



Universal Access and Dual Regimes of Further and Higher Education (The FurtherHigher Project)

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WORKING PAPER 1

INTERNATIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL STUDIES

Kevin Dougherty, Jim Gallacher, Glen Jones, Gavin Moodie, Peter Scott and
Geoff Stanton

Contact:

Karen Kitchen
Project Secretary
School of Education
University of Sheffield
Sheffield S10 2JA

0114 222 8093
k.kitchen@sheffield.ac.uk

Project Website: www.sheffield.ac.uk/furtherhigher



Universal Access and Dual Regimes of Further and Higher Education

(The FurtherHigher Project)

Our working papers

This is one of a series of working papers reporting the methods, findings and implications of a study of *Universal Access and Dual Regimes of Further and Higher Education* (The FurtherHigher Project). Each is authored by one or more individuals on behalf of the project team. The working papers, along with copies of presentations and publications, can be downloaded from the project website at www.sheffield.ac.uk/furtherhigher

Our project

The research was one of seven projects on widening participation in higher education funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through its Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). Information about each study, including Research Briefings on our own and other projects, can be accessed at www.tlrp.org The FurtherHigher Project was based at the University of Sheffield and undertaken between February 2006 and July 2008.

Our objective

We investigated the influence of a division between further and higher education on strategies to widen participation in English undergraduate education. Such a division was intended to concentrate higher education in one sector and further education in another sector, each with their own institutions and separate funding and regulatory bodies. However, government policy in recent years has looked to expand higher education in the further education sector. We examined whether sector separation advanced or inhibited a broadening of participation.

Our approach

We looked at policy and practice at three levels. At the system level, policy interviews and statistical studies were combined with international and contextual commentaries. At the institutional level, we employed case studies to develop a typology of further-higher organisational forms. At the level of courses and students, detailed fieldwork was carried out in four partner further-higher establishments to elucidate features of progression.

Our project team

Ann-Marie Bathmaker (Director), Greg Brooks (Director), Diane Burns, Maxine Burton, David Dale, Cate Goodlad, Liz Halford, Karen Kitchen, Sammy Rashid, Andy Roberts, Gareth Parry (Director), David Smith (Director), Will Thomas, Anne Thompson, Val Thompson.

International and Contextual Studies in the FurtherHigher Project

Introduction

Six papers were commissioned by the project to inform understanding of the situation in England. Four papers were written giving a country perspective on contemporary English two-sector arrangements alongside two domestic papers offering a critical reflection on English developments. The project made available a long source paper on the English situation – drafted by Gareth Parry – and asked the commissioned authors to comment on aspects of this case, including the role played by sectors and the contribution made by dual-sector and mixed-economy organisations to expanding access, participation and progression in higher education.

The context for considering these matters was the creation of a two-sector tertiary system following legislation in 1988 and 1992 and, more specifically, the effort of governments over the last ten years to change the pattern of supply and demand for undergraduate education in undergraduate education. We call this policy enterprise ‘the English experiment’. In our source paper, we outline the main phases and elements in this policy experiment and consider the place of dual-sector and mixed-economy institutions.

The six commissioned papers are brought together in this Working Paper. The source paper is reproduced in full in Working Paper 2. In addition, the authors were sent a copy of the Research Briefing produced by the project team and published by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) on behalf of the Economic and Social Research Council (Parry et al, 2008). They were also sent a jointly authored article in the journal *Research Papers in Education* that reported some of the preliminary findings of the study.

The source report was based on a review and analysis of a wide range documentary, statistical and academic sources as well as the findings from a series of policy interviews.

Further information about the commissioning of the international and contextual papers and the conduct of documentary and interview studies is given in Working Paper 7.

Drawing on evidence and experience referenced to their own or other systems, the authors of commissioned papers were asked to give specific attention to the role of vocational, community and further education colleges in higher education, especially whether and how they serve as open-access, multi-level and transfer institutions. In some systems, this role is large and long-established. In others, such as England, the college contribution is contested and insecure. In some jurisdictions, comprehensive universities perform these broad functions alongside, or in association with, short-cycle colleges.

We deliberately restricted our country examples to broadly analogous (anglophone) post-secondary systems and where there is an academic division of labour between further and higher education or two-year and four-year institutions. Part of the rationale for the contextual papers was to test the account and interpretation provided in the source report. The commissioned authors are leading scholars on their own systems and in their own fields of study. Each was asked to provide a short paper (assembled in this document) and then, following an exchange of papers, to submit a longer version for publication in the journal *Higher Education Quarterly* in 2009 (Volume 63, Number 4).

Six commissioned papers

The six papers presented in this Working Paper are draft documents. They are not for citation or quotation at this stage. The four international papers are followed by the two domestic commentaries.

- **English further education through American eyes**
Kevin Dougherty (Teachers College, Columbia University)

- **Dual sector institutions: a Canadian commentary**
Glen Jones (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto)
- **The significance of Australian vocational education institutions in opening access to higher education**
Gavin Moodie (Griffith University)
- **The contribution of Scotland's colleges to higher education and widening participation: differences from the English experience**
Jim Gallacher (Glasgow Caledonian University)
- **English higher and further education: a commentary**
Peter Scott (Kingston University)
- **A View from within English further education: issues of verticality and agency**
Geoff Stanton

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Bathmaker, A.-M., Brooks, G., Parry, G. and Smith, D. (2008) 'Dual-sector further and higher education: policies, organisations and students in transition', *Research Papers in Education*, 23 (2), 125-137.

Parry, G., Bathmaker, A.-M., Brooks, G. and Smith, D. (2008) *Combining Further and Higher Education: Policy, Organisation and Progression*, 40. London: TLRP.

ENGLISH FURTHER EDUCATION THROUGH AMERICAN EYES

Kevin J. Doughertyⁱ
Teachers College, Columbia University

10-13-08

This paper is a response to an invitation to consider the history and present state of the English further education system from the perspective of the United States. As an external perspective, it carries the dangers that key features will be missed or distorted. But there may be a benefit in having an outside observer, who is not immersed in the native environment and therefore does not take it for granted, comment on the nature of the English further education system.

In this paper, I will point to commonalities and divergences that I find between the English further education system and its nearest U.S. equivalent, the community college system. In terms of commonalities, the paper will discuss the reliance being put on sub-university institutions to provide access to higher education, the dilemmas attendant to that reliance, and the conflicts over efforts to make non-university postsecondary institutions become more specialized in their missions. With regard to divergences, this paper will examine differences between the two nations in the definition of higher education and postsecondary education, the vigor of the sub-baccalaureate ethos and its defense, the strength of transfer arrangements, the balance between national and sub-national governance, and the role of private provision of higher education.

English and American Similarities

The English Further Education colleges (FECs) and the American community colleges (CCs) share three striking similarities. One is the strong commitment to use non-university higher education institutions as a principal means to open access to higher education. The second is the dilemmas of comprehensiveness that are attendant to that social role. And the third is the allure of – but also strong resistance to – reducing comprehensiveness by making the postsecondary institutions more specialized in their mission.

Reliance on Non-University Institutions to Open Access to Higher Education

The FECs have come to be regarded as a central component of English efforts to increase access to postsecondary education. They have become crucial points of access to postsecondary education and even baccalaureate education, particularly for students from lower-income and minority backgrounds. It has been estimated that perhaps 13% of higher education students were taught in further education colleges (Parry, 2006: 9, 2008; King, Widdowson, and Brown, 2008: 19).

Similarly, in the United States, community colleges are one of the most important gateways into higher education. They now enroll 35% of all students in degree-granting postsecondary education and, in several states, are the main portal to the baccalaureate degree. For minority students, community colleges are even more important, enrolling nearly 42% of Black, Latino, and Asian students (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2007: Tables 180, 217).

This similarity of purpose does raise the issue of whether the further education colleges will run afoul of a fundamental issue confronting American community colleges' central role in providing access to higher education. Several different studies find that – even with a wide range of controls for selection bias – baccalaureate aspirants entering the community college are 10-15% less likely to receive that degree than if they had entered four-year colleges directly (Alfonso, 2005; Dougherty, 1994; Long and Kurlaender, 2008). This contradictory role of providing wider access for less advantaged students but also diverting them from full pursuit of higher degrees has been identified as a central feature of the community college (Brint and Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994). Given that less advantaged students in England are also reliant on the FECs for access to higher degrees, might the FECs also be playing the same role of both providing access and creating diversion (see Bathmaker, Brooks, Parry, and Smith, 2008)?

Dilemmas of Comprehensiveness

One of the principal ways in which community colleges encourage greater access is by providing a wide panoply of educational programs, ranging from academic education to vocational education and basic literacy education. However, this breadth of curriculum poses a great dilemma. Postsecondary institutions pursuing very different programs may find that they cannot do all of them well, because those programs compete for a limited stock of organizational attention, energy, and material resources and may in fact undermine the effective functioning of other programs (Dougherty, 1994; Dougherty and Townsend, 2006).ⁱⁱ Secondly, sub-baccalaureate institutions wishing to offer higher education find themselves dependent on higher institutions for granting the key

completion degree and those higher institutions do not necessarily feel obligated to make the job easy for lower-level institutions. Besides seeing them as competitors, higher institutions may be reluctant to accept the credits or degrees of lower-level institutions, because they question their quality, thus hindering student movement from the lower to the higher institutions (Dougherty, 1994, 2002).

This should not be taken as an argument against comprehensiveness. There is strong evidence that more comprehensive institutions are superior in providing broader access to higher education (Dougherty, 1994, 2002). But it is an argument for being fully aware of the dilemmas comprehensivism engenders and actively looking for ways to overcome them. Such a search has led to proposals in the United States to reduce friction in the transfer process as much as possible (through system-wide transfer agreements and common course numbering) and, more radically, to authorize community colleges to themselves offer baccalaureate degrees (Dougherty, 1994, 2002). Similar points have been raised in England, with proposals to move to a credit-based transfer system to ensure seamless transfer between FECs and universities (Parry, 2006, 2008; King et al., 2008). We will return to this below.

The Allure of – and Resistance to – Mission Specialization

Because of the dilemmas it engenders, comprehensivism has often been decried in both England and the United States. In both countries, strong efforts have been made to make non-university postsecondary educations adopt more specialized missions. One thinks of the Dearing Commission's strong push for the FECs to emphasize sub-baccalaureate higher education and recent efforts to have FECs become specialized

“centres of vocational education” (Parry, 2006: 13; 2008). Similarly, in the United States, many public and private commissions – most notably the California Master Plan and similar efforts in many other states -- have called for American colleges and universities to become more specialized and reduce overlap in their functions. But that advice has rarely been heeded. Though community colleges are supposed to focus on sub-baccalaureate education (particularly in vocational form), many are now widely pursuing authority to offer baccalaureate degrees, to the dismay of many observers who deplore this as a dilution of the community college mission (Floyd, Skolnik, and Walker, 2005). Similarly, nonelite state teachers colleges and universities have long pursued higher status as research universities, provoking outrage from their institutional betters (Brint, Riddle, and Hanneman, 2006).

While decried, this institutional resistance to calls for specialization is quite understandable. As higher educational observers have long noted, there is a clear pecking order of higher education institutions and institutions are loath to accept lower status in the name of what they consider spurious claims of parity of prestige or the need for someone to address important, albeit little honored, social functions (Brint et al., 2006). This pursuit of prestige is made all the more strong by the fact that the model of what is higher education that is purveyed world wide is largely based on the elite universities, so that even being seen as a legitimate form of higher education is dependent on emulating the elite institutions (Meyer et al., 2007).

But if status and legitimacy may seem ephemeral concerns, there remain brute matters of finance and power to impel postsecondary institutions to resist specialization. In the face of uncertainties of funding, institutions will usually pursue a varied portfolio

of revenue streams. As resource dependence theory would predict (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1977), institutions will try to control their environmental uncertainty by spreading it across a variety of revenue sources, reducing the impact of fluctuations in any given source. Hence, postsecondary institutions will try to maintain a presence in both academic and vocational markets. American community colleges have been particularly noteworthy for this pursuit of multiple ventures, in the name of an ideal of being comprehensive, community serving colleges (Dougherty, 1994, 2002; Dougherty and Townsend, 2006). Much the same pursuit of a diverse investment portfolio seems to be evident in England, with many FECs pursuing upper-level higher education and many universities offering sub-baccalaureate higher education and vocational education (Bathmaker et al., 2008; Parry, 2008).

Closely allied to the pursuit of multiple sources of funding is the cultivation of multiple sources of political support. American community colleges have seen their multiple educational and training ventures in good part as ways of securing the patronage of powerful actors, particularly local and state government officials and business firms and associations. This political drive played a major role in the development of the vocational education function of the US community college. This pursuit of political patronage was understandable given the weak political position of these colleges, as subordinate institutions within an organizational field dominated by the universities (Brint and Karabel., 1989, 1991; Dougherty, 1994). One wonders whether a similar desire for political patronage might be at work in the FECs pursuit of higher education. For example, does having a strong higher education component allow the FECs to attract

more affluent students and their more powerful parents, as well as the attention and perhaps support of the higher education funding bodies.

Dissimilarities of Experience

While I have been struck by the similarities of situation between the English FECs and American community colleges, I have also been struck by the differences. Five come to mind, involving the definition of higher education and how it is related to other forms of postsecondary education, the vigor of the sub-baccalaureate ethos and its defense, the strength of transfer arrangements, the balance between national and sub-national governance, and the role of private provision of higher education.

How Higher Education Is Defined

To American eyes, a notable feature of the English postsecondary education system is the continued strength of a definition of “higher education” that excludes the bulk of sub-baccalaureate education. It is surprising to find that only a portion of the further education colleges and their offerings are considered higher education. Moreover, it is striking that the FECs cannot offer degrees in their own names, even if they offer the whole of baccalaureate education. The baccalaureate degrees are granted by universities to which the FECs have formed ties (Parry, 2006: 8-9, 2008).ⁱⁱⁱ

U.S. community colleges have long been considered higher education institutions. As part of this, even their sub-baccalaureate associate degrees have long been considered higher education degrees and community colleges grant them in their own names.^{iv} Furthermore, as noted above, a small but growing number of community colleges now

offer complete baccalaureate training and have the right to offer baccalaureate degrees in their own names (Dougherty and Reid, 2007; Floyd et al., 2005).

The Vigor of the Sub-Baccalaureate Ethos and Its Defense

Another striking difference between the English and American systems is in the vigor in which the claim of the sub-baccalaureate sector as an integral part of higher education is defended. It is noteworthy that England does have an Association of Colleges to make the case for the further education colleges. Still, it does not appear to have the age and heft of the American Association of Community Colleges, which was founded in 1920 and over time became a very significant actor in the scholarly and political conversation about what is higher education (Brint and Karabel, 1989). The AACC developed or capitalized on a series of discourses – the “community” college, open door admissions, career education, lifelong learning, workforce and economic development – that have helped community colleges gain a central role in current discussion about higher education policy. To be sure, there is still a strong tendency in the United States to almost unconsciously equate higher education with universities. But the fact remains that the community colleges have been able to ensure that they are defined as an integral part of higher education and their political power in many cases now approximates that of the universities (Cook, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

The Strength of Transfer Arrangements

Closely connected to the above two differences is the fact that transfer arrangements between FEC-provided higher education and university completion appears to be much less strongly articulated in England than is the case with community college articulation with universities in the United States (Parry, 2006, 2008).^v First, transfer arrangements in England largely take the form of bilateral agreements between a given FEC and university rather than systemwide agreements between FECs and universities that are mandated by law (Parry, 2006; King et al., 2008: 20).^{vi} The difficulty of such bilateral arrangement is that they restrict transfer to a narrow range of upper-level institutions. But if lower-level institutions do negotiate several of these arrangements, this takes up considerable administrative energy and time and may produce arrangements that differ considerably and confuse students and their advisors.

Secondly, it is striking that effective transfer in England largely requires the completion of a program – such as a foundation degree – with little provision for transfer of credits short of that (Parry, 2006: 8-9; King et al., 2008: 20).^{vii} Granted, program completion is desirable but the fact is that students often fail to do so, which leaves them with the unpalatable option of an informal and idiosyncratic review of individual courses. In the United States, efforts have been made to regularize such review by states mandating that credits in clearly designated general education courses in community colleges are to be accepted for full credit at public universities (Dougherty and Reid, 2007).

The Balance between National and Sub-National Control

With the recent reforms, the English further education system has moved to a much more national system. This often causes envy on the part of Americans, given the messiness and often incoherence of American governmental arrangements. The federal government has relatively little power over higher education, particularly community colleges (Clark, 1990; Gladieux et al., 2005). They are creatures of state and local government and secure 53 % of their revenues from them (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2007: Table 338). This produces a higher education system that varies greatly across state and even local lines (American Association of Community Colleges, 2007) and makes it very hard to bend it to emerging national policy concerns.

But this very variation is also a source of strength. The presence of 50 different state systems allows for considerable experimentation. Florida, Illinois, California, and Washington can develop new transfer arrangements or performance funding systems (Dougherty and Reid, 2007), and other states can watch how well they work and adopt the parts that seem most effective (McLendon, Heller, and Young, 2005).^{viii} Moreover, this autonomy of sub-national governments also means that the national government cannot easily make sweeping changes, as a new party comes to power, that may too quickly and unthinkingly overthrow previous arrangements. To American eyes, the reforms of 1988, 1992, and 2000 are both enviable and disconcerting: we may admire the national government's capacity to reorganize higher education in a coherent way but we may be troubled by the fact that this educational monoculture may leave less room for organizational experimentation and evolution and for the expression of sub-national interests. Moreover, from the perspective of individual colleges, the nationalization of

control means that they have much weaker ties to local governments and local businesses and therefore less capacity to develop local revenue streams that can insulate them against sudden shifts in national priorities and funding.

The Size of the For-Profit Private Higher Education Sector

For-profit institutions apparently account for a much smaller share of postsecondary enrollments in the UK than in the United States (Clark, 2006: 11; Santiago, Tremblay, Basri, and Arnal, 2008: vol. 2, 375). In the latter, for-profit institutions now account for nearly 6% of degree-credit enrollments and an even larger portion of non-degree enrollments (Kinser, 2006; U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2007: Table 183). The smaller size of for-profit provision in England may benefit the FECs in one regard, in that they face less competition. On the other hand, for-profit colleges have emerged as an important outlet for American community colleges. For-profit four-year colleges are considerably more eager than state-supported universities to accept transfer students coming out of community college vocational programs, thus providing community colleges with both an alternative supplier of upper-division places and a lever for opening up the state universities to more vocational transfers (Dougherty, 2002).

Conclusions

There are substantial points of convergence between the English further education colleges and American community colleges with regard to their social role and the dilemmas it poses. At the same time there are also considerable divergences, founded on

their different origins. English further education colleges began as vocational institutions facing a university education system that distanced itself from the obviously vocational. Meanwhile, American community colleges largely began as academic institutions facing a university system that – at least for the public universities – already incorporated a substantial amount of vocational training and was eager to use community colleges as ways of diverting what they deemed less qualified students away from university doors (Brint and Karabel, 1989; Dougherty 1994; Geiger, 2005). As a result, the English FECs have faced substantially greater difficulties than the American community colleges in claiming a major role in higher education.

However, despite their different origins and trajectories, both the FECs and the community colleges together face the contradictory situation of how to provide full breadth of access to postsecondary education through a comprehensive program and yet not divert less advantaged students from realizing the fullest benefits of higher education. There is much that each set of institutions can learn from the other on how to resolve this contradiction.

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ⁱ I wish to thank Beth Stevens for her comments on this paper.

ⁱⁱ There is a debate over whether the vocational emphasis of the community college also interferes with its capacity to support baccalaureate attainment. Some argue that highly vocationalized community colleges are less likely to produce transfer students; others disagree (see Dougherty and Townsend, 2006).

ⁱⁱⁱ The FECs were granted the right by 2007 legislation to apply for foundation-degree granting powers but none has yet secured this right (Parry, 2008; King et al., 2008: 18).

^{iv} Community colleges also offer certificates and other credentials in their own names that do not count as higher education degrees (Cohen and Brawer, 2008; Kinser, 2006). Still, it is striking that the further education colleges do not even grant certificates in their own names. They can only prepare people for the exams of the actual granting bodies.

^v Some recent research has questioned how effective US transfer arrangements are. But that research has been hampered by the lack of good measures of strength of articulation agreements.

^{vi} There are some efforts being made at the regional level – for example, in the greater Manchester area -- to develop multi-institution transfer arrangements (King et al., 2008: 20).

^{vii} Difficulty in having credits accepted seems to be particularly great in the institutions that had university status before the 1992 reforms that gave university status to the polytechnics (King et al., 2008: 20).

^{viii} This of course is the long-standing “laboratories of democracy” defense of the U.S. federal system of government. It is a powerful argument, but needs to be tempered by a realization that state autonomy also allowed the white South to justify and protect for many years its “peculiar institution” of slavery and segregation.

DUAL SECTOR INSTITUTIONS: A CANADIAN COMMENTARY

Glen A. Jones
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
October 17, 2008

My objective in this paper is to comment on the detailed analysis of the rise and role of dual sector institutions in England. I will do so by outlining some important key differences between the English and Canadian experience, especially in terms defining higher education, the role of further education programming within Canadian universities, the blurring boundaries between the university and college sectors in some Canadian provinces, and the growth of articulation, collaboration, and hybrid relationships between institutions.

Defining Higher Education in Canada

My understanding is that in the English system there is a clear distinction between higher education, defined as educational programming that is recognized for credit towards a degree, and further education, which is synonymous with short-cycle educational programs that may lead to a recognized credential, such as a national diploma, but where students will not receive credit towards a degree. In the Canadian context both types of activity are associated with institutions that we would classify as part of a more broadly defined higher education (or postsecondary education) sector. Historically, Canadian higher education has been characterized as having two institutional types, universities, which have been traditionally defined by their authority to grant degrees and some other institutional characteristics, and community colleges. In 2004/05 there were approximately 785,900 undergraduate students enrolled in Canadian universities (approximately 631,900 full-time) and approximately 514,000 full-time students enrolled in public colleges and institutes, though it is important to note that the latter includes students enrolled in certificate and diploma programs as well as university transfer programs (Canada Education Statistics Council, 2007). The role and structure of the community college sector varies by province but, until recently, the sector was at least partly defined by the fact that these institutions did not have the authority to grant degrees, a point I will return to later (Jones, 2006).

This difference in definition becomes important in comparing the English and Canadian experiences because in Canada the university and college sectors have both been regarded as components of provincial higher education systems (see Jones, 1997). There may be different funding mechanisms by sector, but both sectors function under the regulatory eye of the same provincial ministry.

Universities and “Further Education”

Universities, as an institutional type, have largely been defined as comprehensive, secular, autonomous institutions that have the legal authority to grant degrees. However, universities also frequently offer a range of sub-degree programs and continuing education activities that might well be defined as “further education” under the English system.

There were no universities west of Ontario when the Dominion of Canada was created in 1867, and the new universities that emerged in each of the four new western provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia) assumed a special role as “provincial” universities. Not surprisingly, given their emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these institutions were heavily influenced by the American state university model, especially the University of Wisconsin, and they moved quickly to develop programs in relevant applied fields, such as agriculture, in addition to traditional programs in the arts, sciences, and professions. These universities also offered short-cycle programs from departments of extension or continuing education with the understanding that these institutions had a role to play in the broader educational and economic development of the jurisdiction (Jones, 2001).

Over time, most Canadian universities developed continuing education units or extension initiatives. Much of this activity involves the provision of general interest courses that do not lead to any form of recognized credential, but many universities also offer vocational education certificate and diploma programs. For example, a number of universities (especially in western Canada) have a long history of offering agricultural diploma programs, and many continuing education units offer certificate and diploma programs that are clearly vocationally oriented. Depending on local needs (and the market), university continuing education units often provide ESL programs and other forms of adult upgrading programming. Unfortunately, there is no national enrolment data on university-based short-cycle vocational programming, but using the English definition, most Canadian universities offer at least a very modest level of further education programming. This is not, however, high-access vocational programming; the continuing education units at most universities have a mandate to generate revenue (or at least break even) and many vocational certificate and diploma programs have emerged as a function of institutional entrepreneurship.

The Evolution of the Provincial College Sectors

While many universities offer further education programming, the story of dual sector institutions in Canada is largely tied to the development and evolution of community colleges. The initial post-war expansion of higher education in Canada was funded by direct federal government grants to universities, but by the 1960s the provinces were asserting their constitutional rights over education (now assumed to include higher education) and the federal government shifted from direct support to indirect funding through transfers to the provinces. The ten provincial governments now assumed the central role in planning and funding the expansion of postsecondary education, and this

expansion process led to the creation of a new type of institution in each province that had a mandate to provide vocational education, and often involved integrating what had previously been separate, specialized vocational institutes.

While these new institutions were frequently called “community colleges” there were tremendous differences in the role, mandate, and structure of these institutions by province, in part because the provinces made very different decisions about how to structure their expanding higher education systems (Dennison & Gallagher, 1995; Jones, 1996). The province of Quebec restructured its entire educational system (from kindergarten to graduate school) as a component of a broader range of social reforms that became known as the “Quiet Revolution,” and the province created the *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CEGEP or College of General and Vocational Education) to play an intermediary role between school and university as well as offer vocational programs. Students complete secondary school at the end of grade 11. Continuing students then attend a CEGEP and enrol in either a two-year pre-university program, or a vocational program (usually three years in length). These are regional, high access institutions that do not charge tuition fees.

The provinces of British Columbia and Alberta created community colleges that more closely resembled the American model in that the colleges offered two distinct types of postsecondary educational programs: students could attend a local community college to take the first two years of university credits; or they could enrol in a two-year career-oriented diploma program. Under this model, the community colleges became a mechanism for expanding access to the first two years of university degree programs as well as providing new opportunities for students to enrol in technical and vocational programs. In addition to community colleges, both provinces also created institutes of technology that would offer non-degree, career-focused, technical programs (See Dennison, 1997; Andrews, Holdaway & Mowat, 1997).

The remaining provinces created institutions that focused on providing postsecondary technical/vocational programs, but these community colleges did not have a university transfer function. In most provinces these colleges offered trades and two-year technical/vocational diploma programs, while the new Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology offered programs of up to three years in length. In these provinces the colleges provided students with an alternative to university, but they did not provide students with an alternative route to a university degree, and issues of credit transfer and credential recognition were frequently raised as students attempted to move from one sector to the other (Jones, Skolnik & Soren, 1998).

In terms of dual sector institutions, then, only three provinces created institutional types during this period that had an explicit mandate to offer programs linked to the university sector as well as further education programming. The Quebec CEGEPs became the required pathway to university and were designed to be a high-access, intermediary institution that would facilitate the transition from secondary school to university. The British Columbia and Alberta community colleges were designed to provide students who did not live close to a traditional university with local access to the first two years of university credits, in addition to offering career-focused diploma programs. Alberta and British Columbia also created provincial councils that facilitated

the creation of explicit arrangements for credit recognition and transfer between institutions so that a student would know in advance how a course credit obtained at one institution would be treated by others within that jurisdiction.

While at one point it might have been possible to argue that there were clear boundaries between the university and college sectors, these boundaries have become blurred in several provinces by government decisions to extend the authority to grant degrees to institutions that are not regarded as universities (Shanahan & Jones, 2007). British Columbia provided limited degree-granting authority to the Emily Carr School of Art and Design (a specialized art school that would later become the Emily Carr University of Art and Design) and the British Columbia Institute of Technology (which offered apprenticeship programs and a range of business and technical diploma programs). British Columbia also transformed a number of its community colleges into “university colleges,” institutions that would later have the independent authority to offer degrees while retaining a strong mandate to offer trades and diploma programs in applied fields (Dennison, 1997), and, under the province’s *University Act* of 2008, most of these institutions were repositioned and renamed as universities. These are clearly dual sector institutions with the authority to grant degrees while retaining a historic role in short-cycle vocational programming.

The province of Alberta initially expanded degree-granting authority by allowing colleges and institutes to award “applied degrees,” essentially a new credential involving three years of course work and one year of supervised work experience. Alberta’s *Postsecondary Learning Amendment Act* of 2008 establishes six sectors of postsecondary institutions and expands the types of institutions that can offer “baccalaureate” degrees (in addition to “applied degrees”) subject to a provincial review of new degree proposals. Each sector is described in terms of the types of credentials that they can award and their role in research. For example, only institutions in the “Comprehensive Academic and Research Institutions” sector can award masters and doctoral degrees.

Ontario also passed legislation that allowed its Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology to offer degrees in applied areas subject to government approval based on advice from a new Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board which reviewed all new proposals. Unlike Alberta, the Ontario applied degrees have a four-year structure and rigour that more closely resembles traditional degree programs in the university sector (see Skolnik, 2005). It is also important to note that Ontario colleges also offer post-diploma programs that are aimed at students who already have a university degree or college diploma, for example a career-oriented one-year diploma in a field of applied social science that builds upon a liberal arts undergraduate degree.

While the recent history of higher and further education in England seems to involve a fairly stable series of boundaries (though with significant changes taking place within these bounded relationships), the recent history of system-level structural change in several Canadian provinces has involved a blurring of boundaries between sectors with considerable experimentation in the development of new institutional categories and credentials.

Increasing accessibility to higher education has been a major rationale underscoring most of these reforms. Generally speaking, community colleges have been

more accessible institutions than their university peers, and, recognizing differences by province, they have generally attracted a larger share of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds than their university peers. Expanding degree granting status and disrupting what had once been clear boundaries between institutional types have been strategies designed to increase accessibility to degree programs.

Articulation, Collaboration, and Hybrid Relationships

As I understand it, some institutes of higher education in England subcontract higher education program activities to institutes of further education, and that this approach accounts for much of the higher education activity within the further education sector. The Canadian parallel has been the growth of articulation and collaborative arrangements between individual institutions in each sector.

As I have already noted, most provinces created a community college sector that did not include an explicit university transfer function, and, in the context of lifelong learning, there has been an increasing interest in finding ways for graduates of the college sector to continue their education in the university sector and have some or all of their prior education recognized for credit towards degree programs. Decisions on credit recognition were in the hands of individual universities, and there were differences of opinion between institutions and between sectors in terms of the level of credit that should be awarded. Articulation between the sectors became a major policy issue (Jones, Skolnik & Soren, 1998).

While the issue is far from resolved, there has been a growth in formal articulation arrangements between institutions. Under these arrangements, a college and a university enter into an agreement concerning how the university will treat successful graduates of the college; the agreements frequently deal with the transition from a specific college diploma program into a related university degree program. Articulation arrangements provide students with a clearer sense of future possibilities, and colleges advertise the existence of these arrangements in their recruitment materials.

There has also been a growth in collaborative programs, especially in Ontario, where individual colleges and universities have worked together to create degree programs where some of the degree requirements are met within a college environment and some are met within a university environment. For example, many nursing students in Ontario are now enrolled in collaborative programs where some of the curriculum is the responsibility of a college (by college faculty using college facilities) and some of the curriculum is the responsibility of a university. These are not sub-contract or franchise arrangement, but rather collaborative degree programs where two legal entities have entered into an agreement to work together. They are not equal partners, however, since only the university, in this example, has the legal authority to grant the degree.

Finally, there has been a growth in hybrid relationships. The University of Guelph and Humber Institute have jointly created Guelph at Humber, a joint facility that offers Guelph degree programs on the Humber campus. Seneca College in Toronto has a campus at York University. There has been an increase in experimentation in hybrid

relationships that may involve joint programming, and the sharing of facilities or resources to complement specialized articulation arrangements or collaborative activities.

Provincial governments have generally supported increased articulation and collaboration between sectors. These arrangements can increase accessibility to higher education, but perhaps more importantly they can increase access to higher levels of postsecondary education through the formal development of laddering arrangements so that the steps from one credential to the next become clearer.

Concluding Observations

In Canada, as in England, the emergence of dual sector institutions has largely been an attempt to increase access to higher education, especially to degree programs. However, there are significant differences in the history and form that the further and higher education systems in these jurisdictions. Some of these differences are probably more related to Canada's highly decentralized approach to higher education policy, since it is important to note that there is no national ministry of education or higher education, and no national higher education policy, and there is little doubt that the absence of a strong federal or national presence in this policy area has been a factor in the rise of quite different provincial institutional types and system policies. The boundaries between further and higher education in England seem clearer and more stable than the boundaries between institutional types in at least some Canadian provinces. On the other hand, the further and higher education sectors in England seem to be structured as separate games (with dual sector institutions playing cards at two tables) while in the Canadian provinces one has a sense of multiple sectors playing the same game, though with different roles assigned to different players, and sometimes there are great differences of opinion over the rules.

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The significance of Australian vocational education institutions in opening access to higher education

Gavin Moodie, Griffith University

Abstract

Australian vocational education institutions have a somewhat higher share of higher education enrolments than their English analogues, colleges of further education. Nonetheless, they have not had a significant role in opening access to higher education because this role has been denied them in favour of preparing students for work. Despite this, five dual sector universities are providing opportunities for vocational education students to transfer to higher education at about twice the rate as single and mixed sector universities. More recently, some State governments and the Australian Government has supported vocational education institutions in offering higher education programs. While this may increase the proportion of students transferring from vocational to higher education, it will not of itself widen access to higher education because most vocational education students transferring to higher education have similar demographic characteristics as higher education students.

Introduction

Australian vocational education and training institutions – the analogues of British further education colleges – enrol 15% of Australian higher education equivalent full time students. Table 1 below provides similar data to table 1 in the source paper (Parry, 2008) with two exceptions. Student participation is reported as equivalent full time students rather than as enrolments or head counts because a large majority of Australian vocational education students study part time and thus head counts give a misleading impression of the size of the sector. The second difference from Parry's table is the separation of undergraduate equivalent full time students into bachelor students and students enrolled in subgraduate diplomas, advanced diplomas and associate degrees. This makes clear that 99% of Australian vocational education higher education equivalent full time students are enrolled in sub graduate programs. As will be elaborated below, the sectoral designation of diplomas has been contested in Australia since the delineation of tertiary education sectors in the middle of the 20th century, but designating them as higher education qualifications gives vocational education institutions a role in higher education which would surprise many Australian observers.

Table 1: domestic higher education equivalent full time students by level of study and location of teaching, Australia, 2006

| Institutions | Undergraduate | | Postgraduate | All equivalent full time students |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| | Diploma, Assoc degree | Bachelor | | |
| Higher education | 373 | 415,502 | 82,173 | 498,048 |
| Vocational education | 89,246 | 861 | 261 | 90,360 |
| All institutions | 89,619 | 416,363 | 82,434 | 588,408 |

Sources: Dest (2007), NCVET (2008).

To compare Australia with England I expressed Parry's and my table 1 as the percentage of higher education students enrolled by vocational education institutions. This shows that Australian vocational education institutions have a somewhat bigger share of higher education enrolments (15%) than English further education colleges (11%).

Table 2: proportion of higher education undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled by vocational education institutions in Australia and England.

| Country | Undergraduate | Postgraduate | Total |
|----------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Australia | 18% | 0.3% | 15% |
| England | 10% | 3% | 11% |

Community colleges' share of higher education enrolments range from 15% to almost 70% in US States but average 40% nationally in the US and Canada. So a relatively small amount of higher education is offered by vocational education institutions in Australia. Furthermore, Australian vocational education institutions' transfer function is modest: Australian universities admit only 10% of domestic students commencing a bachelor level program or below on the basis of a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) qualification. Comparing transfer rates between jurisdictions even within the same country is notoriously difficult, so to give an idea of the relative significance of TAFE transfers one may note that they are the third biggest identified source of commencing Australian higher education undergraduate students after secondary education (42%) and higher education (25%).

Table 3: basis of admission of domestic students commencing a program at bachelor level or below, 2005

| Basis of admission | % |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Secondary education | 42 |
| Higher education | 25 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Tafe award program | 10 |
| Mature age special entry provisions | 6 |
| Professional qualification | 1 |
| Other basis | 16 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: Dest, 2006.

In this comment I argue first that Australian vocational education institutions have a modest role in opening access to higher education because until recently they have been all but excluded from such a role. Next I argue Australian vocational education institutions have struggled for control of diplomas and advanced diplomas and thus a role in short-cycle higher education. Finally, I posit a tripartite classification of institutions by their proportion of student load in each sector: single sector (97% of student load in one sector), mixed sector (at least 3% but no more than 20% of student load enrolled in the minority sector) and dual sector institutions (at least 20% but less than 80% of student load enrolled in each sector). Dual sector universities admit distinctly higher proportions of Tafe transfer students than other universities.

Vocational education's role

Until 1975 there were two sectors of higher education in Australia – universities and colleges of advanced education – and disparate other colleges, institutes and schools that offered a range of post compulsory education, some at secondary level and some post-secondary. In 1975 the Australian Government accepted the recommendations of the Kangan committee on technical and further education to designate Technical and Further Education (Tafe) as a distinct sector of education. The Kangan committee (1974: xxxv) defined technical and further education as ‘organised and sustained programs designed to communicate vocationally oriented knowledge and to develop the individual’s understanding and skills’. Tafe was not to have a role opening access to higher education since this would overlap with colleges of advanced education which had been established a decade earlier to fulfil precisely this role. However, the committee (Kangan, 1974: xlii) observed that access to further education by many people outside the big metropolitan areas would be facilitated by ‘community type colleges’ which would offer programs up to the diploma level, then the preserve of colleges of advanced education. But this recommendation was never implemented.

In 1988 the Australian Government established the unified national system of higher education, collapsing the distinction between universities and colleges of advanced education and leaving vacant the role of opening access to higher education. The higher education policy statement establishing the unified national system canvassed a number of options for making closer links between vocational and higher education institutions, including opening access to higher education. However, this suggestion was resisted on

the grounds that it would distract from vocational education's role in developing students for employment, and was soon overtaken by a proposal to introduce competency based training in vocational education. Vocational education was reconceptualised as 'skills formation' for industry and most States moved responsibility for vocational education from their education portfolio to their employment and training portfolio.

The Australian and State governments' concentration and in some cases confinement of vocational education's role to skills formation steadily intensified during the 1990s, reaching its height in about 2000. Since then national policy hasn't formally changed, but the Australian and some State governments have permitted and in some cases supported vocational education institutions offering higher education programs. While enrolments are still small, they are growing fast and are widely expected to become significant over the next decade.

The diploma – a contested qualification

Australian vocational education institutions have struggled for control of diplomas and advanced diplomas and thus a role in short-cycle higher education since they were founded in the late 19th century. In 1939 subgraduate diplomas and certificates were 15% of all university enrolments. In 1965 the Australian Government accepted the recommendations of the committee on the future of tertiary education in Australia chaired by Leslie Martin to establish colleges of advanced education as a distinct sector of higher education 'separate from but equal to' universities, although importantly funded at a lower rate. At the time the older technical colleges located in or near the centre of the mainland capital cities had a plural role which included offering highly respected and high level conceptually based qualifications such as diplomas of mechanical and electrical engineering which until 1972 led to professional registration as an engineer. The central technical colleges proposed to the Martin committee that they be established as a second sector of tertiary education with the dual roles of skills development and providing two-year higher education programs – associate diplomas and diplomas. The committee declined to accept that proposal and recommended instead that the teachers' colleges and the bigger and broader technical colleges be established as a new sector of colleges of advanced education with the diploma as their highest, distinctive and preferably exclusive qualification.

The Australian Government offered to share the funding of advanced education that had hitherto been the sole financial responsibility of the States on condition that the States give their institutions some independence as educational institutions rather than continue as the training arms of departments responsible for agriculture, industry, mines, school education, etc, and that they separate the higher education that would be partly supported by the Australian Government from the technical and secondary education that would remain the sole responsibility of the States. Most States separated the advanced levels of their technical colleges to establish them as separate institutions, the biggest State New South Wales achieving this in 1969. Most technical colleges thus lost their higher level

programs and particularly their diplomas to the newly established colleges of advanced education.

As the Technical and Further Education Commission observed at the time (1976: para 5.59), by shifting diplomas from vocational education institutes which were largely funded by the States and Territories to colleges of advanced education which were by then the sole financial responsibility of the Australian Government, the States and Territories were able to shift costs to the Australian Government. As a result, by 1977 diplomas were only 0.7% of vocational education enrolments, 3% of university enrolments but were 44.6% of advanced education enrolments. Following the establishment of the unified national system of higher education in 1988 higher education quickly became unified around international university norms, withdrawing from sub baccalaureate qualifications such as diplomas and advanced diplomas to redirect energy to postgraduate programs. Following a by now familiar pattern not only in Australia but also in at least Britain, vocational education institutes filled the gap vacated by universities by offering increasing more associate diplomas, diplomas and in time, advanced diplomas.

By the time qualifications were systematised in the Australian qualifications framework in 1995 responsibility for diplomas and advanced diplomas was shared between vocational and higher education institutions. The framework therefore classifies diplomas and advanced diplomas as both vocational education and training and higher education qualifications, describing them as 'sector-differentiated' programs. They are deemed sectorally differentiated because diplomas and advanced diplomas accredited in vocational education must be based on competences, whereas diplomas and advanced diplomas accredited in higher education are based on curriculum in the same way as degrees. Since then higher education has continued to withdraw from the qualifications. By 2000 approximately 12% of vocational education students were undertaking diplomas or advanced diplomas, whereas only approximately 2% of higher education students were enrolled in diplomas. Nonetheless, higher education institutions have strenuously resisted having diplomas designated as solely vocational education programs. Diplomas and advanced diplomas are therefore located ambiguously within Australian tertiary education to buy a peace, however uneasy and temporary, in the sectoral contest over the qualifications.

Karmel and Nguyen (2003) have made a virtue of this ambiguity to argue that the diploma is a sort of 'cross-over' qualification since about 10% of people with a vocational education certificate also hold a diploma and some 20% of people with a degree also hold a diploma. Vocational education students enrolled in diploma programs are more than twice as likely to proceed to further study as other vocational education students. Diplomas and advanced diplomas are therefore potentially an important access for disadvantaged students to short-cycle higher education and a pathway to degree and higher studies in universities. However, this potential has not yet been realised.

Vocational education students enrolled in diplomas do not share the demographic characteristics of other vocational education students which broadly represent the whole population, but are much more similar to higher education students in being younger, more urban, more likely to have completed secondary school and to study full-time, and are less likely to come from low socio-economic status backgrounds or to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. These patterns are accentuated for advanced diploma students. Consequently, most vocational education students who transfer to higher education are likely to come from the relatively privileged backgrounds over represented in higher education (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2005). However, it seems that vocational education provides an important route to higher education for mature age students. Stanwick (2006: 17) reports that twice the proportion of students aged over 25 commencing a bachelor program had a Tafe diploma or advanced diploma as their highest prior qualification than younger students.

Single sector, mixed sector and dual sector institutions

Whether as vestiges of history or to provide pathway programs for international students, many Australian universities offer vocational education programs. But most Australian universities' vocational education programs are offered for full tuition fees, are small in size, confined to one campus (Australian universities have an average of 3.4 campuses), are in one or two disciplines, and many are offered through separate organisational units rather than through the faculties and schools that offer higher education programs. They therefore have little if any impact on the university outside their immediate area. Dual sector universities first identified themselves as being distinctive in having to manage dual systems and processes to report to two levels of government – vocational education to the State Government and higher education to the Australian Government. Where vocational education is a small part of a university's operations it can be handled as an exception to the structures, systems and processes established to handle higher education. But where vocational education is a substantial part of the university's operations a separate system has to be established to handle it. Vocational education must also be a substantial part of the university's student load to affect higher education (Moodie, 2008).

Dual sector universities have never specified the proportion of load needed in each sector to be considered 'substantial' and classified as a dual sector university. The issue can be put rigorously by asking: how high a proportion of total student load must vocational education be before it is no longer considered an exception and is generally accepted as a normal part of the institution? In Moodie (2008) I related this to the concept of 'tipping point' (Grodzins, 1958) and referred to a number of empirical studies of different tipping points to posit that an institution is dual sector when its student load in each sector ranges from a minimum of 20% and a maximum of 80%. I therefore propose a tripartite classification of institutions by their mix of sectoral student load:

single sector institutions – those with more than 97% of their student load enrolled in 1 sector;

mixed sector institutions – those with at least 3% but no more than 20% of their student load enrolled in their minority sector (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2008: 2); and

dual sector institutions – those with at least 20% but less than 80% of their student load enrolled in each sector.

Five or 13% of Australian universities are dual sector, and I estimate that 10% of universities are mixed sector and therefore 77% are single sector on these definitions. Dual sector universities admit an average of 18% of their bachelor students on the basis of a Tafe qualification, double the rate of other universities. The University of Ballarat’s proportion of Tafe transfer students is unusually low, at 3%. The university’s vice chancellor Professor David Battersby reported in a personal communication of 1 April 2008 that this data is from students’ own reports, and consequentially are unreliable. Students transferring from a Tafe program offered by the University of Ballarat report that they are admitted on the basis of an award from the university, which of course students do not consider an award of a Tafe institution. Battersby says that the figure reported by the university is probably of students transferring to the university from Tafe institutes other than the university’s own Tafe division. Battersby reports that the university’s internal data suggest about 15% to 17% of its higher education enrolments are students with a Tafe award.

Table 4: proportion of domestic students commencing a bachelor program admitted on the basis of a Tafe program, 2005

| Institution | All | Tafe | % Tafe |
|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Charles Darwin University | 2,101 | 405 | 19 |
| RMIT | 5,462 | 1,147 | 21 |
| Swinburne University of Technology | 2,893 | 719 | 25 |
| University of Ballarat | 1,266 | 40 | 3 |
| Victoria University | 4,466 | 619 | 14 |
| Average, dual sector universities | 16,188 | 2,930 | 18 |
| Average, other universities | 166,569 | 15,663 | 9 |
| All universities | 183,329 | 18,593 | 10 |

Source: Dest (2006).

Conclusion

This brief review of the significance of Australian vocational education institutions in opening access to higher education has argued that from its formal designation as a sector in 1975 vocational education has been excluded from a formal role in opening access to higher education. Vocational education was first identified as a sector in 1974, ten years

after advanced education was established as the sector to open access to higher education. By the time the Australian Government ended advanced education's existence as a sector in 1988 Australian and State governments firmly conceived of vocational education's main role as preparing students for work. This policy reached its apogee in about 2000 when the national vocational education coordinating body held that preparing students for work was vocational education's only legitimate role. While that policy has arguably relaxed somewhat since then, its legacy remains.

Central to vocational education's role in higher education has been the diploma, which has been used to define tertiary education sectors and their boundaries. Because 96% of equivalent full time student load in diplomas and advanced diplomas is now offered by vocational education institutions there is a common misapprehension that diplomas are not higher education qualifications. This confusion is compounded by the Australian qualifications framework which records diplomas and advanced diplomas as 'sector-differentiated' vocational and high education qualification. However, diplomas and advanced diplomas are classified as tertiary type 5B in the international standard classification of education and so at least for the purposes of international comparisons they are properly considered higher education qualifications.

Finally, I posited a tripartite classification of institutions by their proportion of student load in each sector: single sector (97% of student load in one sector), mixed sector (at least 3% but no more than 20% of student load enrolled in the minority sector) and dual sector institutions (at least 20% but less than 80% of student load enrolled in each sector). Dual sector universities admit distinctly higher proportions of Tafe transfer students than other universities.

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The contribution of Scotland's Colleges to higher education and widening participation: differences from the English experience

Jim Gallacher
Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning
Glasgow Caledonian University

Introduction

The development of higher education in the further education (FE) college sector in Scotland has taken a course which is in many ways different from the developments which can be observed in England. For most of the 1990s colleges developed higher education provision quite independently of the universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs), mainly through Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), developed in co-operation with, and validated by, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Funding was provided directly to the colleges for this provision. This enabled them to develop a strong and independent identity as providers of higher education. While these qualifications were initially developed as vocational qualifications, they have also increasingly been used as transitional qualifications for students wishing to progress to degree qualifications. As a result articulation arrangements, which allow students to progress from HNs in colleges to degree programmes in HEIs have become an increasingly important part of the landscape of higher education in Scotland. This has led to patterns of partnership or collaboration between colleges and HEIs which are in many ways quite different from those which have developed in England. In recent years there has been greater emphasis at a policy level on measures to encourage collaboration between these sectors. In this respect the emphasis has been to move from systems of higher education which developed in parallel to each other to ones which are more closely integrated and coherent.

The development of higher education in Scotland's Colleges

The 1990s was a period of considerable growth in higher education provision in Scotland's Colleges. It can be seen from Table 1 that as a result of this expansion by 1999-2000 more than one third of all undergraduate level students (full-time and part-time) were registered in colleges. Partly as a result of this growth of higher education level provision in these colleges, they are now known as Scotland's Colleges, rather than as FE colleges. Almost all of this provision has been for qualifications developed and validated under the auspices of SQA, with HNCs, and HNDs accounting for about 70% of these students, while those on degrees accounted for only about 1%. The role of SQA as a national agency which has worked in partnership with the colleges in developing HN programmes and which also undertakes a validating function, has enabled the colleges to develop this HE level provision independently of the universities. Franchising or other forms of partnerships with the universities were not a feature of this growth of HE in the college sector.

Table 1 Undergraduates in higher education in Scotland, 1999/00 to 2005/06 by institution type

| | 1990-91 | 1999-2000 | 2001-02 | 2005-06 |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| HEIs | 87,265 (72.6) | 139,270 (66.1%) | 156,535 (71.1%) | 169,395 (76.9) |
| FE colleges | 32,952 (27.4) | 71,445 (33.9%) | 63,625 (28.9%) | 50,820 (23.1%) |
| All undergraduates | 120,217 | 210,720 | 220,160 | 220,215 |

Source: Scottish Executive, 2007

It can also be noted that a great deal of this growth in HNs during the 1990s was in full-time provision. While in 1990-91 only 28% of the HE level students in colleges were full-time, by 2000-01 this number had increased to 43%. This reflected a changing role for HNs. These programmes were initially developed as vocationally focused qualifications, and the vast majority of students were part-time and in work. While the role of the part-time HNC for those in work has continued to be of considerable importance, full-time provision has also become much more significant, as colleges pursued new student markets through providing full-time HNDs. This was part of a wider change in the place of the colleges within the Scottish educational system. These colleges had traditionally been providers of education and training for a wide range of employees, particularly at craft or technician level in many industries. Many of these courses were provided on a part-time basis, and led to a range of vocational qualifications. However, as many of the traditional industries diminished in size and in some cases completely disappeared, the provision of training for employees in these industries became less important. As a result colleges had to seek new markets. This concern to find new markets also coincided with a movement within Government policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s to introduce market principles to education (Scottish Office, 1991). This led to legislation in the early 1990s as a result of which colleges were removed from local authority control, and established as free-standing corporate bodies with their own budgets and employing their own staff.

Under this new funding system colleges were now working on the basis of independent budgets, provided initially through the Scottish Office, and then through the Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC), plus any other sources which they could identify, such as the European Social Fund (ESF), Scottish Enterprise, through the local enterprise companies and income from private industry for courses which they provided. The necessity to secure an adequate flow of funds from a variety of sources, and through targeting a wide range of student groups, became a major priority for many colleges as they struggled to maintain their financial security in this competitive economic climate. One impact of these changes was the rapid growth in certain types of provision in areas where there appeared to be market opportunities. The growth of new areas of higher education provision, and particularly the growth of full-time HNDs, and to a lesser extent full-time HNCs, has taken place within this context.

While the 1990s was a period of considerable growth in undergraduate level of provision in Scotland's Colleges it can also be noted from Table 1 that the numbers of students enrolled on these courses in the colleges has declined over recent years. At present there is a lack of systematic data which would help explain why this decline in participation in these programmes has taken place. While demographic change, and a decline in the numbers of young people may provide part of the explanation, it must also be noted that there has been a significant decline in the overall Age Participation Index (API), which indicates that a smaller proportion of the age group is now entering HE. The API declined from a high of 51.5 in 2001-02 to 47.1 in 2005-06 (Scottish Executive, 2007) The decline in the proportion entering FE colleges may represent a displacement effect, with students who would previously have entered FE colleges now being offered places in HEIs. This is suggested by some college staff as part of the explanation. However it seems likely that this is at best only part of a complex set of factors which would explain this decline in numbers.

The API figures refer only to one part of the higher education student population, viz young full-time students. However the HNC/D provision in the colleges has provided opportunities for many older students who did not have traditional qualifications to enter higher education level courses. There has also traditionally been a higher proportion of part-time students on these courses than on degree programmes in HEIs, and there is evidence that the decline in the numbers participating in HNs is concentrated is disproportionately concentrated among part-time HNC students. At the same time there has been a growing number of students completing Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in subject areas where numbers on part-time HNCs have been falling. SVQs are work based qualifications which are clearly focused on the requirements of the occupations in which they are based. It would therefore appear then that there is some evidence that students who are in employment are moving away from participation in part-time HNCs to more flexible work based programmes.

When considering the role of HNs in providing vocationally relevant education it can be noted that Scotland did not decide to follow England in introducing foundation degrees (FDs). While in England a strong argument was presented for the need to develop FDs as a new qualification at the associate professional and technical level, there has been no similar argument put forward in Scotland, and HNC/Ds have been maintained as the main qualifications at that level. The emergence of FDs in England has been associated with a growing concern about a perceived skills deficit at the intermediate (associate professional and technical) level in national policy. This has been associated with a perception that HNC/Ds are no longer providing satisfactory vocationally relevant qualifications at this level, and a need to remedy these deficiencies with a new qualification. The decision to establish foundation degrees emerged out of these concerns (DfEE, 2000; HEFCE, 2000). The policy documents which provided the framework for these new qualifications have emphasised the importance of employer involvement and work based learning as key features of these programmes (DfES, 2003; QAA, 2004).

However in Scotland there was no pressure at a Government policy level for the radical change to alternative provision of this kind. It was argued that HN courses continued to provide vocationally relevant qualifications, and to enjoy support from employers, students, colleges. Instead it was agreed that a review and modernisation programme was needed to ensure that these programmes were keeping pace with change in the economy, and in educational practice. This modernisation process became fully operational in 2003 and is scheduled to be completed by 2008, by which time all HN programmes will have been reviewed. However, despite this review and modernisation process, the numbers enrolled on HE level courses in the colleges have declined significantly since 2002-03. There is also evidence that there has been a greater emphasis on work based or work related learning in FDs when compared to HNs in Scotland. However despite the considerable emphasis on the importance of employer involvement in FDs, it would appear that this has often been difficult to achieve (Reeve et al, 2007). Overall then these changes in patterns of participation may point to the need for a further review of the structure of HNs and their role in contributing to vocationally relevant higher education in Scotland.

Funding of higher education in Scotland's Colleges

It is clear from the discussion which has been presented above that HN provision, which has been developed largely independently of the universities, continues to be an important part of the work of almost all colleges in Scotland. The development of the colleges as a sector which is in large measure independent of the universities has been assisted, not just by the role of SQA as the national agency which validates their awards, but also by the funding arrangements which have been in place, and which are quite different from those which have existed in England. Colleges have throughout this period of growth of HE level provision received almost all of the funding for these programmes directly as part of their core budgets. There has been no complex system of prescribed and non prescribed funding or indirect funding through the universities. This has given the colleges much more control over this area of development, and allowed college principals and senior staff to make decisions about development based on their own college plans and strategies. It would appear that this may have contributed to creating a more stable basis for the development of this work in Scottish colleges when compared with English ones.

This funding was originally provided through the Scottish Office. However in 1999 the Scottish Funding Council for Further Education (SFEFC) was established to be responsible for funding the work of the Scottish colleges. While it had a shared Chief Executive with the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), and many staff in common, there were separate boards for the two funding councils. SFEFC was established to help strengthen the place of the college sector within the Scottish educational system. The two funding councils operated on the basis of different funding methodologies. The colleges were funded on the basis of weighted Student Units of Measurement (WSUMs) through which colleges received funding for a certain volume of work. A SUM is based on 40 hours of student contact. Funding to the HEIs which was distributed by SHEFC was on the basis of full-time student equivalents (FTEs). In general it would appear that using SUMs as a funding methodology was considered to be appropriate and helpful to the colleges, given

that they had a high proportion of part-time students. However the level of funding provided for HNCs and HNDs was considerably lower than that provided for the first two years of degree programmes. More recently in 2005 a joint Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC) has been established. The significance of the establishment of this joint funding council will be discussed further below. However it can be noted that there are still separate funding methodologies for colleges and HEIs, and while a review of teaching funding methodology is now under way, the different levels of funding for HNC/Ds and the first two years of degrees still exist.

Higher education in Scotland’s Colleges and widening participation

The contribution of HN provision to the widening participation agenda is now very well recognized in Scotland. There is clear evidence that the colleges are much more successful than the HEIs in providing opportunities for students from area of social and economic deprivation to enter higher education. The evidence for this came initially from the work of Raab and her associates (Raab and Small, 2003), and this has been updated recently by the Scottish Funding Council (Table 2).

Table 2 Scottish domiciled students participation in colleges and HEIs by level and deprivation quintile 2005-06

| | College HE Level | College FE Level | HEI |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Least deprived quintile | 18% | 16% | 31% |
| 2 nd quintile | 19% | 20% | 25% |
| Middle quintile | 19% | 21% | 19% |
| 4th quintile | 22% | 21% | 15% |
| Most deprived quintile | 22% | 22% | 10% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Source: SFC 2008

It can be seen from Table 2 that the colleges continue to have a high degree of success in attracting students, not just into FE level courses, but also into higher education level programmes. This reflects a number of aspects of college provision, including their location, their outreach work in communities, and the ladders of opportunity which they provide which enable students, and particularly returning adults to progress from short entry level courses to higher education courses (Crossan et al, 2003; Gallacher et al, 2007).

With respect to the role of the colleges in widening access to higher education, Scotland is not greatly different from England. However the linkage of this to articulation into degree programmes in the universities is now an important aspect of widening participation policy in Scotland.

Articulation from HN programmes in Scotland's Colleges to degree programmes in HEIs

Progression to degree programmes on the basis of HNC or HNDs is now an important feature of the Scottish higher education system. Articulation has been defined by the SFC as referring to opportunities to progress level 2 of a degree programme on the basis of an HNC or level 3 on the basis of an HND, ie transfer with full credit for the earlier qualification. However it can be seen from Table 3 that for around one third of HN students their earlier qualification counts only for entry purposes and no credit is awarded. In some cases this is explained by a mismatch between the curriculum of the HNC/D and the degree. However in other cases it reflects a reluctance on behalf of staff responsible for admissions to accept that HNC/Ds are comparable to levels 1 or 2 of a university degree course.

Table 3 Full-time entrants to first degree courses with HNC/D – 2005-06

| Year of first degree course entered | Number | % |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-----|
| 1 | 1,213 | 33 |
| 2 | 792 | 21 |
| 3 | 1,716 | 46 |
| Total | 3,721 | 100 |

Source: SFC, 2007

From Table 3 it can be seen that 3,721 students entered full-time degree programmes in 2005-06. This represented 10.2% of all entrants, while those articulating to the second or third year amounted to 6.9% of all entrants. However the opportunities to use HNC/Ds as the basis for entry to degree programmes and as the basis for articulation is very unevenly distributed across the various HEI sectors, as can be seen from Table 4.

Table 4 Percentage of HNC/D students entering different university sectors and year of entry

| | 1 st Year | 2 nd Year | 3 rd Year |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Post 92 Universities | 57% | 71% | 88% |
| 1960s Universities | 21% | 15% | 2% |
| Ancients | 14% | 4% | 0,5% |
| Others | 8% | 9% | 10% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Source: SFC, 2007

From this table it can be seen that the opportunities for articulation are heavily concentrated in the post 92 universities, and there is very little articulation into the four 'ancient'

universities. There are more opportunities to use an HNC/D for the purposes of entry to the ancient and 1960s universities, but even here the opportunities are heavily concentrated in the post 92 institutions. While this reflects a greater emphasis on widening participation in the post 92 universities missions, it also reflects the level of applications from young people with high levels of traditional qualifications (Scottish Highers or A levels) in the ancient universities. These students are seen as the first choice candidates in many faculties or departments, and admissions tutors in these 'selecting' institutions see themselves as having limited opportunities to admit students with HNC/Ds. By contrast for a number of discipline areas in the post 92 institutions college students with HNC/Ds are a major and important source of applicants. In some cases these have been identified as 'recruiting' rather than 'selecting' (MacLennan et al, 2000). As a result of these factors articulating students represented 15.6% of all entrants in the post 92 universities in 2005-06, but only 1.7% of entrants to the 1960s universities, and a mere 0.4% of entrants to the 'ancient' universities. If entrants to first year are included the figure is over 20% for the post 92 universities, and for some of them it is in excess of 25%.

The success of the colleges in recruiting students from areas of social and economic deprivation has been noted above. This is reflected in the social characteristics of the students articulating to all HEI sectors. The relatively high numbers of students entering post 92 universities from colleges with HNC/Ds contributes to the relative success of these institutions with respect to the widening access agenda. While 22% of articulating students come from the most deprived quintile, only 15% of other entrants come from this quintile. In the ancient universities 14% of articulating students are from the most deprived quintile, while only 6% of other entrants are from this quintile. However, given that the total number of articulating students is so low, this makes little difference to the overall profile.

Policy initiatives to encourage collaboration and articulation

While it has been argued in this paper that higher education in the college and university sectors have developed as two parallel systems, it can also be observed that there has been increasing interest in encouraging greater collaboration between these sectors, and in creating a more integrated tertiary system in Scotland, which will create greater flexibility and more opportunities for progression. The first significant development in this respect was the establishment of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). While SCQF includes many other qualifications besides those at a higher education level, facilitating transfer from qualifications such as HNC/Ds to degrees has been an important focus for work in developing this framework. It was formally established in 2001, bringing together two existing sub-frameworks, the National Qualifications (NQs) awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (SCOTCAT) for higher education, which links HN qualifications with university awards. The success of Scotland in establishing a partnership which has brought together the HEIs, colleges, SQA, and other key stakeholders has been widely seen as a significant achievement (Raffe et al, 2007). However it is recognised that further work is now required if the potential of this framework in promoting collaboration and flexibility, and creating additional progression opportunities, is to be realised (Gallacher et al, 2005).

The second major initiative in this respect has been the establishment of the joint Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC) in October 2005. The Scottish Parliament's Lifelong Learning Inquiry recommended that the funding councils for further and higher education should be merged within a five year period (Scottish Parliament, 2002). The proposal was taken up by the Scottish Executive in its lifelong learning strategy, and steps were taken to establish the new joint Council within a fairly short timeframe. Prior to 2005 two Funding Councils existed in Scotland. The Scottish Further Education Funding Council (SFEFC) was responsible for funding all provision in the colleges. While the establishment of the SFC has not created a joint tertiary system in Scotland, it is creating a new context to develop policy and strategy which affects colleges and HEIs, and a clear objective for the Council is to develop a more coherent pattern of provision at the tertiary level (SFC, 2006).

With respect to particular initiatives to encourage greater collaboration between the college and HEI sectors, and in particular to encourage and support more effective articulation, the SFC has launched a new initiative in 2008 – *Improving articulation from HNs to degree courses*. This involves the allocation of £3million per year, for a five year period, to enable colleges and universities to build better and deeper collaboration. The funding is being allocated to six hub universities to act as five regional hubs (one hub consists of two universities). All of these are post 92 institutions, reflecting the pattern of involvement in articulation outlined above. The Open University has also been given funding to work at a national level. The role of the hub institutions is to encourage a wide range of colleges and HEIs to work together to enhance articulation links, and improve the opportunities for successful transition for HN students into degree programmes. The SFC Access and Inclusion Committee will oversee and monitor this initiative.

Conclusions

In this paper it has been suggested that the 1990s saw a period of substantial growth in the higher education provision in the college sector in Scotland. This was associated with a period when colleges were seeking new markets, and developing more full-time provision, particularly through HND programmes. While HN programmes had initially been mainly part-time for work based students, many of these new programmes were creating new opportunities for progression to degrees, and articulation began to emerge as a major aspect of the Scottish system. Unlike England there was relatively little involvement of the HEIs as partners in developing or validating this provision, and the relative independence of colleges was reinforced by the funding arrangements which ensured the funding for HE courses came directly to the colleges as part of their core grant. There was also substantial evidence that the colleges achieved considerable success in attracting students from areas of social deprivation. Where strong articulation arrangements existed, and these were mainly in the post 92 universities, these also contributed to the success of these HEIs with respect to the widening access agenda. While much of this development in the 1990s was driven by market forces, rather than by policy initiatives, the period from 2000 onwards has seen a much greater interest in using policy to foster collaboration between the college and HEI sectors, and provide greater support for collaboration.

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English Higher and Further Education: A Commentary

Peter Scott, Kingston University

Introduction

This commentary focuses on a single broad policy issue which emerges both explicitly and implicitly from Gareth Parry's report (Parry 2008) – why has the well-established tendency to enlarge the higher education sector by incorporating elements of further education, which appeared to be uncontested from the 1950s (and earlier) through to the 1970s, been curtailed (at any rate, in England)? This is a key question because its answer(s) illuminate the fundamental character of the mass higher education system that has emerged over the last two decades – and, crucially, its likely limits. Put simply, is the higher education provision within further education colleges to be regarded as marginal residual, even anomalous, or it to be regarded as the first building blocks of a wider tertiary (or lifelong learning) system?

In the 1950s and 1960s advanced further education was decisively and irreversibly incorporated in an extended higher education sector alongside the traditional universities (the number of which was also being increased by the establishment of brand-new campus universities) - first by the designation of some regional colleges as 'colleges of advanced technology' in 1956 and their promotion to become technological universities ten years later; and later by the amalgamation of other colleges to form polytechnics following the articulation of the binary system by Anthony Crosland, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, in 1965 (Department for Education and Science 1966), although the polytechnics had to wait two decades before they in turn were promoted to become universities.

Today, two generations later, there seems to be no enthusiasm for following a similar path, whether by bringing further education colleges (which now provide almost as many

places for students on higher education courses - 180,000 - as the total number of higher education students in the early 1960s) into the 'mainstream' of higher education, or by establishing a much more open and extensive tertiary / postsecondary education (or lifelong learning) system. Indeed the structural differentiation of further and higher education, as expressed through funding systems, quality regimes, governance arrangements and organizational cultures, has actually been increased - although perhaps more by accident than design.

- Separate funding councils for non-university higher education and for further education replaced local education authorities (which, notionally had been responsible for both) when they were evicted from post-secondary education (for political as much as educational reasons) – first the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (now subsumed into the Higher Education Funding Council for England following the ending of the binary systems) in 1988 and then the Further Education Funding Council (now the Learning and Skills Council) in the early 1990s. As a result the funding systems of higher education and of further education are based on very different principles – the former on a largely formulaic block grant; the latter on successive forms of ‘payment by results’;
- Separate arrangements have also been made for monitoring quality. The former polytechnics and colleges have been embraced within the same permissive peer-review based quality regime as the traditional universities while the further education colleges have remained subject to an inspectorial regime. Although the quality assurance of higher education courses in further education has been managed according to higher education ‘rules’, these ‘rules’ have typically been more rigorously applied (with the result that almost the only institutions which have failed to meet the standards established by the – higher education – Quality Assurance Agency have been further education colleges). In addition colleges have been subject to two (incommensurable?) quality regimes which has imposed on them an additional management burden (Quality Assurance Agency 2006);

- Finally, the organizational cultures of the former two halves of further education, advanced (i.e. the polytechnics, now the ‘new’ – or post-1992 - universities and other higher education colleges) and non-advanced (the further education colleges) diverged; the former were heavily influenced by the quasi-collegial norms which had always prevailed in the traditional universities while the latter more whole-heartedly embraced a quasi-commercial ‘corporate’ culture. This difference is even apparent in different approaches to governance. Although ‘new’ universities (and higher education colleges) have similar governance arrangements to those in further education in a formal sense, they are applied very differently. The Governing Bodies of the former behave very much like the Councils of traditional universities, largely respecting a fairly conventional demarcation between governance and management; further education college governing bodies, in contrast, have increasingly taken over quasi-executive functions.

However, despite these divergences, further education colleges now comprise a major, if largely incoherent, component of higher education. As has already been indicated colleges make an important quantitative contribution to the delivery of higher education – more than 200,000 student places. But colleges also make a crucial qualitative contribution because they provide the bulk of part-time non-degree (i.e. technician-level) courses, as the ‘new’ universities (and other higher education colleges) have concentrated more on full-time undergraduate – and, increasingly, postgraduate – courses. A number of implications arise from this shift.

- 1) Further education colleges are central to the delivery of widening participation – in particular among young adults for whom enrolment even in a ‘new’ university may present too great a challenge in terms of their prior educational experience and/or their social and cultural aspirations, and for less mobile adults who wish (or are obliged) to study part-time at a local institution;

- 2) Further education colleges are equally central to delivering the Government's employer engagement agenda. Colleges have fewer inhibitions about, and more experience of, working closely with employers. Not only are they less constrained by 'academic' values, their teaching workforces are often more flexibly organised. So it is hardly surprising that the most dynamic growth of two-year vocationally oriented Foundation Degrees has taken place in the further education sector (despite the fact that these degrees are validated by universities) (HEFCE 2008b);

- 3) More problematically, further education colleges operate in a more challenging market. The 'mainstream' higher education institutions have been able to concentrate on more stable and predictable markets for 'mainstream' students, leaving 'marginal' students to the colleges. As these students sometimes struggle to complete their courses, often have higher failure rates and generally receive a reduced rate-of-return on their higher education in terms of improved employment opportunities and increased salaries, colleges face greater management challenges than higher education institutions. Not only is their funding less reliable but they may also have to cope with more serious quality issues.

Barriers to co-ordination

These two trends – the clearer differentiation between higher and further education in terms of funding frameworks (and so funding systems), quality assurance regimes, governance arrangements and the rest; and the continuing significance of the role played by further education colleges in the delivery of higher education (especially in terms of widening participation and employer engagement) – appear to be contradictory. The first trend is also at odds with the pattern of progressive enlargement of the higher education sector in the 1960s and 1970s (through the absorption of advanced further education). In

the light of the increasing significance of the further education colleges in the delivery of higher education a continuation, even an intensification, of this earlier pattern might have been expected. Yet the contrary appears to have happened. There are various explanations of this apparent anomaly:

The weight of HE-in-FE

One reason why HE-in-FE has remained a (relatively) peripheral element with the wider higher education system is that, although students enrolled on higher education courses in FE colleges today are now as numerous as the total number of students in higher institutions in the third quarter of the 20th century, their relative weight has not increased. Exact comparisons between the 1960s and the 2000s are difficult to make because of significant changes in institutional (and sectoral) categorisation. In the earlier period there was, in effect, a large overlap between further education and higher education (the differentiation of the newly designated polytechnics from other FE colleges was still incomplete). This overlap, or fuzzy boundary between the two sectors, has now been substantially reduced. But the proportion of students on higher education courses in institutions which are not themselves part of the higher education sector has remained largely constant – about 12 per cent (rather less in terms of full-time-equivalent students). This proportion might have been expected to grow as England advanced towards mass higher education; its failure to do so may indicate the limits of this process of massification. It is the so-called post-1992 universities (the former polytechnics) which have been the engine of growth in English higher education over the last two decades, although some pre-1992 universities also expanded rapidly (notably the large civic universities in the North of England and the Midlands).

The reasons for FE's failure to increase its weight within higher education are many and complex. One is that the termination of the binary system at the beginning of the 1990s reinforced the pluralism of university missions. The post-1992 universities had fewer inhibitions about offering FE-type courses, i.e. two-year vocationally oriented

programmes such as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and more recently Foundation Degrees (FDs), than would have been the case if the university sector had continued to be dominated by more traditional institutions. A second reason may be that the prevalence of indirect funding of franchise courses has enabled higher education institutions, predominantly but not exclusively post-1992 universities, to control FE colleges' ability to offer higher education courses; in some cases the availability of (indirectly funded) HE-in-FE appears to have been regulated on the 'header tank' principle, to suit the convenience of the 'parent' higher education institutions in terms of income flows or space constraints. A third reason has already been mentioned; student demand for part-time non-degree courses, the staple of HE-in-FE, has been more fragile than demand for mainstream full-time undergraduate programmes. Not only has this pattern of demand created uncertainty for FE colleges providing higher education courses, the fact that up to now the growth of mass higher education has largely been fuelled by demand for relatively traditional courses rather than for new (or old) less 'academic' and more vocationally and/or socially engaged forms of provision may illuminate the special (and still exceptional?) qualities of massification in England.

The skills agenda

A second reason why HE-in-FE has so far failed to penetrate the mainstream of higher education is that the primary focus of FE colleges since their incorporation in the early 1990s has been on lower-level courses for 16-19 year-olds rather than more advanced courses for adult students; a good example is the 2005 Foster review (DfES 2005). Successive policy initiatives, whether from the relevant Government Department (until 2008 the Department for Education and Skills) or the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), have emphasised the need to drive up skills levels (especially basic skills for those with limited or no formal qualifications); the needs of adult students (and, especially, of adult students on courses supposedly less relevant to the skills agenda as defined by successive enquiries, the most recent of which was undertaken by Lord Leitch in 2006) have received a lower priority (DfES 2006). Although (most) higher education courses in

further education are funded, directly or indirectly, by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) rather than by the LSC, their active development has sometimes been difficult to reconcile with the wider strategic focus which most colleges have been obliged to adopt.

This difficulty is revealed in the policy discourse prevalent among further education leaders. In the 1990s, in the heady years immediately following incorporation, the newly liberated FE colleges were sometimes identified with community colleges in the United States. The more adventurous college principals organized visits to study, or to negotiate partnerships with, their supposed peer institutions on the other side of the Atlantic. In recent years the hope that FE colleges might follow in the footsteps of US community colleges and establish themselves as the entry-level institutions into a mass higher education system has largely evaporated. The stubborn reality has been reinforced that, while US community colleges are, almost entirely, postsecondary institutions, most English FE colleges are still better described as upper secondary institutions. The emphasis on the (basic) skills agenda is not the only reason for this retreat from the 'community college' agenda in its more ambitious forms; several English FE colleges brand themselves as 'community colleges', although more in terms of an older tradition of adult / people's colleges than as entry-level higher education. But it has probably been a significant factor in shifting the policy discourse.

Strategy and planning

A third possible reason for the failure of HE-in-FE to penetrate the higher education mainstream is that the appetite for bold strategic initiatives on the part of Government has also been reduced. Between the 1950s and 1970s successive Governments did not shrink from attempts to remodel higher education, which could take no other form than the systematic incorporation of advanced further education and teaching training. The articulation of the binary system following Anthony Crosland's Woolwich speech in 1965 has usually been interpreted as an attempt to establish a kind of *cordon sanitaire*

between the traditional universities (the number of which had just been increased by the creation of the ‘new’ (i.e. green-fields campus) universities and the ‘promotion’ of the colleges of advanced technology) and the new polytechnics and other (now higher education colleges). In one sense this interpretation is correct because the binary policy was a rejection of the policy assumptions underlying the Robbins report, that the expansion of higher education should (predominantly) take the form of a progressive enlargement of the existing university sector. However, another (and, arguably, more significant) sense the binary policy went substantially beyond the rather timid and gradualist Robbins prescription, and required a much bolder enlargement of the higher education sector (at the expense, of course, of further education). But, regardless of which interpretation is emphasised, there was an appetite for grand restructuring which persisted through the 1980s and early 1990s when the polytechnics were first removed from the control of local authorities and then re-designated as universities (and also when colleges of health, responsible for training nurses and other healthcare professions, were incorporated into the higher education system.

However, for the best part of two decades, there has been no appetite for grand restructuring at the system level. Instead of being the harbinger of a new era of strategic thinking the Dearing report was still-born (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997). As a result the pattern of institutions established in the 1960s and 1970s, as (nominally) modified in the 1990s, has persisted. Only marginal adjustments have been made, usually in the context of institutional distress. Instead a new environment has emerged, characterised by a confusing combination of, at the level of policy practice, increased *dirigisme* (i.e. top-down target-setting, more intrusive accountability and surveillance regimes and often short-lived ‘initiatives’) and, at the level of policy discourse, espousal of various forms of marketisation. The *dirigisme* has often been too tentative, too ephemeral and too contradictory to ‘steer’ the system in a serious way – and, in any case, attempts to ‘steer’ the system have been inhibited, even discredited, by the emphasis on the efficacy of the market. Here is not the place to offer a more detailed critique of this policy environment. But it has not been an environment in

which grand restructuring projects – such as the creation of a combined further and higher education system through the merger of HEFCE and the LSC, or a significant renegotiation of the boundary between higher education and FE – could realistically have been engineered. Just as the pattern of higher education institutions laid down 40 years has remained essentially unchanged (‘frozen’ might be a more appropriate description), so the boundary between higher education and further education created by the institutional restructuring and relabeling of that period has remained largely static. It is revealing that a subtly different policy environment in Scotland has enabled a single Scottish Funding Council for both higher and further education to be established, although this was a less radical initiative than it would have been in England because of the distinctive articulation between further and higher education north of the Border.

Elite and mass higher education

A fourth reason for HE-in-FE’s comparative failure to penetrate the higher education mainstream is that the relationship between further education and an elite system of higher education, such as still existed in the 1950s and 1960s (even with the addition of the newly established polytechnics and teacher training colleges alongside the traditional universities), is very different from the relationship between further education and a mass system, such as has existed in England since the early 1990s. Two dynamics appear to be at work, one of which should have promoted the significance of HE-in-FE (but appears not to have had that effect) and a second which was likely to compromise its role:

- i) The first dynamic is the increasing fluidity, and permeability, of boundaries between mass higher education and other sectors (but not only, or especially, other education sectors). This dynamic should have promoted the full incorporation of HE-in-FE into the higher education sector. But the emergence of a mass system has made it easier for mainstream higher education institutions, notably the post-1992 universities, to reach out across sectoral boundaries – and, for example, ‘trade’ more easily with the corporate

sector ('employer engagement') or other parts of the public sector (notably the National Health Service). This has tended to relegate HE-in-FE to a subordinate role (and even to by-pass it entirely). An elite higher education system consisted largely of traditional universities would not have had this facility so the scope for more distributed forms of higher education, largely provided by local colleges, would have been correspondingly greater;

- ii) The second dynamic is that, while the scope for sustained expansion of student numbers within an elite higher education system is obvious (and, in the case of England, was accepted by all but a small coterie which argued vociferously but in vain that 'more means worse'), the scope for exponential growth within a mass system is more problematical. 'Traditional' demand may be close to being satisfied. In one sense this should benefit HE-in-FE because FE colleges may be in a stronger position than mainstream higher education institutions to identify and then satisfy the needs of less traditional students. But, in another sense, any shift towards slower growth, or even steady-state, is likely to disadvantage higher education provision that is perceived to be peripheral – which may include some forms of HE-in-FE. This second dynamic has perhaps been compounded in England by two factors. The first is the effective abandonment of challenging growth targets (for example, 50-per-cent participation by 2010) and down-playing of 'widening participation' at the policy level. The second factor is that, even in its present mass configuration, English higher education has retained many attributes more characteristic of an elite system – and, perhaps of more immediate significance, its funding, governance and quality assurance systems both assume and reward these more elite attributes. Against this conformist background HE-in-FE can easily appear anomalous.

Prospects for the future: staying on the periphery or moving to the centre

The result has been a form of policy paralysis. The full legitimacy of FE colleges' contribution to higher education has yet to be established, largely because of England's still incomplete shift towards mass higher education (quantitatively achieved but qualitatively unfulfilled). For this reason FE's distinctive role in higher education provision is only grudgingly acknowledged; 'mixed-economy' colleges are sometimes regarded as anomalies which must be resolved; and different (and, to some degree, contradictory) funding and quality regimes persist. However, there are several reasons for believing that, unless HE-in-FE's contribution is fully accepted, further progress towards a more accessible and inclusive higher education system in England will be blocked:

- First, policy initiatives such as the desire of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and HEFCE to promote collaborative provision between universities and employers under the label 'employer engagement' depend for their fulfilment on the full involvement of FE colleges;
- Secondly, the desire to develop more local delivery of higher education, under the recently announced 'University Challenge' initiative, equally depends on the willingness of FE colleges to develop 'university centres' (HEFCE 2008a);
- Thirdly, the (shameful?) retreat of universities from the provision of adult and continuing education has created a vacuum which, eventually, only FE colleges can fill.

Ultimately the distinctiveness of FE colleges' contribution to higher education must be described (and so justified) in social, spatial, pedagogical and even intellectual terms – social terms, because there remain important social groups reluctant to access higher education even in the most inclusive post-1992 university; spatial terms, because even in

a crowded country like England there will always be higher education ‘cold spots’ (and these ‘cold spots’ are not necessarily the same as ‘remoter regions’; nor can advances in information and communication technologies provide comprehensive remedies); pedagogical terms, because the more intimate scale of HE-in-FE offers possibilities for re-engagement between students and their teachers which are largely unavailable in mass universities; and in intellectual terms, because such re-engagement between students and teachers combined with closer engagement with local communities (defined in cultural as well as economic terms) could provide the basis for new patterns of knowledge production and dissemination very different from the scientific and scholarly paradigms which still hold sway in even the most progressive universities. Viewed in this wider (and perhaps more visionary?) context HE-in-FE has a key role to play in resolving the tensions, and even contradictions, which persist in England still-unfinished mass higher education system.

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A view from within English further education: issues of verticality and agency

Geoff Stanton

Introduction

This paper suggests that additional dimensions of the issues raised by the Parry paper can be brought out by (a) considering in more detail how the higher education that takes place in General FE Colleges (GFEs) can be related to different types of universities, and (b) analysing more fully the extent to which the funding and qualifications regimes applicable to universities differ from that of the non-higher education provision that makes up the vast majority of GFE activity in England.

When considering HE provision in GFEs as opposed to HE provision in Universities it cannot, of course, be assumed that the latter is homogeneous. In fact, in some respects the differences within the university sector are as great as those between some universities and many colleges. This implies a need to examine what are the defining features of “higher education”, who determines this, and whether, for instance, these features vary as between full-time HE for school-leavers, and part-time HE for adults already in the workforce. This leads to a consideration of a neglected issue: the risks and advantages of structuring further and higher education “vertically” – offering all levels of learning for an occupational area within the same institution – versus horizontal structures - in which learning in all vocational and academic areas takes place in institutions that offer courses at the same level. The former would, of course, reframe the “HE in FE” issue fundamentally. This forms **part one** of the commentary.

Part two argues that the funding, qualifications and inspection regimes applying to the majority of non-HE provision in GFEs are not only fundamentally different from those applying to universities, but are also diverging from them. By comparison, the regimes under which (for instance) community colleges and universities in the United States operate may be more similar to one another. Although HE provision in GFEs is not conducted under the regimes applicable to FE, as a minority activity it cannot escape the influence of them on the organisation overall. In addition, the differences are now so stark as to raise questions about the extent to which the differences rationally reflect the different nature of the learners and their intended learning, or whether some kind of witting or unwitting governmental experiment is being conducted on FE in England. If the latter, what are the implications for “expansion, differentiation and participation” in undergraduate education, and could it be that the experiment will

in time be extended to some of the lower status areas of vocational higher education in universities?

Part One: A perspective on the history

Different universities reached their current status by very different routes. The older – often called the “traditional” universities in England – may have begun with significant elements of vocational education as part of their offer, preparing people for careers in the Law or the Church, even though this was based a study of the classics and later the natural sciences strongly linked to mathematics. They then became associated with “academic” provision, which has in some minds now become the only acceptable kind for universities to offer. Later the “redbrick” universities in the newly industrialised cities such as Birmingham and Manchester (which began life as local technical institutions) brought in various branches of engineering. But other more modern technologies such as those related to hotels and catering, sport and leisure, photography or dental technology (for example) developed within the FE sector, often growing out of a craft base but later adding higher level and professional courses and qualifications. Many institutions offered these technologies at all levels, but over time there was a tendency for some of them to drift upwards, abandoning their lower level work in the process. As Parry points out, this trend was formalised when it was decreed in 1988 that in order to join the polytechnics and colleges sector an institution had to have more than 55% of its activity classified as higher education.

Parry quotes the belief of English policy makers that there was “evidence that degree work is so much better done where there is a fair concentration of it”, (DES, 1985, p.37). Whatever this unspecified evidence was, Parry also points out that by 2006 the body responsible for quality assurance referred to the “many and varied strengths of HE in FECs.” In any case, the 1985 opinion ignores the potential effect of vocational specialisation. In a large FE college there could be a considerable volume of higher level work in specialist areas – a greater volume in terms of absolute student numbers than in some small colleges of higher education – and yet the institution as a whole would be barred from inclusion within the HE family because this work was “diluted” (or “tainted”?) by even greater volumes of lower level work in other areas of the college. On the face of it, it is not clear why a degree in agriculture (say) is better when it is supported by being undertaken in an institution that also delivers degrees in quite unrelated subjects, than it would be if the required demonstration farm was shared by students learning the craft and technician skills also required for the industry.

In fact, for geographical and historical reasons colleges specialising in agriculture and horticulture in England often form the only remaining organisations which have a vertical structure – educating for all levels of activity within a single

occupational area – rather than having a lateral structure – defined by catering for learners of the same level across many disciplines and occupations.

It is not my intention here to argue for the greater value of either lateral or vertical structures, but rather to point out that often the debate has not been properly had nor the relevant evidence properly collected. It is noticeable, however, that in other sectors of education the governmental prejudice is different. Government policy in England is in favour of vertically structured 11-18 schools, even though the task of organising them to provide equally well for pre-pubescent 11 year olds, on the one hand, and 18 year olds old enough to marry, on the other, is a considerable challenge. Even in areas where highly successful lateral arrangements have been put in place to provide for 16-19 year olds in Sixth Form or Tertiary Colleges, ministers have been urging that sixth forms should be added to the resultant 11-16 schools (Adonis, 2007), despite evidence from the government's own statistics that that, when compared with institutions that specialise in catering for 16-19 year olds, Sixth Forms in 11-18 schools are worse value for money, offer a narrower curricular choice and are less socially inclusive. When school sixth forms are small, as many inevitably are, they are also weaker when measured in terms of student achievement. (Hansard, 2007).

One argument in favour of vertically structured learning institutions being responsible for vocational education and training is, of course, that this reflects the structures of the industries and workplaces for which participants are being prepared. The same verticality also applies to the communities that the institutions serve, which may be why, as Parry points out, that when local authorities were responsible for funding both further education and some forms of higher education they saw it as providing a valuable “seamless robe.”

The same argument might not apply with the same force in the case of institutions whose primary role is to provide an academic education for 18-21 year olds studying full-time as it might in the case of institutions whose primary role is providing vocational or professional education for adults studying part-time. This indicates the potential importance of distinguishing between different kinds of higher education (vocational as opposed to academic, part-time as opposed to full time, initial as opposed to continuing professional development) when discussing the higher education that takes place in the FE sector. Parry quotes the HE funding body as saying that

“HE students in FECs are more likely to be over 25, more likely to study part-time, and more likely to come from areas with low rates of participation in HE than students in HEIs. They are more likely to be studying foundation degrees and sub-degree programmes such as HNCs and HNDs.” (HEFCE, 2006, p.9).

What he does not point out is that this description could equally well be applied to some of England's newer universities (University of Bedford, LSN, forthcoming). For complex reasons, in England these distinctions also map on to another well-known differentiators – whether a university is a research or a teaching institution, or whether it recruits or selects its student intake.

Many of the newer universities had their origins in polytechnics which in turn often grew out of FE Colleges (Bailey, 2002). One of the apparent effects of re-categorising what were polytechnics (or earlier, “colleges of advanced technology”) as universities was that they broadened their range of subjects to include the humanities and the social sciences. However, the converse rarely occurred. “Traditional” universities did not usually feel any pressure to similarly broaden their subject range to include more applied subjects. The implied value judgement here is important.

It might be argued that in both cases the universities were simply responding to demand: prospective students were more likely to apply for humanities and social science subjects than for vocational courses. This can only work, if course, if it is assumed that the state should be equally willing to subsidise provision whatever its direct value to the economy. I realise that to assume otherwise would be a heresy to many HE practitioners, but I mention it because (as we shall see) the principle of prioritising “economically valuable” provision (as determined by employers or “sector skills councils”) is currently being applied to citizens of the same age wishing to undertake an FE level course.

There has been little research into whether the breaking of the direct link between vocational provision at FE level and vocational provision at HE level, through its co-location within the same institution, had any negative effects. There is, though, some anecdotal and other evidence that it has resulted in a significant drop in progression from national certificate / diploma courses to higher certificate / diploma levels in some vocational areas (City and Guilds, forthcoming).

So a study of higher education in FE colleges has to engage with what is meant by “higher education”, with the criteria used to define its quality, and also with the differentiation that is apparent within university-based higher education.

Is “undergraduate study” defined solely by the level of intellectual demand, or can it also reflect a requirement for other kinds of high level skills? For instance, some kinds of decorative plastering, or the ability to create and run a Michelin-starred, restaurant may require extensive knowledge and years of intensive practice, but the relevant courses may never without distortion qualify as “undergraduate” if a requirement for certain “academic” skills is a criterion. More debatably perhaps, can a high level qualification in “simultaneous translation” be

a degree in the same way that a degree in French Literature can be? Could someone be awarded a degree on the basis of their brilliance with a musical instrument, or is it also necessary to be able to write essays on the history and development of music more generally?

This becomes significant if universities are given a monopoly on determining what counts as “higher education”. Parry describes how in 1999 the Government announced the intention to create “Foundation Degrees” which would be vocationally oriented and would take two years of full-time study – or its part-time equivalent – to obtain. Employers were to be involved in their design, they would contain work-experience, and colleges of further education would often be involved in their delivery, though universities would validate them. They were to have a clear progression route to the conventional university degree, which should be obtainable within (or after?) 15 months of subsequent study (DfEE, 2000).

However, there was already a system of Higher National Diplomas in place, deriving from a long standing system of national committees which determined their structure and content industry by industry. HNDs still exist, now validated by a vocational awarding body (Edexcel, previously BTEC). HNDs also take two year’s full-time study post-18, and to a variable extent allow exemption from the first parts of some degrees. Two questions arise:

- Why was almost no reference made to the role and history of HNDs when foundation degrees were launched?
- Does university validation increase the status and attractiveness of the new option, or is there a risk that the academic culture distorts the intended purpose by failing to recognise the legitimacy of “vocational excellence”.

Given the pre-existence of the well-tried and well-known HNDs and HNCs the rationale for the creation of Foundation Degrees seemed to depend upon a reiteration of the belief expressed in 1985 that the quality and status of vocational provision would benefit from establishing horizontal links between academic courses and qualifications at the same “level”. (Though as indicated above, what is meant by “level” is itself debatable.) This may in turn derive from a belief that higher education is primarily for school leavers, and should take place within an “academic community”, in which those following different disciplines rub shoulders and challenge each other’s ways of thinking. However, whilst this may be the assumption upon which Oxbridge Colleges are based, it is not the model followed by many later universities in which students - and indeed staff - may never meet those working in other departments. It is also this way of thinking that has given rise to the strong tradition in the UK of young people

“going away” to university where at least they live alongside others, even if they do not study with them.

These features of the traditional university experience which give it quality (in terms of fitness for purpose) for young people may cause it to fail to meet the needs of older learners. They may have work and domestic commitments which cause them to give priority to geographical accessibility – the ability to commute from their home address – and to the availability of part-time courses. As people who last had contact with the educational world some time ago, or in another country, they may also value forms of learning support that are more common in FE colleges and the newer universities than in the older and more prestigious ones. On the other hand, whilst younger students may value the opportunities for sports that universities provide, workers may already be members of local clubs. So insofar as “quality” means “fit for purpose”, it is clear that its definition will vary with the intended client group.

Alternatively, the added value of university providing accreditation may be thought to derive from their research function. But here again this does not survive a reality check. It is now government policy to concentrate research funding in a minority of (mostly older) universities that have a track record of extensive and high quality research activity. However, some argue that research and its quality is defined in such a way that an institution that (for instance) prioritizes the finding of practical solutions to the problems of local businesses loses out to those who undertake theoretical investigations of a kind that can find a place in international journals.

It is not just the newer universities that suffer in this way: so do GFE colleges. Until recently, it was assumed that “knowledge transfer” was an activity for universities, despite evidence that for some trades such as bakery, or painting and decorating, a GFE college was as (or more) likely to be able perform this function for local small firms. Evidence that undermined this assumption was almost accidentally provided in Wales, where because of an administrative arrangement that meant that the same body funded both GFEs and HEIs, a “Knowledge Exploitation Fund” was accessible to both – with some interesting results (Hughes and Stanton, 2005).

An alternative approach would have been to enhance the status of the vocational by developing specialist institutions, within which learning programmes and assessment regimes had been designed to fit their particular vocational context, and in which status was given to lower level vocational courses by the presence in the same organisational framework of higher-level professional courses to which candidates might progress. There has been little public debate about the philosophy behind the recent moves in England to integrate VET with academic provision at the same level. Nor has there been an exploration of the risks and

advantages of what might be called this “horizontal integration” (on the basis of the age of the learner) when compared to the possibility of “vertical integration” of different levels of provision within the same vocational area. This exploration could be undertaken by examining the recent history of such institutions as colleges of Art, or of printing or of construction, which used to be vertically integrated, but were then reconstructed on horizontal lines in order to be admitted to the ranks of HEIs. Another case study could be recent arrivals in HE, such as courses for nurses, where staff find themselves teaching and assessing at both degree and NVQ 2 level or level 3 – the latter being required as a licence to practise.

Further light can be shone on the prevailing orthodoxy by examining what has happened with regard to provision for 16-19 year olds in recent years. This can be summarized as follows.

- Further Education (FE) colleges remain the largest providers of vocational education and training (VET), but most now have also developed sizeable academic provision. This is both for 16-18 year olds and for older students wishing to return to study and/or progress to university. Indeed, the FE sector as a whole now provides more academic A Level candidates than do secondary schools.
- Up until 1997 different regulatory bodies were responsible for academic and vocational qualifications. These were the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). Since 1997 a single national Regulatory Body - the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) - has been responsible for overseeing both academic and vocational qualifications.
- In 1999, and as a result of government requirements, mergers took place between those examining and awarding bodies that administered qualifications for full-time students, so that each would offer both academic and vocational qualifications for learners at the ages of 16 and at 18. There are now three such “unitary” organisations, which compete with each other with regard to levels of service, but each of which has to meet the same criteria for methods of assessment and for content as laid down by QCA.
- In September 2000 both Advanced academic qualifications (GCE A levels) and the equivalent Vocational Qualifications (Advanced (or level 3) General Vocational Qualifications - GNVQs) were made part of the same framework, called “Curriculum 2000”. They now shared a similar modular structure and assessment/grading system. GNVQs were renamed “vocational A levels”, and at the next level down, the examinations taken at 16 were renamed academic GCSEs and vocational GCSEs.

- Until April 2001 there were three Inspectorates, one for schools (OFSTED), one for Further Education Colleges, and one for government-funded training. In that year they were merged into two: OFSTED inspected all full-time 16-18 provision, whether academic or vocational, and the new Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspected all non-university post 18 provision, including academic, vocational and recreational education, and work-based training.) In 2007 ALI was incorporated into Ofsted, which now inspects everything from child-minding and nursery schools, through primary and secondary, to further education and work-based learning
- Also in April 2001, a single organisation, the national Learning and Skills Council (LSC), was made responsible for the funding and planning of all post-16 non-university provision in England. Previously, schools, FE colleges and training schemes were each funded by separate bodies, and according to different rules and formulae. In addition, the LSC was given a planning role not undertaken by its predecessor organizations. But after yet another policy switch, from 2010 Local Authorities are to be given co-coordinating and commissioning roles for all education up to the age of 19, whether in schools or colleges. Much of the adult learning budget is to be channeled via employers, through the “Train to Gain” scheme.

Many of these changes are further evidence of the currently dominant assumption that the best way to establish parity of esteem is to bring together the academic and vocational “routes”, and learners of the same age. It is also hoped that, increasingly, candidates will “mix and match” provision and qualifications from the two routes. However, there is little evidence of this happening, and considerable evidence that far from gaining in status vocational awards end up being “neither fish nor fowl” because of the academic paradigm predominating in such things as structure, content and assessment regimes.

For instance, It was thought by government in the early part of this decade that the status of full-time vocational provision at what is known as “level 3” would be enhanced by reformulating what had been integrated vocational courses into a number of vocational A levels (AVCEs). Reviewing this provision in 1994, the inspectorate arrived at the following damning judgment.

The AVCE is not well designed. It is neither seriously vocational, nor consistently advanced. The aims of the AVCE are not clearly understood by many teachers and students. We observed a good deal of work that was trivial, as well as some that was excessively demanding. In some subjects, moreover, course specifications lack vocational content and are therefore too similar to GCE A level. Little use is made of work experience,

though where that is well planned it transforms what can often be mundane provision.

(Ofsted, 2004)

A conclusion that can be drawn from all this is that at the same time as analyzing the relationship between higher education in universities and higher education in GFEs, it is important to examine the relationship between:

- “traditional” higher education that is aimed at school-leavers who leave home in order to study conventional academic disciplines or prepare for the ancient professions, on the one hand, and
- higher level vocational education, aimed at older learners, usually based at home at studying part-time, and interested in occupations not thought of when the ancient universities were founded, and still not part of their portfolio.

The HE offered in GFEs is most often of the latter kind. Therefore, whilst agreeing with Parry that the existence and function of HE provision in FE Colleges has been relatively neglected, it can also be asked whether this is because of its location or its nature. The special requirements of adult, part-time learners are neglected or misunderstood wherever they study. For instance the funding mechanism still seems to assume that part-time students will be supported by employers in paying fees, and will not need money to cover their living costs because they will be working. Courses are often simply broken up versions of full time provision, that make little attempt to make use of the wider life and work experience of mature students.

This section also raises questions about the risks and advantages of merging academic and vocational provision within institutions and infrastructures. Given the strength of the academic paradigm, could this result in vocational education having to submit to academic definitions of level and academic assessment regimes? Whilst accepting that it is valuable to require participants on vocational courses to understand the underpinning theory, and to be able to analyse intellectually the context in which their trade or profession operates, should a parallel requirement exist for those on academic courses to be tested on their ability to apply their learning in the real world? While “new” universities have added the humanities to their portfolio, why is it that the older universities have not widened theirs to include the new professions?

And in the light of all this, would “Expansion, Differentiation and Participation in Undergraduate Education” been better served if vocational education in England had developed on a parallel track alongside academic HE, linked more directly with the lower-level vocational course provided in GFEs?

Part Two The World of FE

The majority of provision in FE colleges is now funded by the Learning and Skills Council, and the funding mechanism is influenced by the achievement or otherwise of certain indicators of “success”, and by grades given in Ofsted inspection reports. These are in turn influenced by student performance in examinations that are externally designed, and regulated by central government. The regime under which higher education is provided is quite different, but those teaching on higher education courses in FE colleges, and certainly their managers, cannot avoid being affected by the dominant administrative environment within which they work. HE staff have greater control over qualifications design, and HE students have greater control of which qualifications they choose to study for. FE staff have much less influence let alone control over the qualifications they have to use than they used to - the design and regulation of qualifications have been nationalised. And the state is also taking increasing powers to determine which FE courses taken by adults should receive any subsidy.

This control over what is fundable by the state is being exercised by giving employer-led Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) the right to determine which qualifications are “economically valuable”. Public subsidy is being withdrawn (or significantly reduced) from provision for adults that does not lead to these qualifications. SSCs also define the learning outcomes that vocational qualifications have to embody.

In parallel with this, funding to FE colleges for the training of those in the workforce is being channelled via employers, as part of the “Train to Gain” scheme. These measures were recommended in the Treasury funded Leitch Report (Leitch, 2006) which advocated them as part of a move to making provision “demand-led”. But clearly, and in contrast to the situation in English Higher Education, it is the demands of the employer and not the individual learner that are being given priority.

In parallel with Train to Gain there are also trials being conducted of “Adult Learner Accounts”, which at first sight might appear to be a move towards giving the individual some control. However:

- Adult Learner Accounts are at present being trialled in parts of just 2 areas of England, whereas Train to Gain is already being rolled out nationwide.
- Despite their name the accounts do not contain any money. They do entitle the individual to advice and guidance, but otherwise, as an LSC website in a pilot area puts it

“An Adult Learning Account is the mechanism that will provide information to you about the full value of your learning programme. We want to demonstrate to learners the full value of their learning, the contributions made by them, the LSC and the additional elements that learners are often unaware of. The expectation is that once learners have an understanding of the full value of their programme they will be more committed to it and more likely to complete the programme and be successful.” (LSC, 2008).

These answers were put under the heading of “Adult Learner Accounts – putting you first”, but it is clear that the key assumption is that learners will be motivated by realising how much money is already being spent on them, rather than that they will be motivated by giving them control over the money currently spent on their behalf. At least one project that has given untrammelled loans to adult learners has found that they often invest in courses that would not qualify for government subsidy, usually because they do not wish to take a whole qualification, or because they consider in their career interests to update themselves by taking a second level 2 or 4 course . (Reference: the Kent Learning Loan Scheme.). In contrast, recipients of the learning account “offer” are required to be working towards their first qualification in approved areas if they are to be eligible for existing subsidies.

Another answer from the same FAQs is also worth quoting.

“Are Apprenticeships included in the trials?”

Adult Learner Accounts are an offer to individuals and do not include Apprenticeships as these are a service to employers.”

So the adults that GFEs cater for are regarded quite differently in policy terms depending on their “level” and mode of study. Those engaged in what has been defined as “higher education” are given agency – allowed to make their own decisions about which courses best serve their personal and career interests. Adults engaged in education and training at what has been designated as lower levels tend to have their decisions made for them, and if they are in work it is their employer that tends to be regarded as the primary customer. It is ironic that the trend should be labelled “demand-led”, since it may result in FE colleges making provision that students do not choose to enrol on, and actually prevents FE Colleges spending government money on courses that local firms may ask for (unless they fit plans laid down by national bodies). On the other hand universities are already demand-led, since they have the freedom to adjust their offer to meet current student preferences, and can negotiate freely with local firms.

There was an interesting point in England's education history where the current divergence between the autonomy of HE and the central control of FE could have been avoided. There was a time when Polytechnics wishing to offer degrees did so by making use of the validation procedures offered by CNAA. At the same time, GFEs could devise qualifications at a local level in conjunction, for instance, with local firms, but have then validated at a national level by BTEC. The validation process checked facilities and staffing as well as the design of the provision, and had the advantage of giving a national credibility whilst local institutions developed their reputations. In the case of BTEC there was also the option to use an "off the shelf package" for all or some of the provision. Informally, the Open University provided a similar short cut for fledgling universities. It is an interesting mental experiment to consider how the fitness for purpose and accessibility of FE, HE and HE in FE would have developed had this convergence continued.

One outcome of such a convergence might have been a much needed debate about what is meant by "level" of achievement, qualifications and provision. At present levels are merely asserted in ways that bear little examination, but which have considerable consequences for students, institutions and teachers. The issue of intermediate or technician level skills provides a thought-provoking case-study of this.

The term "intermediate skills" is applied in different official documents both to level 3 qualifications in FE and to Foundation Degrees in HE. In many ways there is probably considerable overlap. However, if classified as the latter, full-time participants have access to student loans for personal support, do not have to pay upfront fees for tuition, and can choose which subjects suit them best. Their staff have some control over qualifications and course design, and work under national conditions of service with common pay scales. But, as we have seen, if classified as the former, the participants (if adult) have no access to a loan scheme, have to pay fees upfront, and these fees will only be subsidised if a national body has decreed that what they wish to do is "economically valuable". Their teachers have locally determined conditions of service, and even if national pay awards are agreed between unions and the national college employers organisation, colleges are not obliged to implement it, and often do not if they ain financial difficulty. Their qualifications are defined in terms of standards and content by employer-led bodies, and whilst staff can design learning programmes these have to lead towards the nationalised qualifications which in many cases they will not have been consulted about. Achievement of these qualifications is also used as performance indicators for the colleges, and as triggers for funding. Activity not measured in this way is not funded.

Parry mentions current proposals to give FE colleges awarding powers for Foundation Degrees. This will be welcomed by most colleges, but it is odd, to

say the least, that this degree of autonomy should continue to be withheld in the case of lower level qualifications with which the same colleges have much more experience. Indeed, even their influence over these qualifications has been reduced in recent years (Stanton, 2008).

Another factor that is clear from Parry's paper is the degree of turbulence to which the FE sector has been subjected as a result of government initiatives and "policy business". Those in the sector have remarked ruefully that whilst a state of constant revolution is thought to be good for FE, and to promote quality by keeping staff on their toes, it is stability and the predictability of funding that is said to underpin quality in HE.

Here's a paragraph from Higher Education Funding Council's consultation on funding, which ended in March/April 2007

"Nevertheless we are committed to providing institutions with stability in funding.. and to allowing time for managed periods of transition when we do alter funding levels... We therefore propose that the old and historic buildings premium should be turned into a fixed allocation based on its current cash value"

And here's a paragraph from the Learning and Skills Council's consultation on funding, which also ended in March/April 2007.

"Competition will be supported. Providers demonstrating high-quality provision will be able to expand. New entrants to the market will be encouraged and unwarranted barriers to entry removed. Suppliers of unwanted or lower-quality provision will not be protected from the resulting loss of income"

Stanton (2008)

Stability of funding is also a priority for schools.

The changes to school funding which were implemented for the two year period 2006-08 had their origin in the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners published in July 2004: it promised schools multi-year budgets and greater freedom over how they can spend their standards related grants. These changes were a continuation of the two year package of proposals for 2004-06, which put stability and predictability at the heart of policy on school funding. *School, early years and 14-16 funding consultation [DfES 2007]*

There have also been several changes with regard to who does the funding. As we have seen, for GFEs the primary funding role has been given to four different agencies in less than 20 years (with simultaneous changes in secondary funding

sources that are too complex to go into here.) What is more, each move has involved a redefinition of the relevant agency's role.

- Up until 1992 Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) owned the FE colleges, and employed the staff. It would be true to say that whilst some authorities took pride in their colleges and invested in them, others felt under political pressure to give priority to local schools.
- After this date, colleges became freestanding corporations, each employing their own staff under local conditions of service. The FEFC funded the "units of learning" the colleges provided, as long as these led towards nationally approved qualifications. FEFC left colleges to decide what to provide, with the proviso that it would favour those that produced most qualified students for the money, encouraging them to compete with one-another.
- LSC also funded learning in a similar way, but was also given a planning role and a brief to encourage collaboration in some key contexts. In particular, colleges were asked to show how their plans supported the skills requirements identified regionally by Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and nationally by Sector Skills Councils. Colleges were also required to work with local schools and training providers in providing a coherent offer for 14-19 year olds in the locality.
- From 2010 local authorities (no longer LEAs) are to commission colleges to make provision for 14-19 year olds, but for employed adults employers will purchase vocational courses using government money channelled through the "Train to Gain" scheme.

And has already been pointed out, this turbulence in funding arrangements has been accompanied by ongoing changes in inspection regimes and the structure and control of vocational qualifications.

It is in this context that the government's exhortations, quoted by Parry, that colleges should develop a "more focussed mission", have to be understood. It has been argued that at no time in the past 50 years has a government given FE colleges a defined role (Stanton and Bailey, 2007). Colleges have survived and even flourished by finding and constantly developing their own niches in the local and regional educational "ecology". While some of the changes in their mission have been self-determined, many have been in response to new government initiatives and priorities. Some would even argue that they have been too responsive to these, being, for instance in recent years, equally willing to expand a foundation degree offer in conjunction with a local university, to provide support

of various kinds to local firms, and to develop vocational provision for 14-16 year olds in conjunction with local schools.

In conclusion

Some key questions arise from this analysis.

1. Does the turbulence experienced by FE colleges derive at least in part from the fact that they cater for lower status learners on vocational provision? If so, might it be that the experiments that appear to have been conducted by government in this politically “safe” arena might be extended in time to those universities that share these courses and clients, albeit at undergraduate level?
2. What are the risks and advantages of those universities that offer the same kind of HE provision as GFEs giving priority to
 - a. vertical links, with craft and technician education in colleges and training providers, on the one hand, and with employer funded CPD and research on the other, as opposed to
 - b. links with other more “traditional” universities, with research funding from government and research councils?

With all its apparent benefits, and the officially sponsored argument that lateral links are beneficial, option (b) might not in the long term protect the well-being of those universities that end up having to focus on recruitment and teaching rather than selection and research. Indeed, it might impoverish the potentially distinctive higher education they could offer by disconnecting it from the competence-based elements of FE and from the crafts and trades from which many vocationally oriented university courses have derived.

In any case, the answers to these questions have significant implications for the existence of the vertical connections and pathways that learners need if they are to progress as adults from FE to HE, for the health of HE within FE, and for its role in promoting diversity and wider participation.

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