Looking from the outside in – lecturers experiences of the expansion in HE provision in FE colleges

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Overview

- Expansion in HE in FE
- Implications for FE Colleges & lecturers
- HE in FE in South West England
  - University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC)
- HE ethos developing within FECs
  - Scholarly Activity & Research
- Changing professional identities of college lecturers
Expansion in HE in FE

• Dearing Report / Future of HE (NCIHE, 1997; DfES, 2003)
  – Special mission: 50% 18-30 year olds by 2010
  – Widening Participation & Lifelong Learning
  – Address the predicted skills gap

• Foundation Degrees (HEFCE, 2000)
  – Bridge the academic-vocational divide
  – Technical, professional or vocational focus
  – Progression route & terminal qualification
Implications of expansion

• Era of partnership working HE & FE (Foskett, 2003)

• New qualification - freedom to design and delivery courses

• Create an environment for HE (HEFCE, 2003)
  – Investment in infrastructure, resources & staff
  – Opportunities for HE related staff development
    • Scholarly Activity & Research
Ethos of FE Colleges

• Target driven nature of FECs (Whitehead, 2005)
  – 3 R’s

• Limited opportunity for lecturers to engage with research and scholarly activity (Harwood & Harwood, 2004)

• Research not the “preserve” of the FE sector (Huddlestone & Unwin, 2002)
Research & Scholarly Activity

• Practitioner-led research advocated
  – e.g. Anderson et al., 2003; Cunningham & Doncaster, 2002; Minty et al., 2007.

• Positive effects on:
  – Staff motivation – empowerment
  – Update knowledge & skills
  – Time for reflection/innovation in practice
  – Student experience & institutional ethos
Research & Scholarly Activity

• Common barriers in the FE sector:
  – Lack of resources and/or time
  – Lack of research culture
  – Limited value and/or recognition
  – Limited opportunities for dissemination
  (Anderson et al., 2003)
University of Plymouth Colleges

• HE in FE in SW England – bucked the national trend

• HE in FE supported by UoP since 1978; UPC formed in 2003, largest faculty by 2008

• 15 partner institutions
  – 13 FECs

• 464 approved programmes

• 7,000 students (FTE) (2007-08)

• 1,800 lecturing & support staff

• 468 students progressed on to UoP (2007/8)
Support for SA in UPC

• Support & investment to further develop expertise
• UoP postgrad qualifications
• Free access to UoP library/e-resources
• Build communities – make connections: UPC-UoP
• Events, courses & staff development
• Subject Fora

• Share & Give Knowledge – promote discussion & debate
HELP CETL

- Enhance the experience of students within UPC
  - Opportunities for the CPD and scholarly activity
  - Strategic priorities of UPC through Development Activities
  - Establish functioning Communities of Practice
  - Virtually support individuals/CoPs
  - Provision of infrastructure/facilities

- 2005 to 2010
HELP CETL: Award Holder Scheme

- Recognise & Reward contributions to learning & teaching
- Opportunities for CPD & research
- 4 levels of Award available between £500 and £10,000
- National/international teaching fellowship schemes
- Grassroots initiative – staff self selecting
Research - rationale

• Experience of teaching HE in FECs
  – Minimum of three years at time of application, generally much longer

• Experiences of undertaking CPD/scholarly activity & research in FECs
  – Through the HELP CETL/higher qualifications

• Perceptions of their college’s HE ethos

• Reflected on their experiences of been practitioner-researchers
Methods

• Two-stage
  – Questionnaires to first two cohorts of AHs
  – Explored experiences of HE, perceptions of HE culture, development of HE in FE, experiences of scholarly activity & research
    • 63% response rate
    • Manually coded using constant-comparative approach
  – Semi-structured interviews with 9 AH
    • Informed by questionnaire responses
Perceptions of HE ethos…?

• Students
  – Independent learners
  – Holistic experience
    • Academic, social and professional development
  – Mature Learning Environment
Perceptions of HE ethos …?

• Lecturers
  – Research active
  – Research inform teaching
  – Wider academic communities
  – Autonomy & freedom

“…challenging attitudes, approaches and ideas without getting into trouble for it, daring to go down a different path.”
Impact of Expansion: Students

Increased **accessibility** created more **opportunities** & raised the **aspirations** of learners:

“The majority of students that we take do not feel they are of university calibre (...) we are raising the game for people who would not have associated themselves with HE.”
Impact of Expansion: Lecturers

• Clear commitment to development of HE
  – Investment in infrastructure & resources

• Questioned their colleges commitment:

  “I am not convinced that the college (...)values (HE), although it says it does, there are mixed messages about how far the college is committed to developing an HE centre”
Impact of Expansion: Lecturers

• Absence of a wider understanding of HE

• Therefore provision marred by imposition of inappropriate governance
  – Registers
  – FE staff development activities
  – OFSTED…
Emerging HE ethos

• Role of students – nature of FD students
  – Non-traditional learners
    • Differ in age, commitments and education
    • Vocational experience
    • Considerable time passed since left education
    • Economically active – family work commitments

• Not expecting the traditional student experience
Emerging HE ethos

• Employed by an FEC but **work in partnership** with an external HEI

• Contrasting expectations & experiences
  – FE management & governance
  – Primary function to provide FE rather than HE
  – Lack of wider understanding of HE
  – Conflicting agendas & priorities…
“I think for some people and in some areas it caused tension and also a lack of understanding and resentment, we are a FE college why are we doing this?”
“I think managers don’t always acknowledge the amount of time for preparation and the level of HE that is required from the staff delivering HE and try to impose an FE model.”
Scholarly Activity & Research

Primary function to teach:

“...but if you’re doing scholarly activity there is no learner in front of you so it is not in the system to be recognised as a justifiable way of spending your time.”

Contrasting systems of measuring professional currency
Scholarly Activity & Research

• External agencies to provide opportunities & support for scholarly activity & research
• Validate their role as HE lecturers
• Contributed to their **identities** as HE lecturers

“When I did my CETL [project] I felt like a proper HE lecturer because I had a research project [and] that was the difference for me”
HE in FE – a hybrid zone…?

• Two distinct sectors of post-compulsory education
  – Partnership Working

• Employer by an FEC, adhere to the expectations of an external HEI
  – Appreciation of the role they should perform/ethos contributing…lack of support

• Teaching non-traditional students

• Neither HE, as associated with universities, or FE as perceived by their FE colleagues:
Hybrid Culture

- Research & Scholarly Activity
- Infrastructure & Resource Development
- Development of Academic Communities
- Increased Liaison with HEI
- Non-traditional Learners
- FE Management Governance
Changing Professional Identities...

- Engagement with HELP CETL – greater awareness of HE?

- Awareness of the realities of being an HE practitioner in an FEC

- Impact on expansion on professional identity
Professional Identity (PI)

- Dynamic – constantly evolving

- Influenced by:
  - Organisational culture
  - Social-professional interactions
  - Life history
  - Self perception (Sachs et al., 2001; Stronach et al., 2002)
PI of FE lecturers

• Perceptions of their role
• Professional Experience
  – Many spent time in another occupation

• Low professional status of FE lecturers
  – Casualisation of workforce
  – Technical effort rather than art of teaching
  – Until recently no expectation to have a teaching qualification

Robson, 1998; Spencerley, 2006
Context of HEI Lecturers

• National/international audience
• Undergraduate through to postgraduate courses
• Learners who have progressed directly through education system
• Ethos – autonomy/freedom
Role of HE Lecturer in an HEI

- Role conceived in pedagogical terms BUT in reality teaching role secondary to research role/subject specialism
- Researcher first, secondary role as a teacher
Research

• 2007-08 academic year – staff development
• 12 semi-structured interviews
• Professional/educational backgrounds
• Entry into HE teaching
• Perceptions of the role of a HE lecturers working in colleges/universities
• Support for their HE teaching and practice styles
Professional Profile of Participants

• 7 of the lecturers had progressed directly through the education system to university

• 5 “non-traditional learners”
  – Returned to education to further their careers/add credibility to their role
  – Ideally positioned to work with students attracted to study for foundation degrees...

• 4 entered teaching following graduation; rest of the group entered after spending time working in other professions
Entry into HE teaching

• 6 had experience of teaching HNDs/Cs; rest entered HE following the introduction of FDs

• HE teaching an accepted part of their role; do not feel they were specially selected to teach HE:
“I suppose because of my vocational background (I entered FE teaching); I then started on a BTEC national level 3 programme. And I suppose I’ve been reasonably successful at that and it’s sort of developed so that a few years later I then started teaching on HNC programmes...”
Perceptions of university lecturers

Research – priority

“...in some (universities) it would be seen as a priority over teaching... I would see research deemed as more important.”

“Well certainly they need to be good at teaching but also the research aspect and the subject specialism is key.”
Perceptions of university lecturers

Support

“I imagine that there is financial help, I imagine there is remission...I also imagine you are encouraged to do research and to publish and that doesn’t happen here.”
Perceptions of university lecturers

Teaching

“You would be doing a huge amount of your own research and you might have to do 8 or 10 hours a week of teaching, and it would be a terrible experience.”
Perceptions of university lecturers

Relationship with students

“...I just get the impression there is a greater volume of students and is it possible to have the same personal relationship, I don’t know...”

“Atonomy is the main goal and probably there is a little bit of a lack of emphasis on individual support for people.”
CL: roles & responsibilities

• View their role as to teach across courses, levels & subjects
• Also wider commitment associated with their role e.g. employer engagement:

“I teach all IT across those programmes, all professional development, study skills all that kind of thing. Also (...) research, statistics, project management...so I teach, I personal tutor and I spend a lot of my time on employer engagement...”
CL: roles & responsibilities

• Teaching & students central to their role
• Holistic approach to their teaching

“So my experience with foundation degree students is that you are dealing with people who have to learn how to learn before they can learn what they are there to learn. They have to find the skills of reading, assimilating information, study, especially time management and they have to learn how to do all of that before they can learn about statistics, sociology, whatever it is they are there to learn from a subject point of view.”
Impact of Expansion

- Deliver the same subject matter in their HE/FE teaching:
  - Employ different assessment modes
  - Different expectations of their learners
  - Develop as independent learners
  - Differentiate between the FE and HE experience for those students who progressed internally
“My view is that we continue to teach subject matter that is now at level 4 rather than level 3 so it’s a bit more involved, it’s a bit more detailed...I think the way that we assess our expectations on students is different, I am expecting more research, more analysis to be presented.”
Impact of Expansion

HE in FE has enabled them to develop as autonomous practitioners.

“I feel we are given tremendous amount of freedom to develop our own programmes to pursue what we feel we should be pursuing (...) in a way you’ve got far more freedom than you have if you run BTEC or national diplomas you have to take them off the peg, even if they don’t fit, if they don’t fit the students, they don’t fit the employers that you’ve got working around you.”
Compare & Contrast (HE in HEI vs. HE in FE)

- Perceive a greater commitment to teaching & therefore students

- Smaller cohorts enable a personal & supportive relationship to be fostered – beneficial for students development...
“I wonder if in FE it is easier for FE teachers to know their students better because there are fewer of them, that brings its problems because they are more likely to email you, stop you in the corridor, ring you up....”

• Close contact – an extra burden...?
Compare & Contrast (HE in HEI vs. HE in FE)

- HE in FE: Jack of all trades

“Probably in my time here I have actually probably taught 14 totally different subjects which makes it hard for me to perhaps be an absolute specialist... whereas in HE I suspect you focus on one particular subject and teach that very, very well. Whereas we don’t have the time, or resources or staffing for that to occur.”
Compare & Contrast (HEI in HE vs. HE in FE)

• Support for scholarly activity & research

“We have access to a range of CPD activities through the university, for example the xxxxx programme. It just so happened it ran on a Friday, it was a convenient time for me, I applied and obviously could go. But I do think that the courses I’ve just been talking about, I chose to go on. The College has not said to me to do that and I don’t think there has been any guidance from the College really at all quite honestly...”
Compare & Contrast

Mismatch in HE & FE systems

• Deliver HE within confines of FE

“What you don’t get though, is you don’t get systems within the college, IT systems, funding information, staff development, all of that is all geared to FE. So we don’t fit, we are a square peg in a round hole.”

• BUT sense that they have to acknowledge the fact HE is a minority of colleges provision
Implications for PI

• HEI Lecturers PI: not just related to research, teaching & admin (Clegg, 2008)
  – Highly distinctive: autonomy & agency

• FE lecturers PI: Complex & fragmented
  – Previous professional experience
  – Low professional status

• Exhibit professional characteristics associated with being an FE lecturer (e.g. Briggs, 2005)
  – Commitment to learners
Implications for PI

• Key to identity development
  – Socialisation processes: relationship building
  – Physical location (Bernstein, 2000; Beck and Young, 2005)

• HE in FECs minority of provision
  – Isolated pockets, limited opportunities to meet
  – Identity development away from an HEI
Implications for PI

• UPC – vital link with University/neutral territory
  – Validation, quality assurance

• Requested further opportunities for Scholarly Activity & Research
Implications for PI

• HE and FE – Clash of Cultures: Hybrid
  – Negotiating dual demands
  – Acute for those teaching both HE and FE

• Professional identity in a state of FLUX
  – Juggle professional values & goals
  – Frustration

• Unrealistic to have one PI, especially given the varied backgrounds of FE lecturers
Identity as HE in FE Professionals

• Importance of recognition
  – Celebrates the role of the HE in FE professional
  • Continued development & motivation
    – Local & Global level (Stronach et al., 2002)

• General traits as an HE in FE professional
  – Lecturers identities will be unique
  – Diversity of professional experiences
  – Key to learners success?
• What next….?

• Further research into lecturers identity
  – “Lived Experience”

  – Award Holder Journey
Discussion Points

• Support for Scholarly Activity & Research

• Relationship with Partner HEI

• Professional Recognition & Validation
• Thank you for listening

• Further details of the HELP CETL & the Award Holder Scheme www.help-cetl.ac.uk

• Further experiences of HE in FE professionals http://escalate.ac.uk/6105

• Publications:
