

NIACE Research and Development



Key Findings



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The HE in FE Training and Support Programme

Abstract

The HE in FE Training and Support Programme was a research and development project, funded by HEFCE and carried out by NIACE in partnership with the University of Warwick, City College Manchester and Sheffield Hallam University.

The project reviewed the provision of HE in FECs from the perspective of College staff, established how the first round of the HEFCE development funding had been spent within colleges, and identified issues for further discussion- including scholarly activity, quality matters, staff terms and conditions, and the student experience.

An advisory Group supported and advised the project team. Preliminary research identified numerous examples of good practice as well as specific requests for guidance. As the project developed, national and regional advisory and consultation events were held with senior managers and front line staff responsible for the provision and delivery of HE programmes in FECs. These discussions involved over 500 people from a wide range of institutions, including HEIs. HEFCE regional consultants and representatives of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) also contributed helpfully at this stage. Two publications were subsequently produced and published by HEFCE. One was aimed at senior managers and was concerned with policy and strategy. A sister publication, aimed at tutors and lecturers, was concerned with implementation.

Research methodology:

- ❖ A questionnaire was circulated to 132 Colleges providing HE programmes in FECs.
- ❖ A series of specific case studies were drawn up after visits to selected institutions and interviews with key staff.
- ❖ Three national and nine regional consultation meetings were held with managers and frontline staff.

Key Findings

The main conclusions of the project are:

- ❖ Respondents were clear that HEFCE development funding had enabled them to do things that would otherwise not have been at all. The funding was particularly useful in the development of QA systems.

- ❖ Attempts to create an HE environment in FECs ranged from the largely symbolic, such as HE graduation ceremonies, to the physical, with the creation of separate HE Centres.
- ❖ Collaboration emerged as a key theme, reflecting a variety of arrangements through which Colleges worked with HEIs and/or other FECs. The nature of the collaboration ranged from formally constituted partnerships and consortia, to much looser ad hoc groupings of institutions for specific purposes.
- ❖ Tensions between colleges and partner HEIs were frequently referred to by colleges with experience of both direct and indirect funding of their HE work.
- ❖ The terms and conditions for staff teaching HE in FECs were considerably inferior to those of equivalent staff in HEIs, as were their opportunities to engage in scholarly activities in their own right.
- ❖ It was striking how little mention was made of the actual or potential contribution of HEIs to the process of subject specific staff development in colleges.
- ❖ An analysis of the average scores obtained by FECs in the six aspects of subject review suggests that quality was higher than some external commentators have suggested.

Recommendations

- ❖ The advice to managers and tutors contained in the two publications constituted the project team's recommendations. HEFCE subsequently extended the project for a further 6 months, with additional funding, to draw up further recommendations to HEFCE about how best FECs could be supported to develop their HE work.

Output

- ❖ Thompson, J. (2003) *Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges: A Guide for Tutors and Lecturers*. Published Report, HEFCE April 2003/15.
- ❖ Thompson, J. (2003) *Supporting Higher Education in Further Education Colleges: Policy, Practice and Prospects*. Published Report, HEFCE April 2003/16.

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