the QAA recommendations of a strategic approach to scholarly activity noted earlier in this overview:

“Scholarly activity is an important aspect of the staff development expected of staff teaching on higher education programmes, and it attracts some specific comments in the IQER reports, with slightly fewer identifications of good practice than recommendations for action. Where good practice was identified, it related to the commitment of staff teaching on higher education programmes to scholarly and research activity with the aim of enhancing the student learning experience ... most recommendations in this area concerned suggestions to colleges that they develop and implement policy and practice to encourage staff to engage with scholarly activities.”
[p10]

The report concurs with the HEA suggestion that development activities are “in many cases natural extensions of staff development carried out by staff who teach on further education programmes” and suggests that scholarly activity is “more embryonic activity in further education colleges than in higher education institutions” (p11). It also agrees with the concept of scholarly activity as evolving practice as indicated in the report of the Mixed Economy Colleges (2009).

Although the QAA report was published in 2011, data collection took place within two years of the HEA report and in parallel with that of the Mixed Economy Group. Thus there is little expectation that the report would bring to the fore any new developments within the sector.

The importance to QAA of the continued development of scholarly activity in its broadest sense was highlighted by its regular inclusion on the agendas of the HE in FE Policy Advisory Forum and its work with the HEA and staff from the Plymouth Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in providing development workshops. Papers presented to the Policy Advisory Forum (2010) describe the points considered in the workshops, and include topics with continued relevance for sectorial debate and discussion:

- The definitions of scholarly activity (and associated terms); the significance of the existing definitions; and the extent to which colleges should be encouraged to provide and justify their own definitions, given the diversity of HE provision in FEIs.
- The scope of scholarly activity. Those attending were keen to include ‘developing FD programmes’ and ‘participating in validation boards’ within the compass of scholarly activity.
- Once defined, the need to find a mechanism for recording the types of activity undertaken by staff, and the impact they might have on the student experience.
- The difference in the number of class contact hours required in FEIs and HEIs and the implications of this for scholarly activity in FEIs.
- The limitations on what can be achieved in colleges with very small HE provision

3.4 Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)

The investment of £315 million in the establishment of Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning underpinned a very significant strategic drive by HEFCE to raise the profile and underline the importance of the teaching and learning agenda.

The HEFCE publication April 2005/18 presented the expectation:

“The purpose of the CETL initiative is to reward excellent teaching practice and to invest in that practice further in order to increase and deepen its impact across a wider teaching and learning community. We encouraged institutions to define their own areas of excellence, evidenced by scholarly practice and a successful track record of excellence in teaching and learning outcomes, and to demonstrate how their identified excellence is reflected in and advanced by the proposed focus of the CETL.”

[p1]

Despite directly funded colleges being eligible to apply for CETL status, none were included, although nineteen collaborative CETLS were established. Notably only the HELP (Higher Education Learning Partnerships) CETL established by the University of Plymouth named its further education partners within the collaborative CETL.

The HELP CETL provided a number of awards to HE in FE practitioners from the partner colleges to provide support for research or continuing professional development. Award holders were appreciative of the financial sponsorship in the context of what they perceived to be a more challenging HE in FE climate. Having undertaken small-sample research, Turner et al (2009) reported:

“Perceptions of their college’s commitment to developing higher education, however, were mixed. Some questioned whether the needs of higher education had been properly recognised, leading to inappropriate and inflexible requirements and insufficient time for higher education activities (e.g. scholarship and research). Others thought their college

had developed an appropriate infrastructure and environment, although there was a lack of clarity about support and funding for scholarly activity and research.” [p1]
HELP provided the University of Plymouth Colleges with a Scholarly Activity Toolkit, basing its definition of scholarly activity on those of Boyer (1990) and the staff development activities suggested in the HEFCE Good Practice Guide. Staff were required to take responsibility for engaging in continued professional development:

“Within UPC and each partner institution there are mechanisms to take forward your interests and scholarship. What is crucial is that you are able to take advantage of these opportunities by demonstrating that you are aware of your own developmental needs. Through reflection on your own scholarly activities you will be able to recognise these and subsequently seek out the appropriate mechanisms to achieve these. Identifying where your scholarship priorities are will enable you to take control of your CPD.”

This clear emphasis on the need for the practitioner to be proactive in consideration of their own development needs provides a degree of balance to the view that the terms and conditions of teaching staff within HE in FE are the main disincentive to scholarly activity. A common feature amongst many colleges working towards FDAP is the creation of a culture wherein teaching staff feel confident to discuss their CPD needs and to work with senior managers to develop a solution that benefits both HE staff and students.

The work of HELP extended beyond its own collaborative partnership and, whilst the resources and website are inactive, the team behind the activity and the nature of their continued engagement with scholarly activity are acknowledged.

3.5 The Perspective of the University and College Union (UCU)

In 2011 - 2012 the UCU undertook research to analyse the working arrangements of staff teaching HE in an FE college setting. The resulting paper (September 2013) reflects the variable approaches taken to delivering an HE offer in a predominantly FE setting, including those surrounding scholarly activity undertaken by teaching staff. Whilst the paper offers no view on the distinction between CPD and scholarly activity, it highlights the expectations of QAA and HEFCE with regards to the delivery of HE. Senior college managers and HE teaching staff must work together to ensure that these expectations are met if the college HE offer is to retain credibility and viability in a competitive market. The report notes that colleges have evolved a range of methods of building an element of flexibility into standard FE teaching contracts in order to enable HE staff to meet these expectations.

4. The Research Perspective

4.1 The Context

In considering ‘Teaching, Staffing and Scholarly Activity’, Parry et al (2012, p52) bring to the fore a number of important issues for colleges delivering higher education. Unusually the authors address both Prescribed and Non-prescribed HE, together with the funding

complexities (both direct and indirect) and expectations associated with mixed economy status. They reference the report of the Mixed Economy Group (2010), highlighting outcomes such as the mixed level teaching timetables of staff, “*the broad range of professional development activities undertaken by staff which was specifically addressed to their higher education teaching*” (p53), and the lack of a definition from HEFCE as to the nature of scholarly activity:

“In planning their higher education provision, HEFCE expected all colleges to ensure that staff were appropriately qualified, had opportunities for ‘scholarly activity’ and were supported by adequate learning resources. No definition was offered of scholarly activity but, in general terms, it is taken to cover any or all of the following: keeping up-to-date with the subject; curriculum development involving research; studying for postgraduate and higher degrees; providing consultancy to industry and other organisations; undertaking industrial secondments or work shadowing; pursuing disciplinary, pedagogic and practitioner research; and leading staff development events.”
[p54]

Whilst Parry et al (2012) suggest that much scholarly activity undertaken is ‘*ad hoc*’ (p53) there is acknowledgement of the fact that staff teaching within colleges have been required to undertake 30 hours of professional development, a situation colleges have had to monitor until fairly recently. Whilst the authors infer that such activity might be at odds with the uptake of scholarly activity, IfL activity is nonetheless not prescriptive in nature and requires associated reflection, as suggested by the HELP CETL.

The issues raised by Parry et al (2012) are reflected and extended in peer-reviewed papers that directly attempt to tackle the issues associated with scholarship in mixed economy colleges. Key concerns such as institutional culture, conditions of service for teaching staff and the nature of scholarly activity are illustrated below.

4.2 Institutional Culture

The nature and culture of mixed economy colleges is held accountable for the differences between that considered scholarly activity within the university sector and that supported or undertaken in colleges (Lea and Simmons, 2012; Harwood & Harwood, 2004). Lea & Simmons (2012) assert that the corporate accountability of employees of FE colleges works to counter the freedom of expression they associate with academic life within the university sector, and the dangers of managerialism associated with the ‘*target oriented and funding driven*’ (p21) culture of Further Education is picked up by Feather (2011). Neither corporate accountability nor managerialist behaviours are exclusive to college-based Higher Education. Since 1998 there has been increasing discussion of impact of managerialism within HEIs (Deem, 1998) and the associated perception of a curtailment of academic supremacy within the structures and processes of universities. The issue is perhaps a matter of degree and of institutional expectation according to the remit of each. Lea and Simmons (2012, p181) comment:

“At the heart of the cultural differences between HE and FE is the fact that universities are autonomous institutions in a way that FE colleges are not ... at the heart of universities is an autonomy that FECs can never aspire to as they are currently constituted. While FECs are owned by their corporations, universities are constituted in relation to the Privy Council; traditionally FECs award other organisations’ qualifications, universities award their own qualifications; FECs have to work with external validating bodies to construct their curriculum offer, universities are validating

Creasey (2013) prefers to take a less segregated view of higher education provision, suggesting that as “some institutions are concerned with both FE and HE it may be more useful to consider the post-compulsory education sector as constituting one continuum and seek to identify where each institution sits, HEI or FEC...HE is a contested concept and the HE sector is not homogenous” (p44/49).

4.3 Conditions of Service for teaching staff

Lea and Simmons (2012) consider the nature of learning at higher levels, asking ‘if HE in FE is to develop the kind of culture that HE demands, we need to ask if the right kinds of conditions exist in FE for this HE-ness to flourish. That is, that the conditions exist to take students beyond the fixed and into the realms of the contingent’ (p184). They reflect that the higher teaching loads and mixed level timetables of many staff teaching college-based Higher Education (Harwood & Harwood, 2004; Lea & Simmons, 2012; Creasey, 2013) may create a barrier to research and scholarly activity, certainly as it is understood in a traditional university setting.

Davy et al (2006) expound the benefits of partnership working that supports the development of communities of practice that supplement formal arrangements for scholarly activity, ‘*These informal networks can cut through formal procedures to jump-start initiatives and meet extraordinary deadlines*’ (p18), thus embracing the benefits of collaboration applauded by QAA.

4.4 The Nature of Scholarly Activity

Lea and Simmons (2012) initially suggest that research might be considered as the generation of new knowledge and take the view that this type of activity would be difficult for teaching staff within a further education college to undertake. They assume that such (unfunded) activity would be unwelcome in that context. Creasey (2013, p43) extends the debate to include scholarly activity but notes that “*Research ... means generating new knowledge ... scholarly activity exists to underpin teaching*”. Whilst Creasey remains unconvinced of the place of HE and scholarly activity within an FE setting, Lea and Simmons (2012) then go on to consider the work of Boyer and thus indicate their empathy for the outcomes of the MEG Report (2010):

“Paradoxically perhaps, there are grounds to be cautiously optimistic about an FE research agenda, and for a number of reasons. First, if research is reconceptualised as ‘scholarly activity’ and we utilise Boyer’s four scholarships (Boyer 1990) in the context of

HE in FE, several potential rich avenues begin to present themselves...The scholarships of integration and application, particularly in the light of the notion of knowledge transfer, and the importance that is increasingly being given to research having beneficial impacts on its participants, would seem to offer lots of scope for scholarly work to take place in FE contexts.”

[p188]

Recent debate within the pages of the Times Higher Education magazine has centred around the concept of practice as research (7 March 2013.) Writing about the overlap between the professional arts practitioner, ever keen to develop their skills and extend their own knowledge, and the demands of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) Till notes that Art schools and Music and Design Conservatoires are often drawn into a process which was never designed for their sector. (“*As a result many artists teaching in universities are now putting themselves through elaborate contortions to justify their work as research according to the new criteria.*”) However, he also notes

“I believe that artistic practice can be research. The Italian painters of the Quattrocento who investigated the artistic potential of the newly established geometry of perspective; the composers who around 1600 unwittingly invented opera as an outcome of scholarly research into the performance practices of Athenian drama; Stanislavsky’s development of his “Method” for acting; Braque and Picasso working alongside each other to forge Cubism; Schoenberg’s development of Serialism: all were undoubtedly engaged in systematic projects of artistic research.

These examples all have three things in common: a sense of common endeavour, sometimes collaborative and sometimes competitive; a clear relationship between theory and practice - whether the practice is employed to test a theoretical hypothesis, as was the case with the composers who invented opera in response to the theoretical speculations of classical theatre scholars, or whether the theory is parallel or post facto, as was the case with the group of lesser artists around Picasso and Braque who theorised Cubism as it evolved; and a belief that artistic innovation involves issues of cultural meaning and value rather than merely technical concerns. Such work would certainly meet the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s criteria for research: it was led by “research questions, issues or problems”

His views attracted a level of comment, many of which offered more modern examples of a professional pushing the boundaries of practice such that new techniques were discovered, honed and polished for the benefit of other professional practitioners.

5. Practitioner Activity

The continuum of activity that is considered to be “scholarly” appears to have changed little during the past three years. For example, practitioners are continuing to undertake published research, participate in practice or consultancy, develop pedagogical approaches and skills, meet the requirements of professional statutory bodies and study for academic or professional qualifications. The barrier between CPD and expected teacher professional activity and scholarly activity is a particularly permeable one. However, the ability to seek FDAP and TDAP has had an impact on senior managers and their HE teams. Institutions

appear more aware of the need to have structures in place which support a distinctive entity called scholarly activity.

The original survey of colleges undertaken by the Mixed Economy Group (2010) took place at an early stage of the cycle of QAA visits under IQER. At this point the articulation of 'staff development' as a requirement in the review handbook suggested a qualitative openness to the entire spectrum of activity, despite the mention by HEFCE of the term 'scholarly activity' in its consultation on HE in FE (HEFCE 2006/48). Those colleges using IQER as a precursor to an application for FDAP presented, even at that stage, a more embedded approach to scholarly activity. For example the Summative Review for Newcastle College found as good practice:

“there is a focused and comprehensive approach to staff development, including an extensive programme of development events and active College support for research and scholarly activity; together these contribute to ensuring that the teaching staff profile is well matched to the needs and expectations of higher education” [QAA, 2009]

The review methodology for college-based HE has required a need for a stronger strategic or institutional emphasis on 'scholarly activity' (QAA, 2012) ahead of the more recent Guidance on Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (QAA, 2013). This emphasis has been supported through the production of research reports such as that of the Mixed Economy Group (2010), and associated dissemination and discussion through (though not exclusively) the work of the HE Academy, the AoC and the HELP CETL. Thus college HE staff are more informed and engaged with academic perspectives and positions that underpin the wider definitions of scholarly activity.

New College Durham and Newcastle College, having achieved Foundation Degree Awarding Powers, have demonstrated strategic engagement with scholarly activity and a strong focus on the learning experience of the student. New College Durham offers this definition of scholarly activity:

“Scholarly activity involves a process of continuous review of professional currency at an appropriate level and, where relevant, pedagogical practice. Through this review process practitioners can ensure that in the teaching and learning relationship with their students the learners develop contemporary subject knowledge, understanding and skills, including graduate skills and can benefit from current approaches to good practice in higher education programme delivery. In this way value is added to their learning, and their employability prospects are enhanced.” [New College Durham, 2012]

The development of an explicit Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Scholarship Strategy at Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education highlights the impact of institutional support, through practice, monitoring systems and a dedicated staff team of HE Teaching, Learning and Scholarship Fellows. Scholarly activity is clearly defined by GIFHE as “*Activity which develops or promotes staff expertise in their discipline*”. This distinguishes it from research, which is viewed as ‘*Original enquiry into a matter of academic or professional interest resulting in publication in peer referenced journals etc.*’ City and Islington College, too, are taking steps to embed an ethos of scholarly activity within the

college. It is this holistic, institutionally-supported approach for activities on the broader continuum of research and professional development that underpins the development of the strategic adoption of scholarly activity. In some colleges such as Blackpool and the Fylde, joint student/teacher research is undertaken as part of the HE curriculum.

As indicated in a previous section, private providers of HE also contributed to this Context and Issues paper. Many are sector-specific: BPP University College of Professional Studies Ltd, which took part in the earlier 2010 survey of scholarly activity, ifs School of Finance and Regent's College each offer a curriculum firmly based in the accountancy, business and law professions. Whilst the precise definitions of scholarly activity varied, each made a direct link between this and the development of professional practice. All three have Taught Degree Awarding Powers.

The debate around the nature of scholarly activity in an FE college setting is not a uniquely English one. A similar discussion is taking place in Australia. In "Towards a culture of scholarly practice in mixed sector institutions" Williams et al (2012) begin by noting that:

"Some TAFE (Technical and Further Education) institutes have now been developing and delivering higher education courses for several years. Yet recent research findings and audit reports indicate that the scholarly culture required to support their higher education provision is still at an embryonic stage of development (AUQA 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Goulding & Seddon 2011; Wheelahan et al 2009b). Thus, as sectorial boundaries continue to blur in the emerging 'tertiary education' sector, scholarship has surfaced as a 'hot spot' of reform. This is particularly evident in mixed sector VET institutions where the dominant legacy of VET culture and practice confronts new expectations about scholarly practice rooted in higher education traditions."

In this relatively new world of HE, Australian college-based HE teachers have come to value senior management support for their scholarly work. Comparing examples of scholarly practice and institutional dynamics, Williams and her colleagues note:

"The findings reveal overlap in some of the features of VET and mixed-sector scholarly practice, such as industry focus, the emphasis on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning, and individualised ways of building knowledge. But they also reveal overlap between the distinguishing features of mixed-sector and higher education scholarly practice, such as recognition of the role of critical reflection and of literature in situating scholarly practice within theoretical frameworks and traditions. Thus scholarly practice in mixed-sector institutions can be characterised as a hybrid form that reflects the hybrid nature of the institutions in which it is produced." P29

Previous sections have illustrated that the research activity underpinned by this Context and Issues paper is situated in a changing climate for college-based HE. Significant drivers at both national and local level have encouraged a more strategic approach to institutional engagement with scholarly activity. Defining what this is, maintaining and enhancing its quality, and sharing good practice continue to inspire debate and will be the subject of our main report.

6. Conclusion

This paper provides the background to a hypothesis that within HE in FE, scholarly activity has been underpinned by a greater level of strategic attention across the last 4 years. However, the extent to which this view is supportable remains open to question. It also raises the prospect of an extended definition of “scholarship” in the context of a curriculum which reflects the higher level skill needs of employers and the employment aspirations of students.

It is suggested that the drivers for this development have been regulatory in nature. The recognition given to good practice and the increasing opportunities for college based higher education, within a market driven HE economy, may become the new enablers of such development. Our future research will now explore these questions:

- Are extended definitions of scholarly activity evolving alongside the changing HE landscape? If so, what should be included?
- What definitions and interpretations are currently in use in HE in FE?
- To what extent is strategic engagement with scholarly activity realised within college based higher education?
- What are the drivers for change?
- What factors have supported strategic development?
- Are there any significant barriers?
- What impact has this had on the current range of practice?
- To what extent has this impacted on the learning experience of students?
- What expectations do HE in FE practitioners have of LSIS's successor body, the Education and Training Foundation?

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Website Links

BPP University <http://www.bpp.com/>

Ifs University College <http://www.ifslearning.ac.uk/AboutUs.aspx>

Regent's University <http://www.regents.ac.uk/>

The Chartered Institute of Builders www.ciob.org/

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health www.cieh.org/

The Chartered Institute of Legal Executives www.cilex.org.uk/

The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants www.cimaglobal.com/

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development www.cipd.co.uk/

The Institution of Engineering and Technology www.theiet.org/

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors <http://www.rics.org/uk/>

The Education and Training Foundation <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/>

The Higher Education Academy <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition>

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>

The Institute for Learning <http://www.ifl.ac.uk/membership/member-benefits/new-benefits-for-2013-14>

Mixed Economy Group of FE colleges (MEG) www.mixedeconomygroup.co.uk

LSIS: <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/research> and
<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/631>

LSRN www.lsrn.org.uk/

QAA www.qaa.ac.uk/



Exploring scholarship and scholarly activity in college-based Higher Education

Part 2. The Survey Report. The role of research, scholarship, scholarly activity and CPD in supporting the delivery of college based Higher Education.

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Introduction

The Part 1 paper in this three-stage project highlighted the need to explore the nature and usefulness of the definitions of scholarly activity that are currently in place within college-based Higher Education. It also brought to the fore the importance of considering the extent of strategic engagement with scholarly activity and its application within institutions. It suggested the need to explore the drivers and barriers to the strategic development of HE, the effect of these on policy and practice, and the impact of scholarly activity on teaching and learning. Paper 1 also referred to the strategies and practice that have worked to support the delivery of college-based HE and provided recommendations for future action on the part of colleges and national organisations alike. Here in Part 2 we set out the results of a survey that was undertaken to explore the issues which emerged from Part 1.

1. Research Methodology

The enquiry took place across April – May 2013 and was made up of four stages: an on-line survey, a set of voluntary interviews undertaken with college representatives who had been responsible for completing the survey and a discussion with professional body representatives around their expectations with regards to the scholarly activity that they expect from staff who teach their higher-level qualifications. A Focus Group will scrutinize and review the initial research findings and advise on the content of Part 3, which will offer examples of scholarly activity in practice.

A wide range of colleges contributed to the on-line survey. Liaison with senior staff in the Association of Colleges, the 157 Group and the HEA enabled the research to include colleges other than those in membership of the Mixed Economy Group. A total of 257 FE colleges offer Higher Education courses in England¹ and the survey was of interest to many staff, including teachers in three Australian colleges and one institution in New Zealand. (Their responses broadly paralleled those of their UK colleagues but were not included in the analysis.) English respondents included specialist Art and Design and Land Based colleges. Once duplicate or largely incomplete responses were eliminated, 60 colleges (about 23% of all those offering HE) provided the core data from which our findings are drawn. Where duplicate responses were received from colleges, the return provided by the most senior member of staff was selected for inclusion.

The questionnaire was designed to enable the collation of background information about each institution in terms of the size and nature of its Higher Education provision, embracing both Prescribed and Non-prescribed HE and both Full and Part-Time study modes. It set out to investigate the way in which colleges defined scholarly activity, embedded such activity within strategic planning documents or college policies, and then implemented it. Impact (as opposed to follow-up) measures were of particular interest.

Twenty five interviews were undertaken after completion of the survey, involving participants from colleges of various sizes and with a range of provision and practices. These were drawn from respondents who had indicated a willingness to take part in a telephone interview once the formal survey had closed. The discussions provided an opportunity for

¹ AoC Key facts 2012

participants to share further details about their approach to scholarly activity and each one normally lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Interview transcripts were then coded and a thematic analysis undertaken. Where themes emerged, investigative analysis was then reapplied to the complete data set as provided by the survey responses. Whilst most interviewees appeared more familiar with Prescribed HE than Non-Prescribed, all had a broad sense of how their institution met the need for higher education/higher level skills in their geographical areas and the expectations of employers, QAA, partner HEIs, etc. that accompanied this.

Representatives from six professional bodies contributed their views on scholarly activity in terms of their expectations with regards to staff teaching their higher level qualifications and the annual professional updating (CPD) expected of their members. This served to support the wider perspective on the nature of scholarly activity across all forms of Higher Education.

2. Findings from the Enquiry

(a) The nature and size of provision

The data provided by the survey respondents illustrated wide variations in terms of the scope, nature and size of HE provision delivered in the FE sector. It included some of those new to the sector as well as more established providers.

Whilst the highly-variable combinations of Full and Part Time, Prescribed and Non-Prescribed provision make absolute comparison of provision difficult, the number of Full Time students at each institution appears to be a key driver for establishing the status of HE provision within the largely FE environment of most colleges. The survey records 25 colleges with more than 500 Full Time Higher Education students (regarded as a large volume of HE provision), 10 colleges with between 301 and 500 Full Time students (medium volume), and 25 colleges with 200 or fewer Full Time students (a small volume of provision).

This illustrates the increasingly diverse nature of HE in FE in terms of size and nature of provision.

(b) Defining Scholarly Activity

As noted above, the survey results suggest an association between the number of Full Time HE students and the approach taken to scholarly activity. Colleges which indicated that they provided a definition of scholarly activity were more likely to be found in the medium/large volume provider categories: the use of an HE Strategy to further embed such a definition, or indeed to provide an implicit definition was predominant only where there were larger numbers of Full Time students. [Table 1]

Provision	Number of colleges	Percentage providing a definition of Scholarly Activity	Percentage defining Scholarly Activity within HE Strategy
Small : < 300	25	40%	36%
Medium: 301 - 500	10	60%	40%
Large: >500	25	80%	76%
Total	60	60%	53%

Table 1. Volume of FT HE students and definition of scholarly activity

However, only 35 of the 60 colleges have a definition of scholarly activity. Of these, 7 use a definition provided by a partner HEI. Those who do not have one reported that they are under no pressure to develop a definition by partner universities. (In some cases it was suggested that the HEI saw scholarly activity as being the element that they brought to the partnership.)

This proportion is broadly unchanged from the earlier MEG study of 2010², when half of the responding colleges had evolved a definition of scholarly activity. The remaining half reported that this was not regarded as a necessity by either the college senior management teams or the partner universities. However, all 2013 respondents (as in 2010) considered it to be central to the delivery of high quality HE. As we will explore later, this raises the question of how, without a clear definition as a starting point, an activity perceived as a determining feature of HE can be nurtured and developed, and its impact on teaching and learning assessed.

It can be inferred that HE strategies do not appear to have survived as a free-standing, on-going planning and delivery mechanism beyond the first few years of being a HEFCE requirement. The majority of colleges reported that scholarly activity is embedded in other strategies (most usually the staff development policy) and/or other policy documents. [Fig. 1]. Two of the smaller providers advised that there was no definition, embedded or otherwise of scholarly activity, whilst a further six colleges with small provision did not provide a response to the question. This current analysis therefore suggests that scholarly activity is seen as being part of staff development policy in the majority of responding institutions.

² Scholarly activity in higher education delivered in further education: a study by the Mixed Economy Group

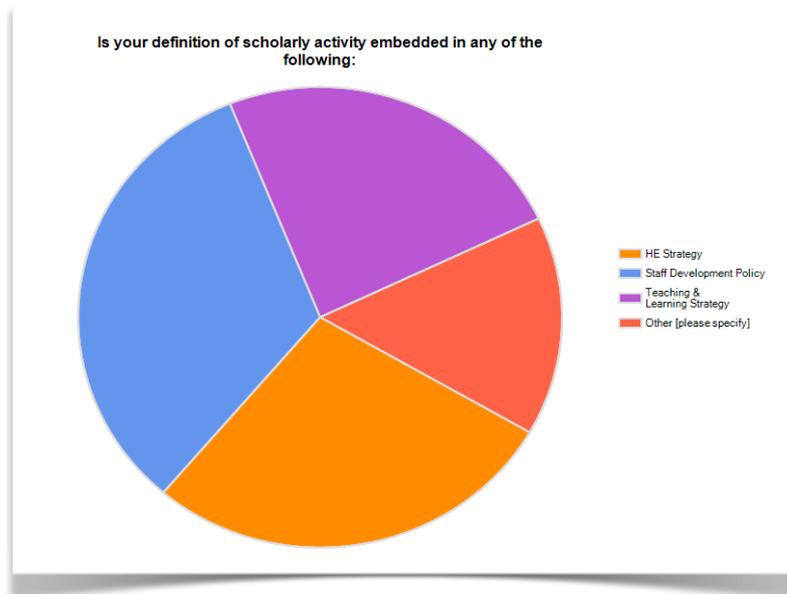


Figure 1. Location of definition of scholarly activity

A range of definitions emerged from amongst the colleges which have evolved a description of scholarly activity. There is probably a broad consensus that scholarly activity has to involve something new, either by creating new knowledge or applying new knowledge to an existing situation. One respondent, asked to distinguish between CPD and scholarly activity, commented that:

“There has to be a big element of self-development, rather than having to do it as a license to practice. If they have to do it, it isn’t scholarly activity. The activity must add something new, it must come out of a “what if...?” moment. That’s the breakpoint from ordinary updating.”

One college was specific about what was and what was not included in their definition: asked to define scholarly activity, it offered:

“...a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.We exclude routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques, and we also exclude the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research. However, we include the development of teaching materials where these embody original research, and where these might be applicable to HE institutions beyond the College.”

Some colleges offered clear published definitions that distinguished scholarly activity “Activity which develops or promotes staff expertise in their discipline” from research: “Original enquiry into a matter of academic or professional interest resulting in publication in peer referenced journals, etc.”

Others provided lists of activities which were viewed as scholarly activity, of which the following is typical:

Type of Scholarly Activity	Examples of Activities
Curriculum development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> designing/reviewing HE courses and/or modules
Conference/seminar attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College HE Conference HE in FE or pedagogic conference/seminar subject conference/seminar
Conference participation - delivering a presentation or workshop at a conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the College HE Conference HE in FE or pedagogic conference/seminar Subject conference/seminar
Consultancy and professional practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> practising professional that relates to area of teaching (e.g. counsellor, artist, veterinary nurse, website designer) film or music production participation in professional body meeting (e.g. RCVS)
Exhibition of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> exhibit of art or jewellery at gallery or museum.
Subject updating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reading journals, etc peer review of journal article
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> training provided by awarding body on curriculum developments or quality methods training by equipment supplier on use of new/updated equipment College-based training on pedagogic developments or sharing of good practice.
Research - investigation and reporting of specified question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> effect of feed on horse racing performance? what is the best way to peer review HE lessons?
Action research - using work/practice to investigate and report a specified question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can the provision of generic feedback improve students' future assignment work? is multiple choice questioning a valid HE assessment method?
Industry/Employer liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gaining knowledge (and specific examples) of latest industry advances, techniques or methods through industry visits, etc. industry secondment recorded discussion with employer around specific topic
Publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> publishing research findings in a peer-reviewed journal or appropriate internet site authoring a book, chapter or other publication
Personal and professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> working towards teaching qualifications or higher level qualifications management training
External verification/examining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being an external examiner for other HE provider

More generally, a particular development has been the move away from an understanding of the term “scholarly activity” as only having an emphasis on research and intellectual updating:

“The college has put the emphasis back to Scholarship from Research in order to challenge assertions made by academics from HEIs, on validation Panels, that staff at the college were not engaged in activities that underpinned their teaching. The move was a

positive one towards the term scholarship (away from the excluding concept research) and was designed to embrace, include and celebrate the work that colleagues are engaged in, rather than collude with ideas that it was something of less value and worth.”

Some colleges made reference to the definitions supplied by Boyer (1990) who defined scholarly activity as encompassing

- The scholarship of discovery: includes original research that advances knowledge;
- The scholarship of integration: involves synthesis of information across disciplines, across topics within a discipline, or across time;
- The scholarship of application (also later called the scholarship of engagement): goes beyond the service duties of a faculty member to those within or outside the university and involves the rigour and application of disciplinary expertise with results that can be shared with and/or evaluated by peers;
- The scholarship of teaching and learning: the systematic study of teaching and learning processes. It requires a format that will allow public sharing and the opportunity for application and evaluation by others.

However, few colleges cited Boyer as the starting point in their deliberations about scholarly activity. In all cases, the approach to this matter appears to have evolved from an analysis of current circumstances and current resources, rather than a deliberate move to mould a college policy to an academic construct. Publications from national agencies, such as the QAA and the HEFCE, indicate an embracing of this wider understanding of scholarly activity. (See QAA 2013³, HEFCE 2009⁴) In parallel, a significant number of colleges have reported a more strategic engagement with the nature of scholarship, in particular with activities which could be referred to as the scholarship of application. However, this is more a case of parallel evolution than the focused application of Boyer's proposition.

Conversely, a number of respondents suggested that it was not necessary to have a written definition or statement about scholarly activity as long as policies and practice allow and encourage scholarly activity to take place. Others made the point (previously noted in the 2010 report) that it is virtually impossible to ascribe a direct link between scholarly activity, quality of curriculum and student success rates.

“The impact of scholarly activity on TLA is often very weak, which undermines the case for it.”

“Measuring the impact of staff doing scholarly activity is almost impossible because of the subjective nature of the activities”

However, where colleges are on the journey towards a formal process of quality review or applying for FDAP or TDAP they acknowledged that QAA expectations assume that there is such a link and that formal processes are in place and activities are logged.

³ Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: Expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding powers and for Taught degree-awarding powers.

⁴ Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Policy, practice and prospects. HEFCE 2009/05:

More pragmatically, it was noted by some colleges that in a difficult financial environment, not having formal scholarly activity policies and procedures can suggest that the resources needed to deliver them are unnecessary. A number of colleges are actively setting about writing policies to justify and secure what is currently established (in terms of contractual teaching hours, scholarly activity budgets and allocations) and to provide a case to establish a budget/provide remission/secure opportunities for scholarly activity.

All of the interview respondents were upbeat about scholarly activity, seeing it as something which was intrinsic to being an HE teacher. Despite pressures on time and budgets, at no stage did any respondent suggest that staff could not or would not make time to undertake scholarly activity.

The earlier report (King & Widdowson, 2010) suggested three categories of scholarship:

- Category 1 - Scholarly activity as research, intellectual updating, academic development;
- Category 2 - a broader context of keeping up to date with the curriculum, industrial secondment;
- Category 3 - scholarly activity that meets the strategic aims of the organisation (for example, the improvement of learning and teaching).

The definitions of scholarly activity emerging from the enquiry undertaken in 2013 suggest continued alignment with Categories 2 and 3 (King & Widdowson, 2010) as institutions continue to develop their curriculum and seek improvements in learning and teaching. There is, however, some greater emphasis on a definition of scholarly activity that accords with national guidance (QAA, 2013; HEA, 2012) as colleges prepare for reviews (IQR/HER), look to achieve FDAP/TDAP and/or work to engage with the HEA's UKPSF.

Alternatively, it could be said that there are three pragmatic drivers for the continued survival of scholarly activity in the setting of an FE college – an external imperative directed by QAA, an operational reality developed by practitioners such as those working in MEG colleges, and a more philosophical view which aspires to apply Boyer's approach to an HE in FE setting.

(c) Forms of Scholarly Activity

The survey sought to establish whether the opportunities for teaching staff to undertake scholarly activity within a college differed according to their role. The researchers wanted to find out if there was a distinction that applied to those teaching on HE programmes (whether Full Time or as a subset of their timetable) and those who only taught Further Education. The responses indicated that teachers of all types of provision have the opportunity to undertake scholarly activity albeit that the nature and extent of that activity was variable [Fig. 2]. The only distinguishing feature to emerge was the lack of involvement by FE staff in curriculum design (a possibly not-unexpected result) or publication. In 40 colleges, staff who teach Non-Prescribed HE are also encouraged to undertake scholarly activity, suggesting that most colleges involved in the survey adopted a whole-college approach to scholarly activity. Sixteen colleges advised that staff were

involved in activities not listed in the survey, citing examples such as engagement with journals, attendance at conferences and exhibition work as further types of scholarly activity.

The survey did not specifically explore the position of PT staff who were still active in their original profession. However, two specialist Art and Design colleges took part in our survey and the interviews which followed. In both cases the majority of staff employed in the colleges are Part Time and actively pursuing professional careers in the creative arts. Both respondents made the point that their students gained significantly from the on-going professional development of their tutors, many of whom were recognised as experts in their fields. In both colleges the development of scholarly activity amongst teaching staff was regarded as a priority. This was partly to raise their profile in a competitive HE environment but also to illustrate that current professional practice could of itself be developmental and lead to new techniques and new ways of teaching and learning.

Further work is needed to look at the contribution made by PT staff to scholarly activity within their colleges. Many are still active in their original subject and are thus continually updating curriculum content as a matter of course. The perspective of PT teaching staff may therefore be different from that of their FT colleagues.

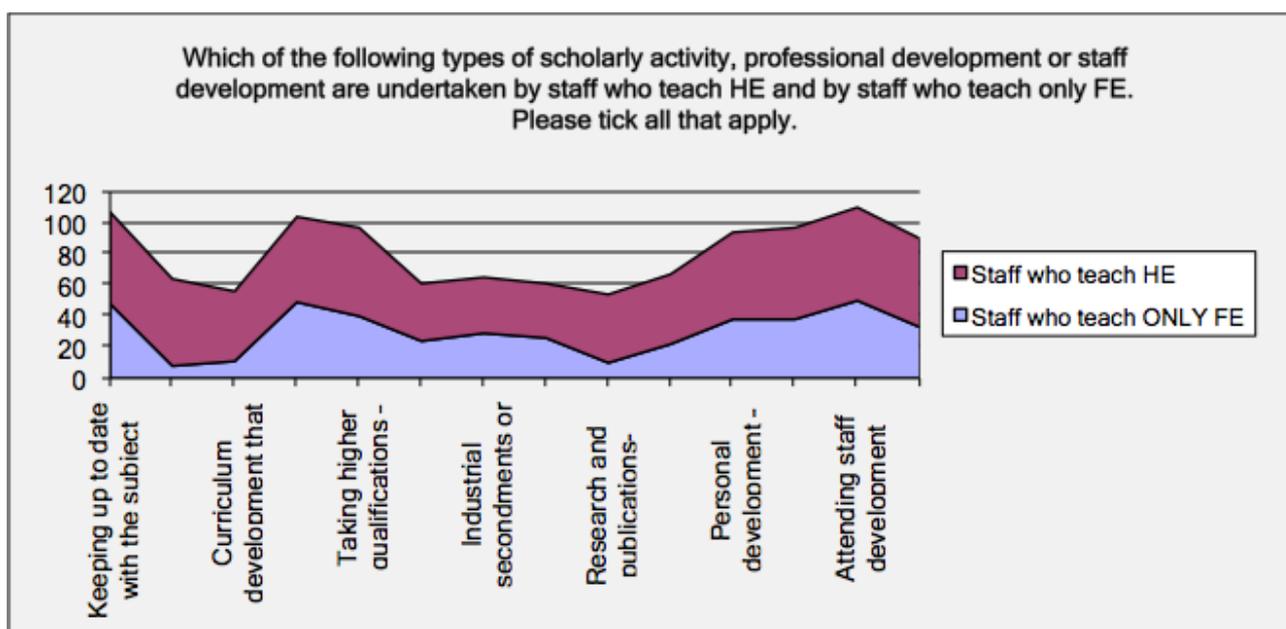


Figure 2. Scholarly Activity as undertaken by FE and HE staff.

Further examples of scholarly activity were gathered during the interviews, highlighting engagement with 'live briefs' or similar industry based projects (often with the involvement of students), action research, collaborative work with staff at the partner university and project work funded by LSIS, JISC or the HEA.

Whilst many colleges were able to illustrate a definition of scholarly activity by reference to a menu of high-level activities, nearly 50% of respondents quoted a general list which ranged from current updating to action research. As we will see later, this tendency to blur

the normal expectations of a teaching professional with activity that might be regarded as CPD as opposed to higher-level work is unhelpful to the argument for an established and, more importantly, distinctive, culture of HE in FE.

(d) External support/drivers for Scholarly Activity

Some 57% of respondents are engaged in scholarly activity with the support of one of their partner HEIs or with professional associations such as HEA, IfL etc, a survey statistic that broadly aligned with that reported during interviews (12/25). Six respondents also made reference to support available through engaging with LSIS and a further 4 underlined the importance of teacher education/training in supporting scholarly activity. There were also 5 reports of colleges seeking support for projects from JISC. Four large providers of Higher Education, seeking or having gained awarding powers, reported a wider awareness of the bidding processes, and reported the benefits of engaging with multiple agencies. However, the nature of this engagement and its relationship to the college definition of scholarly activity is unclear.

The value of institutional and individual engagement with the HEA emerged from the interviews, with 4 interviewees describing the recent move to institutional membership of the Academy. Four colleges for whom FDAP was a key priority indicated a more established relationship with the work of the HEA, describing the way in which their college was working to support staff engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework. Indeed, the greatest driver for strategic recognition of scholarly activity was reported as being the guidance from and compliance with the requirements of the QAA. Ten of the interviewees highlighted the importance of scholarly activity in relation to an application for Taught/Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP/FDAP) or the impact of their preparations for and experience of IQER or HER.

(e) College Structural support for Scholarly Activity

The nature of institutional support for the development of scholarly activity was explored through interviews undertaken with more than a third of the total survey respondents. Seven out of 25 college representatives referred to the value associated with the support of senior college managers and three interviewees underlined the importance of support received from their Governing Body. In each case the strategic drive from the college leadership was perceived as a main driver of very positive engagement with scholarly activity.

Research participants also reported the implicit support of the senior management team through the provision of institutional enabling or directing structures, including HE policy developments. Examples of structural support were indicated in the survey [Fig. 4] and this picture was supplemented by mechanisms reported by interviewees. These included:

- funding for higher level qualifications either through HE staff development budgets or through an internal system for research bids;
- formal provision of secondment opportunities/unpaid research leave or days for scholarly activity;
- establishment of support from or collaborative work with the partner HEI(s);

- formalised support for industry engagement;
- the development of a SA Handbook;
- the development of an HE community/ethos/practitioner group;
- the establishment of a HE staffing review group to link policy initiatives.

Despite the positive impact reported through engagement with such institutional initiatives and structures, the majority of participants (48 colleges) reported that most teachers undertake scholarly activity outside of formal working hours. This is not unexpected – and may also be true for much of the research undertaken in some post-92 universities and University Colleges. In a college setting it may also reflect the difficulty in obtaining blocks of free time (as opposed to an hour or so here and there) in which to undertake further study.

Only 9 colleges reported that HE staff are paid at a higher rate than their FE colleagues and are expected to undertake scholarly activity as a result. 13 referred to arrangements with a partner HEI whereby the university enabled staff to undertake scholarly activity – presumably through reduced cost or free access to Masters or Ph.D. programmes or other research activities and conferences, but the nature and extent of these arrangements was generally unspecified.

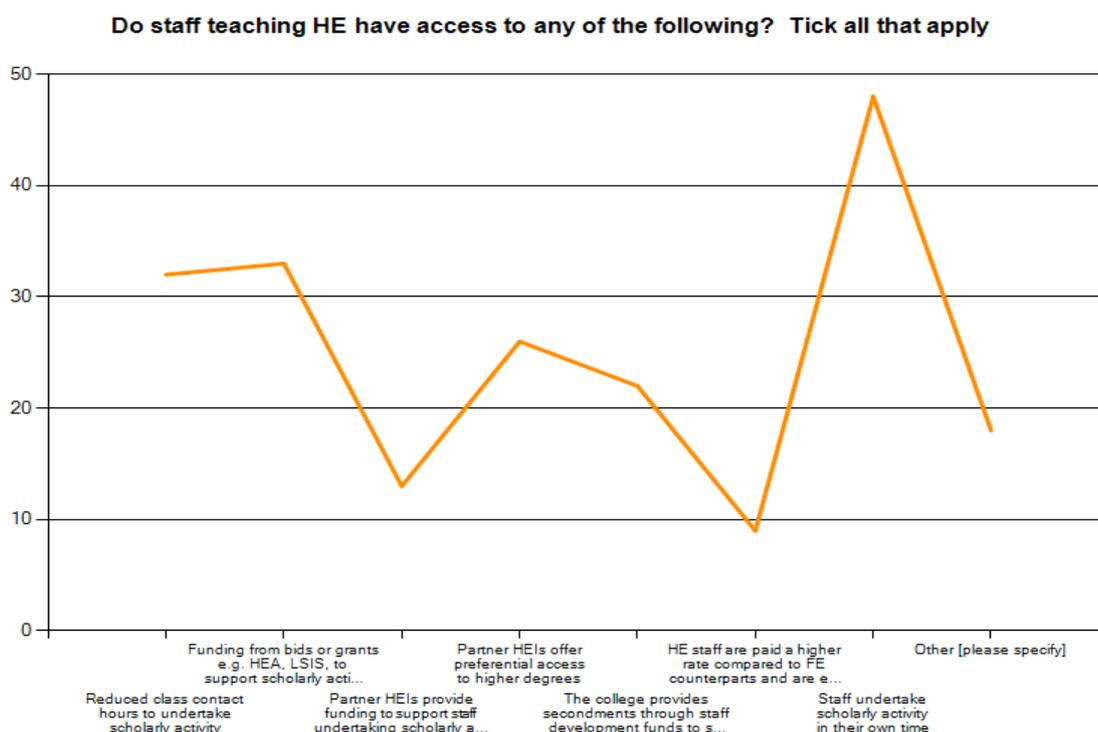


Figure 4. Forms of support for scholarly activity

(f) Barriers to engagement with scholarly activity

Participants were asked to consider the issues that prevented staff from undertaking scholarly activity or which made such activity problematic [Fig. 5]. The lack of dedicated annualised allocations of time to support individuals undertaking scholarly activity (reduced contact time or more flexible holiday arrangements, for example) is regarded as

a key issue. The great majority of respondents noted the tension between the demands of the standard FE teaching contract with its classroom focus, and the expectations surrounding the development of an HE culture. This leads to a proliferation of activity being undertaken outside formal working hours which is either not recorded at all by the institution or not measured in terms of its impact on teaching and learning.

“...even with a reduction in teaching hours, the high baseline of 828 hours does not encourage uptake of scholarly activity during teaching semesters. Much is undertaken under the radar during non-teaching periods”

This is explored in more in the next section. Other comments were also of interest and will be addressed further in Part 3, which will focus on examples of current practice in scholarly activity. Several respondents made the point that not all HE teaching staff are interested in scholarly activity. They enjoy teaching and are skilled practitioners but do not necessarily see themselves as academics. As one interviewee noted:

“I do not think that someone who is research active is necessarily a better teacher of HE than someone who is up to date in their subject area and uses research informed teaching practices for their students. It is a myth that good HE teachers need to be research active, it is much more important that staff are up to date with their reading in their subject area and understand the importance of teaching research skills to students.”

Several interviewees made the point that many teaching staff do not feel confident about undertaking scholarly activity. Some may lack the application needed to sustain this whilst teaching for 800 hours a year. Respondents supported the concept of a “Good Practice” Guide, but also referred to the need for a means of developing a community of practice that somehow supported the development of scholarly activity undertaken in an FE setting. The impression gained from respondents was that partner universities are not seen as being closely involved in the development of scholarly activity: whilst there has been friction in the past over the perceived lack of “HE-ness” of FE staff delivering partner programmes, it appears that little has been done to promote the development of these attributes by the universities who challenge HE in FE staff during annual review meetings.

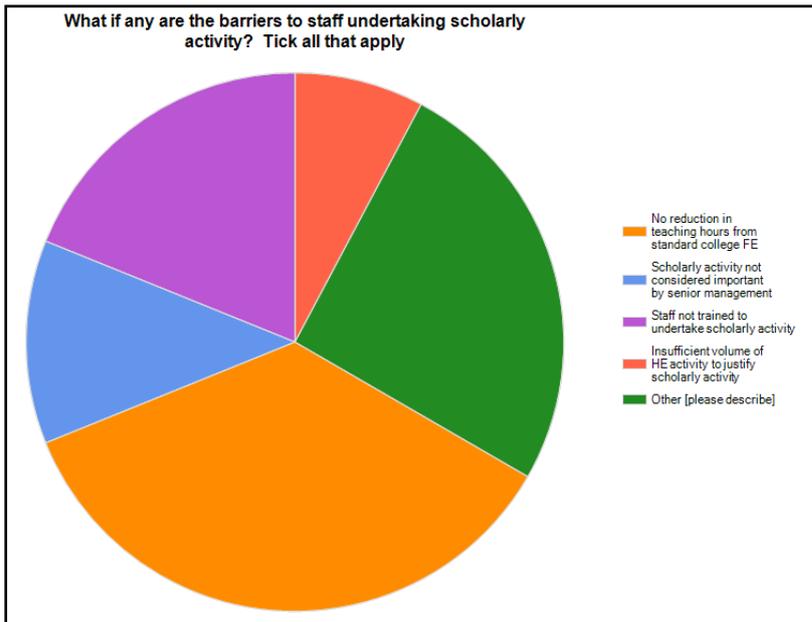


Figure 5. Barriers to scholarly activity

(g) Teaching Hours

The allocation of teaching hours to staff teaching at higher level varied considerably across the colleges participating in interviews. However, a number of caveats apply to the numbers of hours, not least the predominance of staff teaching across the spectrum of further and higher education programmes. Participants employed by small or medium providers of HE indicated that contractual (and actual) expectations of contact time fell in the range of 800 to 850 hours, providing an average expectation of 821 annualised teaching hours. Large volume providers of HE suggested that teaching hours fell in the range 621 – 864, recording an average expectation of 766 teaching hours per year. However, these numbers must not be taken at face value as many hide a range of institutional responses to the external and operational drivers behind scholarly activity.

There are often mechanisms within staff development activity, for example, which compensate and create a difference for HE teaching staff. These include special HE events where a complete day or in many case more than one day is dedicated to HE matters. Many have recorded close involvement with external speakers, the Higher Education Academy and other bodies who have supported their HE staff development. The involvement of partner HEI's with these events is notably low key.

Whilst survey data indicated that 55% of colleges support reduced contact for their HE practitioners, 82% indicated that staff continue to undertake scholarly activity in their own time. This infers that for 27% of providers the reductions in teaching commitment is inadequate to support the levels or quantity of scholarly activity deemed appropriate to the teaching and learning situation (whether by the college or by the member of staff), or to the professional development of staff. In practice, there may never be enough free time to carry out scholarly activity, however benign the view taken by the college managers. Institutional requirements for fitness for purpose may be at variance with the individual's concern to ensure that they project what is perceived to be the expected professional

image of an HE lecturer to university partners and/or to give the time that they would want to give to a personal interest in a particular subject area. Others, as is noted below, argue that it is impossible to find the time required to mark undergraduate essays and undertake scholarly activity within the constraints of an FE contract.

A small minority of participants provided different contracts and pay scales for teachers teaching only on HE programmes. Such providers also reported the specialist nature of their provision and/or the physical separation of the HE provision from FE activity.

The University and College Union has also taken an interest in scholarly activity undertaken by those teaching HE in FE colleges. In a paper published in September 2013⁵ the union noted that most of this work was undertaken out of hours but acknowledged that there was no simple solution for staff working to a standard FE contract. Their research found that in many colleges there was a degree of flexibility around the interpretation of the standard contract that recognised the demands of teaching HE students and also the expectations of the QAA.

“The vast majority of respondents felt that it is clear that there are a range of informal arrangements within their institutions which are not transparent, Similarly, whilst many respondents stated that their organisations did not give explicit time allocations for scholarly activity, some tutors described sympathetic managers with whom they were able to work out individual agreements.”

UCU reports the potential hostility of those teaching on FE courses to any negotiations for different terms for those teaching at higher levels. Many FE staff, such as those who teach students with learning difficulties or disabilities, for example, would argue that they have an equal need for a reduced teaching load. Referring to the blurred lines between CPD, professional updating and scholarly activity, UCU notes, *“responses also suggested a strong sense that managers often conflate scholarly activity with CPD which is typically generic and college provided”*.

(h) The nature of scholarly activity

In both the survey and the interviews, some participants reported a lack of understanding on the part of senior managers about the nature of scholarly activity. This was perceived as a barrier in terms of staff perceptions and actions. As examples of this, respondents mentioned situations where staff did not have a clear, shared definition of scholarly activity, or where their own perception was that scholarly activity was equated to formal research. A lack of admin support also created difficulties: several interviewees who had previously taught in universities made the point that if HE was about teaching, admin and research, the teaching and admin components of college-based HE were far higher than was the case in HEIs. This imbalance meant that scholarly activity inevitably took place in the teacher's own time.

“Staff at Colleges in charge of programmes have a much greater admin load than their counterparts at University. Less admin time could lead to more scholarly activity”

⁵ Scholarly activity in HE in FE – towards a better practice model. UCU 2013

The need to submit a bid (internal or otherwise) for funding or time allocations could provide a barrier, despite being intended as a supporting mechanism. Many staff saw the time involved in preparing the bid as a call on time that they did not have. In some cases, lack of experience in writing bids may also contribute to this burden.

(i) Recording the evidence and impact of scholarly activity

As noted previously, there is a large variation in delivery hours in the range 500-848 hours per annum and very mixed practice in the sector with regards to remitted hours or compulsory staff development activity. Where there is remitted time or robust staff development opportunities, scholarly activity is taking place. However, the recording and impact measurement of scholarly activity is mixed and emerged as the least-developed element of this survey. In this respect, little appears to have changed since the earlier 2010 survey.

“The College is currently working on a scholarly activity policy. At present activity is not formally assessed or reported on. A great deal of practitioner led activity takes place but the College has not previously categorized it as scholarly activity. A staff development event is planned for the summer to produce some working definitions as a basis for the policy.”

Amongst the more novel practices recorded are the use of Wiki's and Facebook pages to not only document scholarly activity but to provide real interaction and reflection. Both Online solutions provide a history line such that activity can be recorded and output related directly to individual courses. Assuming the right level of oversight/moderation, this may be a useful approach.

With respect to the status of HE within an institution, responses suggest that where HE matters are reported separately from FE to the SMT and Governing Body, the status and hence institutional support for HE activity is much stronger and more pro-active. As noted earlier, a document which appears to have gone into disuse in a number of colleges is the HE Strategy, possibly undermining the importance of HE activity unless this embedded by other means in other policies.

Colleges which have established an HE Conference describe the planning and running of these events as being very worthwhile. Not only is it recognised as securing a high profile for HE activity in the college but it also provides a platform for external speakers and, through workshops, realistic opportunities for scholarly activity and research. The recording of this is most often through traditional media (quite often made available to the public) or the more innovative methods described previously. Student involvement is underdeveloped in this context but a few respondents describe students who are undertaking teacher training and Bachelor degree programmes being able to present their research and take part at such conferences.

During the survey and subsequent interviews, participants reported a wide range of instruments and situations designed to enable institutional or professional evaluation of the amount of scholarly activity undertaken and its subsequent impact. This assumes a

definition of scholarly activity - where no definition is reported or published, it remains unclear how any institution can form a view of the quantity or level of scholarly activity undertaken by individuals. Similar difficulties exist in recording the impact of scholarly activity where it is not clear what activity has been undertaken. The third issue arises where staff undertake much of their scholarly activity outside their formal working hours and thus the activity remains unseen and/or unrecorded and unmeasured.

Participants reported the mechanisms through which managers could reflect upon scholarly activity that was formally supported by the college. [Fig. 6]. Further mechanisms included: the recording of scholarly activity through social media, as referred to above; the evidencing of activity through the production of journal articles, external conference presentations or newsletters; through inclusion in validation documents, periodic reviews and reflective reports; sharing good practice at internal college events. Many referred to comments by external examiners, seeing these as a means of validating staff scholarly activity.

However, the existence of these mechanisms, although suggesting that a range of individuals at a range of levels in the college might be interested in scholarly activity, does not automatically mean that measures exist to analyse the impact of that activity. Nor do they differentiate between continued professional development and scholarly activity or take account of the scholarly activity undertaken outside the remit of the formal policies and procedures.

Impact can be defined as the reportable, quantifiable *difference, or potential difference*, that a project or program makes to people's lives. It reports benefits to society as a whole. Within college-based HE, the emphasis is on the benefit to the students rather than institutional or personal gain. Any assessment of the impact of scholarly activity will therefore want to include what was undertaken, the difference that has occurred as a result of the activity, the benefits to students and why this is important.

Whilst some colleges may well be taking this approach, responses from some interviewees suggested that impact was often measured in terms of a report or as a quantified description (meetings attended, presentations made, etc.) Descriptions of what has been done or of the funding sources used also provide context but not impact. What is needed – but which our survey found lacking – were references to processes which revealed

- Knowledge gained and how that knowledge is applied.
- Behaviour or attitude changes.
- Practice or situations changes.
- Results of those behaviour, attitude, practice or situation changes⁶

⁶ i:/EARS/whatisimpact.wpd

**How is the impact of scholarly activity on teaching and learning measured or reported?
Please tick all that apply.**

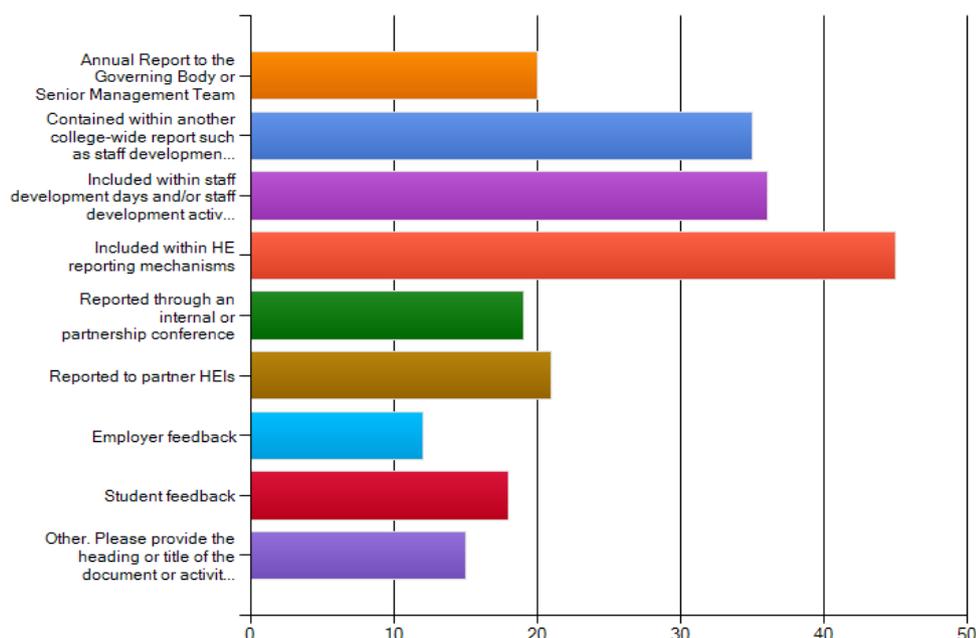


Figure 6. Impact measurement.

3. Developments in Scholarly Activity

Participants were asked to consider the ways in which their college had developed its engagement with scholarly activity over the previous five years. [Fig.7] The feedback from participants suggests that there has been forward movement in terms of support for and recognition of scholarly activity within colleges.

“An audit of activity has been conducted, and has proved revealing both in terms of the activities undertaken and the attitudes of departments and individual staff to the policies implemented at that time; which again has led to the change in support currently being developed.”

Over half the 60 respondents indicated that their college had put into place a new approach to scholarly activity. In the survey, 30% of participants indicated that senior management support for scholarly activity was the feature that had impacted most positively on improving the perceptions and actions of teachers within their colleges. Secondary drivers were reported as being ‘external drivers’ and ‘structural change within colleges’; both of which were perceived to have an impact on strategic drives initiated by the senior management team. It was clear from the responses received that the process of application for FDAP or TDAP had galvanized previously neutral senior management teams into developing mechanisms which promoted scholarly activity. These included funding sources and mentoring schemes for teaching staff, as well as a review of teaching contracts.

A surprisingly small number of respondents cited financial constraints as a barrier to college engagement with scholarly activity. They considered that the economic climate had a significant impact on current and future teaching hours and on the amount of funding available to support scholarly activity and continuous professional development. However,

fewer than 20% of respondents cited financial issues, and only three of the sixty participants actually brought this to fore through subsequent comments.

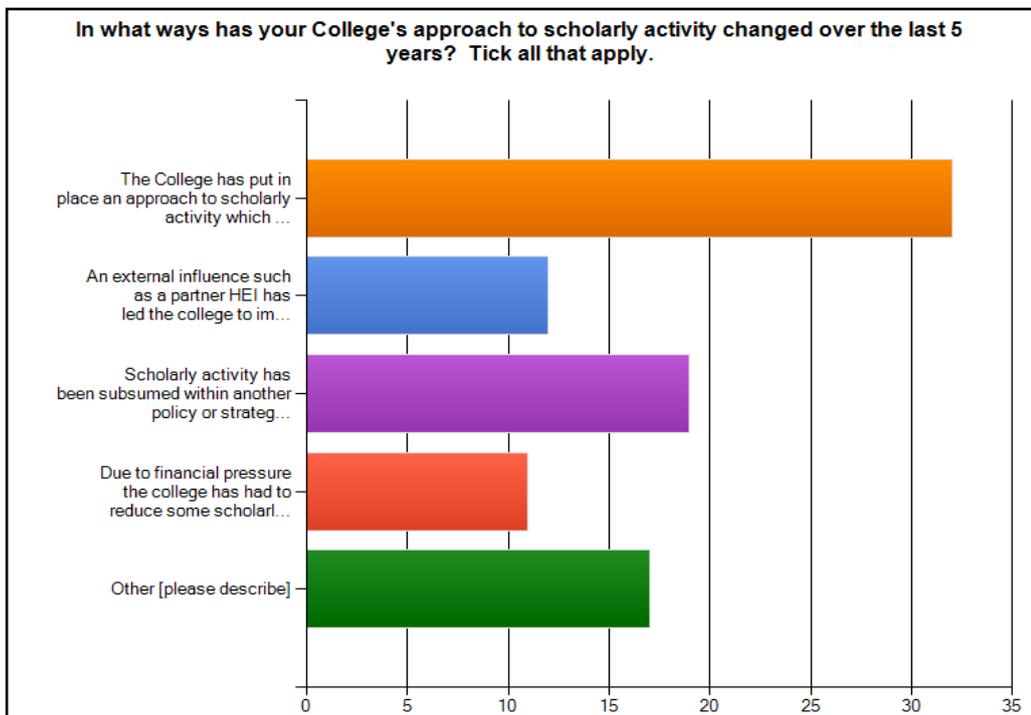


Figure 7. Changes to the approach to scholarly activity

4. Comment and Discussion

Three broad themes emerged from the research findings. These are:

(i) Changes in the way colleges define scholarly activity

The definitions of scholarly activity provided by the majority of participants, when compared with those presented by King and Widdowson (2010), indicate an evolving recognition of the value of a range of academic and vocational practices within college based higher education. However, in some areas little has changed over the past three years.

The on-going need for greater consideration of the potential difference between the continued professional development long embraced by the FE sector and an approach that could be more appropriately considered as scholarly activity was brought into significantly sharper focus by the introduction of the IQER in 2006 and FDAP in 2007. These radically altered the debate, as did the QAA Guidance Note of 2013⁷

The process of IQER review and subsequent QAA reports offered a means of learning about what other colleges were doing – ie the experience of college-based peers, rather

⁷ Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: Expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding powers and for Taught degree-awarding powers. QAA.

than university partners. Colleges applying for FDAP also raised concerns as to the definition and application of scholarly activity as a part of that process. It could be proposed that a national system of review and scrutiny has driven the recognition and validation of scholarly practice as adopted within college based HE, leading to further formalisation and adoption of such practice. FDAP prompted a debate about what characterizes scholarly activity in a vocational context. HE staff in colleges are now more likely to be involved in scholarly activity as a result.

However, not all institutions clearly demarcate CPD from scholarly activity or have a description of what scholarly activity entails for FE as opposed to HE staff. A further issue arising from the lack of a clear definition of scholarly activity is that of measurability. If scholarly activity is deemed to have an impact on the learning experience of students studying at higher level, it would seem appropriate that such activity is targeted, measurable and suitably evaluated. It is therefore not a wholly independent activity, as in universities, but an institutional one. This purpose can only be realised where there is a clear definition of scholarly activity in each college – or indeed, each university. Impact measures are also needed, and will ideally be shared by all HE programmes within the college.

(ii) Strategic engagement with scholarly activity

The way in which colleges chose to formalise their understanding of scholarly activity was reported as being variable, ranging from adoption in the college's HE Strategy to inclusion within broader college policies. Not all colleges reported a separate HE strategy.

The greater tendency of larger providers of higher level study to define scholarly activity in the context of the HE strategy suggests recognition of the strategic (and financial) importance of their status as HE and FE providers. Spelling out the principles of scholarship and the way in which the college promotes this in a high-level strategic document suggests the support of senior management, as well as a wider awareness within the college of the importance of such activity. This is particularly true when HE is dispersed amongst the subject departments.

Where scholarly activity is defined within a college strategy for Higher Education and the actions supporting the strategy are also set out, colleges are able to refute the accusations of managerialism purported by Feather (2012)⁸. Effective strategic alignment of HE with other policies serves to illustrate the drivers relevant to the college and its HE provision, as well as promoting support structures and minimising barriers to high quality HE.

(iii) Drivers, enablers and barriers to engagement with scholarly activity

The findings from the enquiry highlight the imperatives of the journey towards the attainment of awarding powers; partnerships; validation and the process of review (by

⁸ See Paper 1. Feather, D., 2011. Culture of HE in FE – exclave or enclave? Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 16(1), pp.15-30.

QAA, or through professional bodies) as drivers of scholarly activity amongst HE staff.

Further to these external drivers, respondents reported the benefits of the leadership provided through Governing Body and senior management support and the effectiveness of structures that align to frame the processes to drive forward scholarly activity.

Support for scholarly activity has been derived from membership of the HE Academy (and increased awareness of the UK Professional Standards Framework) and through engagement with the bidding processes available through the Academy, LSIS and JISC.

The main barrier to engagement with scholarly activity is predominantly a lack of time. The variability of the annualised teaching hours allocated to staff teaching on higher education programmes is complicated by contracts, management guidelines, and the differing teaching years across the HE and FE boundaries. Where staff are given remission for teaching at a higher level, the expectation that they will meet their reduced annualised teaching load, across a shorter academic year, may mean that their weekly teaching timetable remains as that of a colleague teaching FE. This issue was reported by UCU (2013, p1) who wrote that “*one third of colleges expected staff to undertake scholarly activity in their own time*”.

Levels of skill with regard to scholarly activity also vary considerably, as does the concept of good practice. Consideration should thus be given to means of collaboration; working with agencies such as the Education and Training Foundation, the HE Academy or JISC suggest a way forward, as does greater sharing of experience within membership groups such as MEG, AoC, Landex, etc.

A number of respondents also indicated that administrative workloads were a significant barrier to engagement with scholarly activity. Colleges may wish to consider the significance of this.

The importance of a necessary minimum critical mass of HE also emerged from the survey. Several respondents from colleges with low volumes of HE made the point that as this was a very minor component of the overall college offer, it was difficult to make the case for scholarly activity amongst those who taught both HE and FE. This raises a number of strategic issues for colleges with small numbers of HE students, and questions current national approaches to HE delivery. Colleges with medium to large volumes of HE are more able to develop an HE ethos and community amongst their teaching staff.

5. Conclusions

These survey findings will contribute directly to the next stage of our research, which is the development of a Practice Guide supporting scholarly activity. As noted earlier in this report, a separate and future piece of research is needed to look at the relationship between staff who teach HE on a PT basis and their contribution to scholarly activity within their institutions. Similarly, scholarly activity undertaken by those teaching Non-Prescribed HE is

also worthy of future attention, being largely delivered within the subject departments and much more closely linked to the expectations of professional bodies.

The Practice Guide will take account of the views of our 60 survey respondents. It will consider the following questions:

From the teacher's viewpoint:

- How can staff develop and maintain the three roles which characterise the HE in FE teacher – the current teaching professional, the former industry professional who is still current, and the individual who is pursuing scholarly activity in their own time? How can this tripartite identity be nurtured and celebrated?
- How can colleges help staff, particularly those entering teaching who are already qualified and experienced in another profession, to undertake scholarly activity?
- How can colleges build staff confidence about undertaking scholarly activity?
- Do college managers understand (and harness) the various motivations for undertaking scholarly activity? This ranges from regulatory requirements to professional development to a personal drive to learn more about their subject.
- Will college managers support HE teachers to teach their students how to undertake research and possibly engage with them on their “research”?
- The relatively small number of HE teaching staff in each college can lead to a sense of isolation, with each teacher evolving their own approach to teaching and to scholarly activity. Is the development of a community of practice a way forward? How does this happen?
- How can senior management support for scholarly activity be embedded in the college culture and in college policies?
- Who or what defines scholarly activity?

From the college perspective:

- Is a critical mass of HE necessary before scholarly activity can thrive?
- Should colleges regard the sole purpose of scholarly activity as being the continuous improvement of teaching and learning? Is it more than this?
- How can scholarly activity be captured, evaluated and recorded?
- Can colleges gain an enhanced reputation as a result of higher-level work with industry based on the scholarly activity of its staff? What arrangements must be in place in order to promote and sustain this?
- Is there a need for a formal framework for scholarly activity in college-based HE? Would this foster the distinctiveness of this type of scholarship as well as show how to do it and how to measure its impact?
- Is there a need for a community of HE in FE practitioners? The HE staff in a college are often few in number and can feel isolated from their HE peers in other colleges. They may also teach a mixture of HE and FE courses. Would the establishment of such a community help to grow the identity of the teacher as the tripartite professional?
- Should colleges reach out to external academics, either teachers working in colleges with more established HE provision or in partner universities, to advise on this process? How would this be funded?
- How might colleges which offer HE gain access to other external sources of funding for scholarly activity? Are partnerships with businesses and universities feasible?
- Is Higher Level Skills Transfer, rather than Knowledge Transfer, a route forward for college-based HE?

- How can colleges help HE teaching staff to locate Invitations To Tender or more traditional academic research opportunities and then also write persuasive funding bids?
- Can colleges provide more administrative support for HE teaching staff, in order to have more time for curriculum-related tasks, including scholarly activity?



Exploring scholarship and scholarly activity in college-based Higher Education

Part 3. A Practice Guide to scholarly activity in college-based HE: what works?

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Introduction

This Guide is derived from the work undertaken in Parts 1 and 2 of the MEG project “Exploring scholarship and scholarly activity in college-based HE”. It provides illustrations and examples of how colleges approach the issues of scholarly activity in all its forms. The definition of “scholarly activity” used here follows the broad guidelines set out in Parts 1 and 2. These took as a starting point a definition evolved by the Mixed Economy Group in 2010⁹, which proposed that scholarly activity could be defined as:

An activity or activities with the potential to:

- *create or affirm knowledge and/or expertise of a subject or discipline*
- *develop or enhance understanding of a subject or discipline*
- *develop or enhance methodologies for the delivery of a subject or discipline*

This activity must be shared with peers, disseminated across the institution and possibly beyond and archived in ways which are easily accessible to all staff.

Whilst some colleges reported an element of “innovation” in activity recognised as “scholarly activity”, others described a focus that was more on professional updating and curriculum development. Some colleagues reported their assumption that peer review is a key accompaniment of scholarly activity. This position may be similar to that indicated in the BPP University definition, referred to in Part 1: the University describes scholarship “as the application of the most current knowledge of a discipline or professional specialism to broader activities and practice, communicated in ways which are validated by peers and influence others beyond the organisation.”

This Practice Guide does not seek to identify good or best practice. It identifies a range of current scholarly activity in colleges and provides vignettes of practice that practitioners may find useful, and which may be used to enhance the further development of scholarly activity in colleges. It is offered to practitioners as a means of reviewing their own practice and applying it to the individual contexts of their own institutions.

What follows are a series of questions, some related commentary and some examples of approaches taken by colleges to deal with the issue under discussion.

1. What is the purpose of Scholarly Activity?

The lack of clearly-articulated definitions of scholarly activity in many colleges means that the underlying reasons for supporting teachers to undertake such activity are difficult to identify. In some cases, the expectations of the QAA, the HE review process or the need to provide evidence for applications for Degree Awarding Powers provide the main drivers for strategic engagement with scholarly activity, with the implication that if these drivers were not present,

⁹ Scholarly Activity in Higher Education delivered in Further Education, 2010

scholarly activity would have a far lower priority. As in earlier studies carried out by MEG,¹⁰ few colleges cite the requirements of a validating university as a stimulus to greater or more embedded activity. It is perhaps unsurprising then that few have gone beyond the broad terms set out by the QAA in January 2013.¹¹

Where the purpose of scholarly activity has been considered, several strands emerge. For some individual teachers, scholarly activity is seen as something that teachers of Higher Education do as a matter of course; it is perceived as being part of the persona of the HE professional. For these teachers, scholarly activity is undertaken for their own personal development, as “scholars” in their own right. Indeed, for some tutors, any further application or impact may be purely secondary and incidental to this main purpose. One correspondent noted that experienced teachers or those still active in a previous profession should aim to be considered experts in their field, contributing as much to their own development as the industry within which they are working/researching. Not only do these teachers provide a platform of relevant professional practice but in many cases they provide an industrial context and opportunities for students that college-based staff may not be able to access. In some cases, outputs from scholarly activity have the potential for commercialisation through partnerships with industry.

The scholarly activity of a teacher who is “research active” is assumed (by both their peers and college senior management teams) to have a beneficial impact on their students, but this is notoriously difficult to evaluate or define. Some college policies appear to adopt this assumption, but with no real measures of impact. However, within most colleges, value is seen in undertaking an activity that other HE providers (principally universities) regard as a key to their HE identity and credibility.

For others, including those in some private sector institutions, the impact on the quality of teaching and learning and thus the student experience is described as the prime purpose in supporting staff engagement in scholarly activity. In a smaller number of colleges, scholarly activity is seen as a means of connecting learning with industry via live briefs.

2. Does “pure” research have a place in college-based HE?

Colleges often state that they are not research-driven institutions and as such cannot be required or expected to conduct original research in the same manner - or to the same extent - as universities. Several interviewees noted that FE teaching staff are not expected to undertake research as part of their job and as a consequence are not assessed by their ability to produce such work.

Nevertheless, some colleges do undertake classic “blue skies” research. This is particularly the case where either the college offers a distinctive specialism, for example a large land-based college or a college of art and design. More generally, the factors that are in place to make this particular level of scholarly activity happen include;

¹⁰ E.g. Scholarly Activity in Higher Education delivered in Further Education, 2010.

¹¹ Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding powers and for Taught degree-awarding powers. QAA 2013

- Specialist staff with qualifications and experience at the appropriate level
- Staff willing and capable of undertaking work of this nature
- Institutional support at senior level
- Established internal conferences and staff development events
- A whole-college approach to research and scholarly activity which includes teachers of FE
- Financial support either from college sources or via bids to external funders (including employers)
- Appropriate level of teaching contact
- Access to publication via specialist journals
- Access to college based social media to record and promote activities

Factors that prevent this happening include:

- Staff unable to gain release from teaching and other duties
- Staff capability to undertake research. FE staff may not have either the skills to undertake pure research or the wish to do so
- Time-consuming research applications
- A college culture which does not recognise such research as a core activity for academic staff
- Impact on colleagues e.g. perceived lack of equity in allocating time for research when compared with other functions e.g. course leadership.
- Ineligibility for funding due to the status of the institution

Hartpury College has an integrated *Teaching Learning Research and Knowledge Exchange* strategy. The college has established organisational structures and budget lines that have been designed to support a culture of research within the college. Such structures have engaged teaching staff in research and consultancy whilst also enhancing the learning and progression opportunities of students. [Link to Hartpury College strategy](#)

However, as implied in the bullet points above, funding “pure” research can be difficult for many general FE colleges. In the case of some specialist institutions, employers from their sector will sometimes fund specific research topics, which in most cases are not intended for academic publication but to be of direct use to the funder. In many cases, such projects may involve the application of existing knowledge rather than original research. That, coupled with issues of commercial confidentiality, may make much work of this nature difficult to detect.

3. How does Scholarly Activity articulate with continuous professional development (in a “parent” profession) and college staff development?

Many college staff will retain their membership of a related professional body to underpin their teaching of courses in that subject area. To do so they will in most cases have an obligation to undertake the Continuous Professional Development required by that body. However, those requirements are often poorly articulated and have relevance to professional practice rather than teaching. Some colleges support staff by funding professional body

membership where this is a requirement to teach particular courses or by paying for attendance at professional updating events. Activity of this type may be particularly important when supporting the delivery of Non-Prescribed Higher Education or that requiring approval by a professional body.

The QAA has set out its expectations¹² on scholarly activity. Many college staff development policies include specific provision for those teaching HE. The usual practice in many colleges is to require staff to possess a qualification higher than that on which they teach, and most institutions contribute to the cost of gaining this. Where study for these qualifications involves research activities, research outcomes are sometimes shared at teaching staff conferences or via internal publication.

The professional bodies contacted as part of the survey were uncertain as to the role of scholarly activity in preparing college staff to teach on courses leading to their higher qualifications. In most cases, reference was made to matters such as membership of that body or a related institute and familiarity with current practice, rather than academic research. There did not appear to be a direct link between teaching NPHE and undertaking scholarly activity.

Plymouth College of Art is a specialist college. Over 50% of its students pursue HE courses and it puts a high premium on the research output of its staff, many of whom are active in their original profession. The college sees a clear link between research, teaching and professional practice, and has established infrastructures to support its vision. [Link to Plymouth document](#)

4. What is the role of “live briefs” and teaching by practitioners?

The QAA definition of scholarly activity accepts that in some disciplines (e.g. creative arts) practice in the chosen field is recognised as scholarly activity. Indeed this practice is often replicated in other disciplines involving industrial and commercial contacts with live briefs and projects. However, it is unclear how this would translate across the range of disciplines supported by the college based sector, where such activity might be more readily classified as “consultancy”.

Many colleges make good use of current practitioners to deliver part of their provision. These individuals may be variously described as fractional, part time or visiting lecturers. In cases where only a small contribution is made, their role may be as guest speakers. In extreme cases where the provision is very specialised, whole courses may be delivered by such colleagues. This may give rise to concerns about how those individuals are integrated into course teams and how realistic any expectations may be for them to undertake “scholarly activity”. The engagement of teachers drawn from the “real” world of work is seen to bring a much needed perspective which is appreciated by students and adds to the professional understanding of full time teachers. In some departments, particularly in small-volume providers of HE, external practitioners are a valuable link to the non-academic world, serving to inspire and contextualise learning.

¹² *ibid*

Weston College is pleased to employ and to support the scholarly activity of teaching staff who undertake practice based research and who retain significant involvement with industry. The College offers an illustration of how students may benefit from the experience of a teacher who is still active in their original profession. [Link to Weston College document](#)

5. Should those teaching Higher Education have different conditions of service from their colleagues teaching Further Education?

Before dealing with the specific issues of teaching Higher Education, it should be borne in mind that standard national terms and conditions for teachers in FECs no longer exist. All colleges are responsible for determining their own approach. Since college incorporation in 1992 there has been a progressive move towards locally-applicable terms and conditions. For example, holiday entitlement for all staff can vary as can job gradings, post titles and internal college structures. What follows has to be read against that background.

A small minority of colleges have introduced separate conditions of service for specialist HE teachers. In most cases this has accompanied a policy that does not permit staff to teach on both HE and FE courses, a move sometimes brought about or even supported by separate campuses for HE provision. Where Full Time teachers cannot fulfil all of the teaching hours required by the provision, specialist Part Time teachers are engaged.

However, a majority of colleges apply the same conditions of service to all staff irrespective of their teaching commitment. This is done for a number of reasons. Foremost amongst these are questions of equity across teachers of all levels and types of student in what are in all cases “mixed economy” institutions. Whilst comparisons may be made with the terms and conditions enjoyed by lecturers in universities by college based HE teachers, other colleagues may compare their role with teachers in school sixth forms, trainers in industry or even practitioners.

Many teachers of HE in colleges also teach FE. Indeed this may be more typical than having dedicated HE teachers in most colleges. Separate terms and conditions for staff employed at the same institution may raise questions of equal value and ultimately have implications for the culture of the college. Such specialisation may also have implications for flexibility in deploying staff and longer term employment prospects. Arguments are also made for the beneficial effects of having teachers crossing the sectoral divide in terms of teaching quality, student progression and professional development. Following the introduction of variable fees, with many new entrants to HE provision setting those fees at £6,000 or less, a further set of issues may arise over resourcing scholarly activity, particularly in comparison with the resources available to universities charging £9,000 per annum.

Ultimately, the decision as to how to engage staff to teach Higher Education is a matter for individual colleges, to be balanced against other factors within the institution.

6. How do colleges manage teaching loads in HE in FE?

Against this background, colleges have adopted varied strategies. In some cases, no allowance is made for the demands of teaching HE. Previous MEG¹³ research suggests that this is often based on the assumption that teaching HE is a valued and sought after role, and thus teachers will be prepared to work in their own time. Indeed, the 2013 survey shows that virtually all HE in FE teachers report a significant commitment of their own time in supporting their role as HE teachers. This approach does not appear to be confined to new entrants to HE teaching or even colleges with small amounts of provision, but rather reflects individual college decisions.

Instead of adopting separate contracts, many colleges use a formula-based approach which allocates additional time to those teaching HE in a transparent way alongside other activities which might attract remission from teaching. This approach is well established in most colleges as it reflects a pre-existing model offering a balance between teaching and what is often described as “marking and preparation”. Examples include:

- A “one for one” approach which offsets every hour spent to teaching HE to one hour for preparation etc.
- An allocation of time for specific activities. For example one college allocates fifteen minutes per week per student for supervision of final Honours dissertations
- Time based on an agreed formula for specialised activity such as clinical supervision and observation of practice in the workplace
- Time for activities such as curation of exhibitions or direction of performance activities

In all of the above examples, the allocation of time is according to agreed formulae and is not contractual. In most cases they are in place for one academic year and are adjusted according to the individual’s teaching commitment.

7. How can colleges create and sustain an HE ethos amongst teachers?

Staff teaching Higher Education in colleges often work in small teams, sometimes including Part Time teachers. Many teach on Further Education courses and may spend the greater proportion of their time doing so. This can make it difficult to create an environment that allows teachers to consider specific issues relating to their HE teaching and in particular the distinctive needs of their HE students. A wide variety of approaches have been taken to creating an appropriate HE ethos. These include:

- Supporting teachers to study for higher degrees to update knowledge and gain familiarity with research skills and methodologies
- Designing staff development activities and conferences specifically for HE teachers
- Establishing communities of practice to share ideas and approaches
- Linking with teachers of similar subjects in other colleges and universities
- Encouraging External Examiner work and participating in external validations.

¹³ Strategic options, operational challenges. MEG 2010

Blackburn College introduced the role of Research Co-ordinator in order to publicise research undertaken at the college and to support scholarly activity amongst teaching staff.

[Link to Blackburn College document](#)

Coleg Sir Gar has devised a system for making and considering funding bids. Proposals are captured in an application form which ensures that staff focus on the relevant bid criteria and most importantly the impact of their research on their students. [Link to Coleg Sir Gar document](#)

Bournemouth and Poole College has organised an annual HE conference for some 10 years. Their experience may be of interest to both those considering such an activity for the first time or to others who are seeking to expand their existing arrangements. [Link to Bournemouth and Poole document](#)

8. How is Scholarly Activity defined and recorded?

The results of the survey show that many colleges do not have a definition of scholarly activity. Against that background, it is perhaps unsurprising that difficulties have been identified in recording the activity that takes place. Parts 1 and 2 of this research give details of the definitions that are in use, but ultimately it will be for individual colleges to arrive at and implement their own definitions to meet the objectives they themselves have set. When colleges come to recording activity undertaken within the boundaries of their stated definition of scholarly activity, a number of approaches have been tried. Means of recording scholarly activity include:

- Using wikis or other social media
- Capture via college staff development documentation. In some colleges, teaching staff of all types are asked to declare and record the range of activities undertaken. In some cases colleges report that teachers need constant reminders as to what can and should be recorded e.g. many will not record acting as Chair for Validation Panels etc. In some colleges these documents are updated on an annual basis and form part of the core documentation used for QAA and validation with partner HEIs
- Regular staff conferences, where current issues for both the college and the HE system in general can be considered. These may also include the opportunity for staff to provide updates or dissemination of scholarly activity they have undertaken
- Events dedicated to sharing good practice in both scholarly activity and pedagogy. In some cases, these events also involve students
- Journals published by the college circulated either internally or more widely. See below for further details.

Grimsby Institute is using e-technology through an on-line research and scholarship wiki called The Network. It has provided a dynamic platform through which research and scholarship can be peer reviewed, published, rapidly disseminated and used to drive forward reflective practice linked to learning and teaching. It has also provided a simple means through which to increase staff engagement in knowledge transfer activity. Following its launch in 2012, The Network has become an innovative on-line community of scholarly

practice and is owned by a team of teaching, learning and scholarship fellows. [Link to Grimsby document](#)

Blackpool & the Fylde College also use an online environment to support scholarship. *Scholarnet* is a web based scholarship tool designed to capture and record all scholarly activity in one place and to support social engagement between staff undertaking scholarly activity. [Link to Blackpool & the Fylde document](#)

Other colleges use a variant on this approach. Several colleges produce an HE Journal. Havering College offers a commentary on how such a publication can be of value, as well as a more informal approach to sharing information with colleagues. [Link to Havering College document](#)

9. How is the impact of Scholarly Activity measured?

Given the difficulties experienced by some colleges in simply defining and recording scholarly activity it is not surprising that there are few robust means of measuring its impact on the teaching and learning process. As indicated in the main report, some argue that active scholarship is valuable in its own right and does not necessarily have to demonstrate impact directly on the student experience. However, most colleges expect to see some measurable and direct impact on the quality of the student learning experience or the quality of teaching in return for remitted hours or similar adjustments to a standard college contract. Means of doing so include:

- Sharing the outcomes of SA with colleagues or peers
- Income generation via consultancy or other work with employers
- Success in gaining funding from external bodies
- Feedback from student surveys
- Publication either in peer referenced journals, college or other publications
- Off-site exhibitions or working as an artist or writer in residence, all of which are open to a wide range of audiences.

In “Scholarship Assessed”, Glassick, Huber and Maeroff (1997)¹⁴ refer to six criteria against which scholarly activity may be judged. These are proposed as a means of developing a common language for the discussion and evaluation of scholarly activity and include:

- Clarity of goals in undertaking the research
- Adequate preparation
- Appropriate research methods
- Significant results
- Effective communication
- Reflective critique

¹⁴ Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning.

Engagement with these criteria may be useful in stimulating further discussion within colleges.

10. Conclusion

The definition, nature and purpose of scholarly activity in college-based Higher Education will continue to stimulate debate. This Practice Guide has emerged from a literature review and primary research: it seeks to address a number of practical issues within colleges whilst at the same time encouraging discussion about more qualitative or organisational matters that impact on the development of scholarly activity. In no particular order, these include:

- The approach to scholarly activity that is adopted across the whole college. Where both FE and HE staff are actively encouraged to undertake further work around their subjects, this appears to mitigate the often-isolated nature of HE in FE. Scholarly activity (however defined) is not solely the prerogative of the HE teacher
- Critical mass of HE. Where this is very small, collaboration with other colleges and universities may be needed in order to foster and sustain the development of scholarly activity. Previous papers in this research have noted the impact of the time demands placed on HE in FE staff – they may teach across two timetables, which can also be two-semester for HE provision and three terms for FE courses. This could in turn generate a heavy admin burden which may be undertaken without access to the admin support levels found in universities. By sharing expertise in bid writing, research techniques and resources, groups of colleges (ideally with support from a partner university) will be able to nurture and sustain not only their HE teaching colleagues but also a sector-wide approach to HE in FE. Wikis, social media and similar on-line tools may help to break down institutional isolation and enable the sharing of good practice
- An on-going need for a shared *understanding*, if not a shared *definition*, of scholarly activity across the HE in FE sector. As we have illustrated, some colleges have a clear concept of scholarly activity, others significantly less so. Given that all are offering HE, which generally perceives scholarly activity as a core component of an HE ethos, some general principles must be adopted across HE in FE if the sector is to maintain credibility in a competitive environment. This is not to deny the distinctiveness of the HE offer made by FE colleges and which marks it out from that delivered in a more traditional university setting
- Classroom-supported research. This aspect of scholarly activity, in which students are made aware of their teachers' research interests and feel able to discuss investigative approaches, was only occasionally referred to in our survey but offers an opportunity for a different approach to the development of research skills
- A key aspect of scholarly activity is to be able to step back and develop a critical view (on practice, existing research, attending a seminar, etc). One correspondent notes that professional updating becomes something more than keeping up to date if the teacher reflects on why and how things have changed and in whose interests. Producing something as a result of updating or attending a conference is just as important as going

to it. One form of production is writing. This could be an article for a journal but synopses for students, on-line materials and resources for students are also relevant outputs which reflect critical review.

The Mixed Economy Group of colleges is keen to promote a discussion of the issues arising out of this research. Its members have several decades of experience of delivering HE and are keen to share and develop this expertise. The authors of our vignettes have provided their contact details as a means of beginning this process.

As students become more concerned about the value of their higher qualification in the job market, teachers will be expected to reflect those concerns in their teaching and curriculum design. At the same time, tutors will be expected to ensure that their teaching reflects academic knowledge of the subject at an appropriate level. Maintaining an effective balance between these two demands will present challenges to teachers, managers and institutions as the Higher Education landscape continues to evolve.