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ABSTRACT

The interface between further education (FE) and higher education (HE) in the United Kingdom was examined by analyzing information from the following sources: available literature; all United Kingdom (UK) data sources regarding student enrollment, funding, objectives, and modes of study; interviews with representatives of national bodies concerned with education and employment in the UK; eight case studies involving a combination of universities (including one U.S. university) and FE colleges; and papers prepared by five other universities. Three dimensions of HE-FE interaction were identified: qualifications/curriculum; focus/purpose of linking activities; and types of interinstitutional relationships. Among the main types of HE-FE interaction identified in the case studies were the following: franchising, validation, access to HE, foundation courses, compacts, and 2+2 or 2+1 and other progression arrangements. Such arrangements were most common in business, engineering, mathematics, and computer education. HE-FE interaction was concluded to benefit universities by giving them access to more potential students through "feeder" colleges and to benefit students (especially nontraditional students) by allowing them to progress to HE. Cultural differences and operational management issues were identified as areas of concern. Contains 16 tables/figures and 42 references. (MN)

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The FE/HE Interface: a UK Perspective

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THE FE/HE INTERFACE: A UK PERSPECTIVE

A report to the CVCP

S Rawlinson
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Executive Summary

Introduction

The project objectives and methodology

A research project was undertaken to produce a clearer 'map' of the interface between further and higher education, and to ascertain the nature of the links, boundaries, and the developing trends. The research was carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies for the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) Longer Term Strategy Steering Group, between February and May 1996, and covered all four UK countries. The research methods consisted of a literature review, data collection and analysis, consultation with national bodies, eight case studies involving a combination of universities (including one from the US) and further education colleges (FECs), and papers prepared by five other universities.

Recent trends

The factors which have helped to shape the current interface are expected to continue to exert an influence. National funding policies have resulted in 'capping' of full-time undergraduate student numbers in UK universities after a period of growth. Incorporation of colleges has led FECs to expand their student numbers, maximise their income, and to widen their catchment areas. FECs' employer-led work has declined, but more full-time students have been recruited. 'New' universities, most with a vocational emphasis, have increased their share of students dramatically. In the context of these changes, both sectors have looked increasingly to the new student markets, *ie* students who prefer to study nearer home, who are over 21, wanting to study part-time, and less likely to have 'A' level entry qualifications.

Links and partnerships between FECs and higher education institutions (HEIs) can provide flexible, part-time and local higher education for these students. However, the unpredictability of both institutions' and students' funding, and competition for students, causes uncertainty about future development. Several FECs and universities in the study found problems with separate further and higher education funding, and some, usually 'new', universities feel that the FE/HE divide is an altogether artificial one. The recently announced review of higher education led by

Sir Ron Dearing is expected to address these and other issues raised by this research.

The FE/HE interface

The scale of the interface

The national significance of all FE/HE relationships, and the overlap between the sectors, is difficult to assess because there is no single source of clear data. However, the proportion of higher education students in FECs, and that of further education, mainly in the 'new' universities, appears to be relatively small, and each represents a comparatively small proportion of institutional and national budgets. Higher education enrolments at FECs in England in 1994/95 accounted for nine per cent of all higher education students. Data for each UK country is collected differently and so figures are not strictly comparable, but in Wales the figure for similar provision was six per cent, in Scotland 29 per cent and Northern Ireland, 15 per cent.

Classification of FE/HE interaction

We suggest that there are three dimensions to the interaction — qualifications and curriculum, the focus or purpose of the activities, and the types of relationships between institutions.

Qualifications play a central role in the progression and transfer of students at the FE/HE interface. The qualifications are mainly vocational: *eg* HNCs, HNDs, their Scottish equivalents, and professional qualifications. In all countries only small numbers of students take degrees and postgraduate qualifications in FECs. Recent relevant changes have included the introduction of competence based qualifications, core skills, GNVQs as entry qualifications, modularisation and credit frameworks.

The FECs' delivery of the curriculum is seen as more participative, student-centred and pastoral than that of the universities, although universities offering their own further education are more likely to have similar approaches to the FECs. The concentration of higher education subjects delivered in FECs is fairly narrow, with business/administration, engineering/ technology, and building in the top six enrolments in all the UK countries.

The focus of the activities between further and higher education institutions covers firstly those which facilitate student progression: *eg* Foundation, Access to HE, and jointly delivered HNC/D/degree arrangements. Secondly, there are activities which extend the provision of higher education to more institutions, locations or individuals, usually by franchising, validation and outreach arrangements.

Some relationships between FECs and HEIs are more formal than others, and there is no common use of terminology. We have identified two main types: 'associate college' arrangements and 'preferred partnerships'. In the former, HEIs work with a number of different FECs, and *vice versa*. 'Preferred partnership' refers to stronger links with a small number of partners, usually with the university conferring certain rights on partner FECs.

FE/HE links in practice

The main types of interaction

The main FE/HE activities in the case studies were franchising, validation, Access to HE, Foundation and Year 0 courses, Compacts, two-plus-two or two-plus-one and other progression arrangements. The most common subject areas were business studies, engineering, maths and computing. The links concentrated on HNC/D level, professional qualifications, and small amounts of degree work.

Institutions were unclear about the exact scale of these activities, but new universities had links with larger numbers of FECs, and more franchised students than the old. The latter had more validated programmes covering FEC students. Students involved in FE/HE links accounted for less than five per cent of the universities' total student population, and income generated was a small proportion of total budgets.

In the FEC case studies, the number and percentage of higher education students and income from higher education was low (five per cent or less), but up to about 25 per cent of total numbers in the mixed economy colleges. All FECs except one had links with several universities, and it had a 'preferred partnership' with one university. Another college was reducing its 11 links to a partnership with one university.

A case study of a university in the USA was included. Its state-wide system has 13 community colleges which offer two-year courses enabling students to transfer to the state or other universities. The 16 technical colleges focus on locally-based vocational training and adult continuing education, but students can also transfer to a university. Transfer between colleges and the universities involves all the institutions in a formally-agreed state-wide credit transfer system.

Reasons for the development of links

Universities' reasons for establishing FE/HE links were that they helped to ensure recruitment, gave access to the changing types of higher education students, and helped to fulfil their missions to serve the wider community and the region. Some used FEC premises to overcome accommodation constraints, and some,

operating from a single campus, used them to reach the local community. All universities used links with FECs to keep abreast of developments in vocational education.

FECs' main reasons for FE/HE activity were to provide increased access and progression routes for FE students to higher education, to use and develop existing college staff expertise and resources, and to diversify funding sources. They also felt that such activity helped to improve the status and profile of the college. Two colleges had developed links with 'old' universities for reasons of perceived status and quality.

Managing the links

Institutional policies in universities and FECs were backed up by senior management, but at operational level, internal policies on staff time for teaching, research and development, conditions of service, and use of resources were still not well developed. Management of links was characterised by the dominance of the university hegemony — academic and administrative; FECs were generally the 'junior' partners.

In franchised work, colleges received some funding from the universities, who held back varying percentages for administration charges. In validation arrangements, FECs paid fees to the universities, who controlled quality. Student progression/articulation arrangements were operated by FECs with varying levels of control by the universities. The progression procedures for these students differed between universities; some guaranteed places or interviews, and some neither. It was not easy for FE students to be accepted on highly selective courses, and individual institutions or group activities were trying to obtain better progression arrangements for FE students.

A smaller number of more structured arrangements which we have called 'preferred partnerships' was developing between FECs and universities. Both, but particularly colleges, wanted links to operate on a more egalitarian footing, and FECs were being selective in their choice of partners. There was only limited support among universities, FECs and national bodies, for exclusive arrangements (*ie* a college allowed to link with a single university). This could mean status and privileges for the FEC in exchange for exclusivity, but the same benefits to colleges could be found elsewhere without exclusivity arrangements.

Quality management of most FE/HE activity was monitored by university systems which conformed to HEQC criteria. These systems were seen as useful and necessary by college staff. The achievement of students from FECs was shown at course level to be good, but there was little overall tracking of achievement of HE students from FECs within and between the FE and HE sectors. FE staff were generally praised for their abilities by university staff, and especially for their teaching skills. Some

resources were said to be better in FECs, but it was acknowledged that FE learning resources and libraries could not compete with those of universities.

Benefits and concerns

Benefits of FE/HE interaction

Benefits for universities included recruitment of students to courses with low numbers of applicants (*eg* sciences and engineering), and access to a wider pool of potential students through 'feeder' colleges. Universities gained income from the links, and an opportunity to be involved in new areas of work.

FECs cited the main benefit as students' progression to higher education, which was also good for colleges' recruitment. Links with universities conferred status on the colleges who used the university name as a 'selling point'. Many FE staff liked teaching at higher education level, and there were some opportunities for students and staff to have access to the university environment.

Benefits for students cited by university and FEC staff included progression to higher education, especially for non-traditional students, and a convenient local base to study. The supportive environment of an FEC and, where available, the academic ethos of a university, were both considered beneficial.

The factors promoting success included the quality of the people and relationships, and mutual respect between the FE and HE staff. Senior management support and encouragement were important in developing and supporting activities which had begun informally, and staff development events had been valuable in some cases. Credit transfer systems were considered increasingly necessary to facilitate student progression. Mutually beneficial funding arrangements were preferable to each partner seeing the other solely as a source of funds.

Concerns

Cultural differences between the two sectors caused some concern. For example, FECs felt that whilst university procedures ensured quality, they were sometimes overly-bureaucratic. Some university staff believed that FEC staff were unable to teach at higher education level. There was some concern that university standards could be diluted by admitting non-'A' level students. It was felt that students moving from FECs to university found it difficult to learn independently, although non-progression or drop-out were usually thought to be caused by financial, travel or family difficulties.

Operational management concerns revolved around whether there was sufficient time for FE and HE staff to keep in touch, or

work together. A second problem was the conditions of service of the FEC staff which generally did not allow time for research or professional development.

Concerns around qualifications included a fear that HND courses are vulnerable when some universities offer degree places with the same entry criteria. Secondly, students could be loath to embark on Foundation courses if they can choose a three year degree course. There were concerns that 'Access to HE' students linked to selective courses are finding increasing competition for places. A difficulty for FECs delivering a BTEC Higher National course via a university BTEC licence is in satisfying both university and BTEC criteria.

FECs receive no capital funding for higher education work, and some felt they were to an extent providing higher education 'on the cheap'. Only one or two universities provided additional funding for their FE partners. FECs and universities were not meticulously costing the time spent on FE/HE links, but both feared that the real cost could be more than they were receiving. Franchising arrangements led to colleges feeling vulnerable because some courses had been closed by the universities, and small numbers created groups which were not financially viable for FECs.

There were mixed feelings about how detrimental might be the lack of access to university campuses for higher education students in FECs, but for some students the problems of distance and time in getting to the campus might outweigh the lack of access to facilities. However, the lack of comparable library resources was the main worry for both parties, who usually felt that IT and the use of the Internet could not compensate.

The future shape of the FE/HE interface

FE/HE interaction is likely to continue as HEIs use FEC links to recruit and maintain student numbers, and FECs need to meet growth targets and to diversify sources of income. Continuing consolidation for HEIs means that they are unlikely to increase franchised provision to FECs. Institutions in both sectors fear pressure for more higher education to be delivered 'cheaply' in FECs, and are increasingly looking at the real cost of HE provision in FECs themselves.

The low level of student grants is likely to further increase the numbers of full-time students who wish to study nearer home, or even discourage take-up of higher education generally. Entrants to higher education are likely to include older, non-traditional students, as well as young people.

Development of the interface at regional level

Regional roles have recently taken on more importance for institutions, and development looks likely to continue. All universities in the study had decided to adopt a regional focus as part of their mission, although the geographical boundaries of the 'regions' were unclear. Some universities initiated or formalised networks of their partner colleges, and are currently collaborating to plan higher education across the region. In all UK countries, external bodies (*eg* local authorities, development agencies, and TECs) had approached universities to ask them to be involved in economic regeneration in their regions, and had supported the activity financially, in some cases with capital projects.

The regional focus is likely to remain important for HEIs in terms of recruitment. Links with FECs can also help the universities to raise their profile in the region and fulfil a philanthropic or civic role. FECs are likely to focus on regional links in order to offer students clear progression routes to higher education and thereby encourage recruitment. FECs wanting closer, better quality relationships with HEIs, are unlikely to increase links over a wide geographical area.

Qualifications

An overall FE/HE CATS system looks unlikely in the next year or two but some possible developments include the Scottish SCOTCATS which will increasingly involve General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQs), and the Welsh modular FE credit-based system which is being articulated with higher education.

The future of the HND qualification is unclear if it has to compete with degrees, and with new qualifications such as NVQ level 4, GNVQ level 4 and possibly Associate Degrees. A change of focus identified by some universities is the take-up of academic rather than vocational degrees by non-traditional students who might not be aiming for a specific job or career. Demand for part-time courses is expected to increase, but benefit rules, low grant levels, and a possible increase in fees could cause difficulties. Employers' needs for shorter more flexibly-delivered training are expected to increase.

The focus of the FE/HE activities

Much FE/HE activity will focus on student progression, but the different types of arrangements and uses of terminology, *eg* 'associate college' or 'affiliate college' make it increasingly difficult for students to choose the most appropriate courses and institutions. The proliferation of qualifications, modules and credit accumulation frameworks, could make the hoped-for 'seamless robe' look like a patchwork quilt. Students need clarity,

coherence, and objective guidance, as in the US case study, especially when institutions compete for student numbers.

Articulation agreements guaranteeing progression to certain courses, as in Scotland and the US, are likely to develop further. Compacts are also likely between HEIs and schools. FE/HE agreements are increasingly likely to concentrate on curriculum progression, *eg* matching GNVQ curricula with a specific degree course. Validation arrangements are expected to increase because HEIs see them as a reasonably cost-effective source of income, and colleges, especially mixed economy colleges, like the 'freedom' they give. FEC franchise arrangements with HEIs can be unpredictable, and colleges will not wish to become too dependent on them. Outreach centres are likely to continue to develop, with HEIs involved in delivering modules, whole degrees or other qualifications in local communities.

Relationships between institutions

FE/HE links between institutions are likely to reduce in number, with 'preferred partnerships' becoming more common. HEIs will continue to drive the management of FE/HE interaction because of the nature of the activities, but colleges are 'shopping around for the best deals' and deciding which HEIs to choose. More 'old' universities are likely to be approached by FECs because of their perceived status and quality.

The day to day management of the interface activities is likely to need addressing by both sectors. Institutional policies need to be backed up by clear management strategies, with the possible need for discussion with lecturers' unions because of the differences in conditions of service between the two sectors.

FECs and HEIs aim to link staff and students in different centres via the Internet, computer based learning packs and video-conferencing. The issues are about access to the appropriate hardware and software, and whether this will compensate for being at a distance from the main university.

Wider issues

Competition at the FE/HE interface could increase as particularly the 'new' universities and FE colleges both see non-traditional students and community-based education as their natural client group. The 'old' universities are new players in the game but are increasingly involved. Another potential cause of more competition to both HEIs and FECs could be the new universities which are as yet at the planning stage.

Planning of FE/HE provision in some form is recognised as necessary to avoid duplication of provision, allow for economies of scale, and offer students more coherent choices. Individual

institutions want to choose their own partners but accept the need for planning, probably based on regional networks. There is strong support from some institutions and national bodies for planning based on voluntary collaboration, not led by national funding mechanisms.

The possibility of mergers between 'new' universities and FECs could offer both parties mutual benefits and increased security in the short term, but fears have been expressed that 'mission drift' could arise in an institution resulting from a merger between an FEC and a university. It is feared that it might emphasise higher education provision at the expense of further education, as might FECs which also provide higher education. FECs in the study were certain that their core work is further education and that higher education would not be given preference over it. There is also concern that 'upwardly mobile' universities might concentrate development on research and post-graduate work, leaving a gap in the lower level of higher education provision.

Diversity could be an issue for FECs and HEIs, since neither sector wants to rely on one type of student or funds as its chief source of income. Some HEIs will continue to offer or develop further education in their own right, but could do so through mergers with FECs. Currently there is no indication that general FE colleges will take on much more higher education, although some of the mixed economy colleges might do so.

The quality issues at the FE/HE interface usually focus on the quality *management* of the courses in the FECs, but another issue is the quality of the higher education *experience for students* in FECs. It is acknowledged that this could be different, but should be of comparable quality to that in HEIs. Some arrangements between FECs and HEIs have virtually no interaction between the two, *ie* no link for students with the HEI campus or staff. However, different types of students might have different demands of a university education, and for some this interaction might be less important. A related issue is access to university libraries and information which, even with new communications technology, might prove difficult. To help ensure quality, an agreement for students could state publicly what the relationships mean for them in terms of progression, resources, staff and facilities.

Conclusion

This research investigated the nature of the overlap and interaction between UK further and higher education. It concluded that activity at the FE/HE interface is likely to continue, and is beneficial for institutions and students. There are concerns about day-to-day management and cultural differences between sectors, but both wish to retain their separate characteristics and strengths.

The amount of higher education delivered in FECs is not likely to increase unless higher education expands overall, and further education in HEIs is on a very small scale. The number of links between FECs and HEIs looks set to decrease as both decide to concentrate on stronger formal partnerships. The overlap and interaction between further and higher education boundaries creates problems for institutions, but helps to provide students with a more seamless educational experience through the maze of qualification routes.

The regional dimension of the interface is already established in some areas, with universities and their partner FECs meeting to plan joint activities, and in some cases, higher education provision across a 'region' which they have defined. There is support for increased planning at this level, but little for a centralised prescriptive system. Whatever factors shape the future of the FE/HE interface, including the current review of higher education, participants involved in this research feel that any changes should lead to mutually beneficial relationships for further and higher education, and have at their heart the best interests of the students.

1. Introduction and Background

This report about the overlap and interaction between further and higher education — the FE/HE interface — is based on a research study carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies between February and May 1996. The research was undertaken on behalf of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) Longer Term Strategy Steering Group.

1.1 Background

The traditional perception of the work of a further education college is of offering BTEC and other courses on a day release basis to 16 to 19 year olds, especially apprentices in subjects such as construction and engineering. This perception of further education is now just as outdated as the idea of universities providing only full-time education on a campus, for 18 to 21 year-old undergraduate students studying for three year degrees. In the last five years in particular, there has been a change in the shape of both further and higher education. There is less employer-led work in further education colleges (FECs) and an increased percentage of young people staying on after the age of 16 to take full-time courses. A wider variety of people are wanting to study, often part-time, and many are returning to study for the first time since leaving school or initial training. Increasing numbers of mature students and young people without 'A' levels are applying for higher education.

As both further and higher education sectors have looked to these new student markets, and are both involved in the progression of students to higher education, so there has been increasing convergence of some of the work of the two sectors. There has also been interaction between individual institutions to provide education which meets the needs of these students. However, overlap and interaction between further and higher education has existed for many years. Many (FECs) have offered Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) work in vocational subjects, as well as professional qualifications, and they have also been the main deliverers of 'Access to Higher Education' (Access to HE) courses. Many universities, particularly those which came from the polytechnic sector, have offered all these plus further education courses of their own, and have had wide access policies for non-traditional entrants for many years.

The interface between further and higher education is currently coming under scrutiny because of these changes in the type of students, and the changing social and economic context in which further and higher education operate. The interaction between the sectors and individual institutions is helping to provide flexible higher education as more students choose to study part time, or prefer to stay nearer their homes and need convenient locations for study. Links and partnerships between FECs and higher education institutions (HEIs) can be used to reach students without traditional entry requirements for higher education, and provide opportunities for them to progress through the education system. The partnerships can also target potential students in specific subjects such as science and engineering, where the number of applicants is low, and increase the take-up of higher education in those subjects.

There are also uncertainties for both further and higher education caused by wider issues such as the unpredictability of funding (both of institutions and students), the potential for duplication of educational provision, and competition between institutions for students. Interest in the interface is sometimes dominated by the potential for mergers between FECs and universities. Whilst this aspect of FE/HE interaction is obviously of interest and concern, the mergers are not necessarily representative of the interface as a whole but just one response to some of the issues. The recently announced review of higher education led by Sir Ron Dearing is expected to address many of the issues discussed here, and it is the more general concerns about the interface between further and higher education which will then need to be in the spotlight rather than mergers *per se*.

1.2 Project objectives and methodology

1.2.1 Objectives

The project was commissioned by the CVCP to help to produce a clearer 'map' of the interface between further and higher education, to ascertain the nature of the links, boundaries, and the developing trends. The overall objectives of the research were to:

- map, and where possible quantify, areas of overlap and interaction between further and higher education provision
- further develop a classification of further and higher education interaction
- show how the interaction is developing in response to changes in, for example, qualifications and funding arrangements
- identify institutional (as well as national) policies and strategies which promote or inhibit effective partnerships

- identify any social, economic and cultural factors which affect the partnerships
- to identify the beneficial and other outcomes of the interaction and partnership arrangements for colleges, universities and students
- to inform CVCP policy.

1.2.2 Methodology

The research began in February 1996 and was completed by 31st May of that year, with a final report presented to a CVCP seminar on 12th July 1996.

It originally had three elements:

- mapping and quantifying FE/HE links which consisted of:
  - literature review
  - data collection and analysis
- consultation with national bodies
- case studies.

The literature review concentrated on drawing together publications and documentation from national bodies and recent research on the subject, mostly by universities. As some of the existing publications offer detailed and extensive information about FE/HE links, IES's literature review concentrated on the coverage of a small number of key themes.

All national data sources in the UK were contacted, and provided data on the different aspects of further and higher education which they cover (*eg* student numbers, type of funding, qualification aim, mode of study). The chief executives or policy planners from national bodies with involvement and influence in FE/HE links were interviewed.

Data collection concentrated mainly on 1993 onwards; it is difficult to compare with earlier years owing to changes in data collection, and in the characteristics of the sectors. The bodies included: the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the Higher education Funding Council (HEFCE) the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the Universities Central Admissions Service (UCAS), the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals (COSHEP), the Welsh Funding Councils (WFCs), the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), and the Scottish Office of Education (SOEID). It is important to note that the project has coincided with a changeover in data collection systems in further education. This means that 1994/95 and 1995/96 data straddle both systems, and that data for 1995/96 is not yet complete.

Case studies

As the research had to be carried out over a period of four months, CVCP asked that eight case studies be undertaken, four of which should be in England and the others in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United States of America. Selection was based on two broad criteria. Firstly there was a need for case studies to represent FE/HE links managed in different ways (*eg* franchising, associate colleges), and cover a range of links (*eg* Foundation courses, two plus two schemes *etc*). Secondly, because of the small number of case studies, they needed be representative of the range of universities (*eg* by location, size and type of institution), and different stages of development in their links with FECs. Within the small scale of the study it was decided not to include the specialist HEIs which mainly offer courses in teacher training, and art and design. The case studies focused on the overlap between FECs, including the larger mixed economy colleges, and universities.

The researchers incorporated into some case studies time to interview colleges with whom universities had a link or partnership. This was in order to understand how the interface was operating from the point of view of both FECs and universities. The final selection of eight case studies which were visited consisted of:

1. Wales:	university and one link college
2. Northern Ireland:	university and one link college
3. Scotland:	university and one link college
4. England:	university and one link college
5. England:	university
6. England:	university
7. England:	FE college
8. United States:	university

The key features of the case study institutions are given below, but a brief outline of each institution visited, and of the FE/HE interface in each country is also given in the Appendix.

Universities

- The UK universities varied in their strengths and emphasis. Some had long traditions as academic institutions with strong research priorities and international profiles, whilst others had a stronger community role with wide access policies for non-traditional students and a wide choice of vocational courses. Three universities were very selective in their student intake and had high entry criteria for most courses.

- Two universities were in rural areas with very wide catchment areas for even local students, subsequent travel problems, and potential competition from several other universities in the wider area. Another served both rural and urban areas, and three were based in or near city centres. These four had other universities in very close proximity.
- All had areas of low recruitment in certain subjects, especially sciences and engineering, with schools or departments that had been or were likely to be under some threat of closure.
- All had a range of strong links with organisations such as institutes of higher education, schools of art and design and professional institutions such as nursing colleges, as well as with FECs.
- Three of the six UK universities had polytechnic status prior to 1993.
- All had some formal arrangements with FECs based on an exchange of funding and formal quality procedures, but they also had looser arrangements based on personal contact.
- All offered vocational courses and HND provision. All had credit accumulation and transfer systems (CATs) in place, but those in the 'old' universities had only recently been established and were not yet operating fully enough to be incorporated to any great extent into the links with FECs.
- The US university was part of a state-wide higher education system consisting of 13 universities with more than 140,000 students between them, with numbers expected to increase by 10,000 over the next few years. The universities offered four-year degrees as well as postgraduate qualifications, and undergraduates entered direct or after two years' study at one of 13 college centres or the 16 technical colleges. Whilst continuing education was a key part of the university's activity, its role was more focused on providing courses leading to academic qualifications.

FE colleges

- The FECs ranged in size from 35,000 enrolments (mostly part-time) to 7,500. In the general FE and tertiary colleges the percentage of higher education students and income from higher education was low.
- Of the five FECs visited, one was a tertiary college, two were general FECs, and two were 'mixed economy' colleges (so called because their higher education students accounted for about 25 per cent of their total).
- The colleges all had links with several universities (five to eleven), with exclusive partnership arrangements operating on any scale only in Scotland. The general FE and tertiary colleges offered a few of their own HNC/D and Access to HE courses. The mixed economy colleges also offered whole HNDs

and degrees in their own right, and had Masters courses franchised from universities.

In each case study institution, senior staff with responsibility for policy and strategy on FE/HE links and data collection were interviewed, as well as one to two academic staff involved in day to day management of FE/HE links. We saw annual reviews, prospectuses, strategic plans, mission statements *etc.* and some available data on achievement and progression rates of students on FE/HE linked courses.

Additional papers

In consultation with CVCP it was decided that the research should include the views of some additional universities. These were selected by CVCP on the basis of their strong interest and involvement in the FE/HE interface area. Five were asked to write a brief paper outlining their own university's activities and giving their views on the same aspects of their management and development as the case study institutions. Their views have been incorporated into the main findings of the report and highlighted only where they differed significantly from those of the case study institutions.

1.3 Structure of the report

The report consists of four chapters in addition to this one.

Chapter 2 provides a map of the FE/HE interface showing the extent of the overlap between further and higher education in relation to levels of courses and funding arrangements.

Chapter 3 provides a classification of the interaction between FECs and HEIs, providing data where possible to illustrate its extent, and outlines the major external factors which have shaped it.

Chapter 4 draws examples from the case study institutions. It explores the main patterns of activity between FECs and HEIs, and why they developed. It describes the ways in which individual institutions manage the interface.

Chapter 5 continues with the case studies. It presents their assessment of the benefits of FE/HE interaction to their institutions and students, the factors they identified as promoting or inhibiting successful activities, and areas of concern.

Chapter 6 draws the study together. It considers the part played by national trends, and explains the major issues likely to have an impact on the future FE/HE interface.

There is an appendix to the main report which provides additional information about the case studies.

2. A Map of the FE/HE Interface

This chapter will mainly draw on the data analysis, information from national bodies, and the literature review. It gives an overview of the institutions, funding arrangements, qualifications *etc.* which constitute the FE/HE interface. Section 1 outlines the external factors which have influenced the shape of the current FE/HE interface. Section 2 provides an outline of the scale of the UK further and higher education sectors. Section 3 gives some indication of the scale of the interface using existing data.

2.1 External factors which have shaped the FE/HE interface

In the last three to four years there have been four main factors outside the control of the universities and FECs which have helped to shape the interface. They can be identified separately but are interrelated. The ways in which FECs and universities have responded to these factors will be referred to throughout the rest of this report.

2.1.1 National funding policies

In 1993, the implementation of maximum aggregate student numbers (MASNs) or 'capping' for HE, *ie* no funding for additional full-time undergraduate students, created a period of consolidation for universities in the UK. Universities had increased their student numbers during the late 1980s and early 1990s, some doubling their numbers. Reductions have also occurred in the level of the unit of funding and this combined with 'capping' has obliged universities to maintain as high numbers as possible to maximise their income.

2.1.2 The changes to the sectors

As part of the incorporation of colleges in 1993 (due to occur in Northern Ireland in 1997) FECs were expected to expand their student numbers and maximise their income as part of the FEFC's funding strategy for the sector. In addition, they have become free to offer the type of courses they want, and are no longer confined to catchment areas defined by local education authorities (LEAs).

'New' universities (the former polytechnic and college sector) by tradition had a strong vocational emphasis, with links to further

education, employers and the community. The overlap and interaction between them and FECs meant that were in a good position to expand, within funding constraints. The new sector increased its share of total students, full- and part-time, from 55 per cent in 1988/89 to 59 per cent in 1993/94, and their number of full-time students during the same period by 91 per cent, compared to 41 per cent in the 'old' universities (Connor *et al.*, 1996).

2.1.3 The changing student profile

There have been significant changes in the characteristics of students and the ways they want to study. Data from UCAS enables universities to look at trends in the geographical sources of applications for full-time courses, and they have realised that many students, young and mature, prefer to study nearer home than in the past. This has always been the case in Scotland. In Northern Ireland there is an under-supply of higher education places and it is estimated that about 35 per cent of students who wish to study in the province have to leave.

Over half the undergraduate entrants to higher education in England in 1994/95 were over 21, and UCAS data shows that almost 50 per cent of full-time degree course entrants aged over 25 in 1994 came from social classes III, IV and V. This compared to only 34 per cent of entrants under 19 from the same social classes, and an overall figure of 61 per cent of entrants who came from professional and intermediate classes I and II (Connor *et al.*, 1996). Many older students also want to take up higher education courses which can be combined with their own local commitments to families, financial circumstances and work opportunities. They are usually non-employed people returning to study, or employed and requiring additional qualifications or professional updating certificates and diplomas. Part-time study has increased in HE by over 20 per cent since 1990, and now accounts for 80 per cent of FE students.

2.1.4 The changing nature of qualifications

All FECs and universities, whether the latter have an academic or vocational emphasis, are aware of the significance of the changing nature of qualifications: *eg* the introduction at higher education level of competence based qualifications; the increasing variety of vocational qualifications; the development of core skills within existing higher education qualifications; and GNVQs presented as entry qualifications.

Many universities have modularised their undergraduate courses (academic and vocational) and have credit frameworks in place to facilitate student transfer and achievement. They realise the potential that this has to provide flexible provision to fit in with changing study patterns and commitments. Another change has been that continuing education courses are now award-bearing

and carry credit towards higher education qualifications, thus bringing them closer to mainstream provision.

2.2 The FE and HE sectors

2.2.1 Definitions of FE/HE and data collection

- Data collection on student enrolments in both higher and further education has been changing because of the introduction of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record for higher education, and the Individualised Student Record (ISR) for further education. The coverage and some definitions used in the HESA record and the ISR differ from the Universities Statistical Record (USR) and the Further Education Statistical Record (FESR) which were the main sources prior to 1994/95 enrolments. The ISR has not yet been completed by all FECs in England.
- The DfEE has compiled figures for further and higher education which allow for some comparisons with recent years, although not strictly comparable over time. They also have the overall UK figures from HESA and the ISR. There are discrepancies between the data sources within as well as between countries because of different definitions and collection methods.
- The categorisation of further or higher education students for most data collection purposes derives from the level of the course and qualification aim as recorded by the institution at which they enrol. Higher education courses as defined by DfEE and HESA are:

  'Of a standard higher than the Advanced level or the General Certificate of Education, the Higher Grade of the Scottish Certificate Education, the BTEC/SCOTVEC National Certificate/Diploma or their equivalent (NVQ/GNVQ level 3).'

- Although classified as higher education, sub-degree courses such as HNC ('non-prescribed courses') provided in FECs are funded by the FEFC in England, not the HEFCE. Professional qualifications can be prescribed or non-prescribed, depending on whether they lead to certain qualifications. 'Access to HE' and preparatory Foundation years of degree courses are non-prescribed, and are usually (but not exclusively) delivered by FECs. Because of the range of higher education qualifications, the DfEE has approximately 300 codes for recording them for data collection purposes.
- FECs offer higher education qualifications, and HEIs offer further education qualifications in all UK countries, but funding mechanisms vary. In England and Wales most further education qualifications in HEIs are funded by FE funding councils and most higher education qualifications in HEIs by HE funding councils. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the funding follows the student's location.

2.2.2 The further and higher education sectors

The FE sector (as at 1st August 1996) consists of:

- England 452 colleges
- Wales 29 colleges
- Scotland 46 colleges
- N Ireland 17 colleges

The total number of UK further education enrolments in 1994/95 was over 3.8 million, of which 0.8 million were full-time.

The HE sector (as at 1 August 1995) consists of:

- England 143 HEIs (73 universities, 25 University of London Institutes, 50 HE colleges)
- Wales 14 HEIs
- Scotland 22 HEIs
- Northern Ireland 4 HEIs

The total number of UK higher education enrolments was 1.6 million in 1995/96, of which 1.1 million were full-time or sandwich.

2.3 Assessing the scale of the interface

This section gives some available data on the overlap between FE/HE sectors, in terms of courses and funding arrangements. It is possible to provide data for the individual UK countries but not a UK-wide cumulative picture, because of the different methods of data collection in the constituent countries. (For further contextual information on the countries covered in the study see the Appendix.) Chapter 3 explores the nature of the interaction which occurs between FECs and HEIs.

2.3.1 Higher education in further education colleges

The clearest picture which can be obtained from current data is to show the number of enrolments on all higher education courses (prescribed and non-prescribed) at FECs in each UK country in 1994/95 (see Table 2.1). In order to give some indication of the scale of this, the figures have also been shown as a percentage of the total number of higher education enrolments in each country.

Table 2.1: Proportion of HE enrolments located in FECs (all UK countries) 1994/95

	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland
HE in FECs	133,138	4,636	55,017	6,136
Total HE	1,249,600	78,087	192,035	39,750
% HE in FECs	9.39	5.88	28.65	15.4

Source: IES based on data from DfEE, HEFCW, SOEID, DENI.

Table 2.2: Higher education students in FECs (England)

Type and mode of HE course	1992/93	1993/94
Prescribed FT	29,330	35,752
Prescribed PT	7,054	7,517
Total Prescribed	*36,384*	*43,269*
Non-Prescribed FT	n/a	8,496
Non-Prescribed PT	n/a	81,727
Non-Prescribed Total	*90,678*	*90,223*
Total student numbers	127,062	133,492

Source: FESR 1992/93 and 1993/94

The figures for England are based on unpublished provisional data from DfEE, derived from a combination of the 1994/95 FESR from 279 Colleges and the 1994/95 ISR from 169 colleges. They are not exactly comparable with previous years, but the figure for England of 133,138 higher education enrolments in FECs in 1994/95 shows that against figures of 127,062 and 133,492 for 1992/93 and 1993/94 in Table 2.2, there has been little change.

The figures for each UK country in Table 2.1 are derived from different data sources, and comparisons between them should be made with some caution. The figures show that the highest percentage of higher education seems to be provided in FE colleges in Scotland. Even allowing for variations in the different qualifications in Scotland, this appears high, and reasons suggested by Sharp and Gallagher (Abramson, Bird, Stennett (eds), 1996) for this are firstly that there has been a significant growth in participation in full-time higher education, and that FECs have been able to develop their own HNC/HND courses since incorporation. An initial financial incentive was the significantly higher fee income than for non-advanced provision, but this has not been maintained. Other factors suggested are that Scotland's national framework of vocational qualifications encourages greater overlap between the sectors, and allows for more coherent progression from further to higher education. (Background information about Scotland is in the Appendix).

Again, data collection differs, but the relatively high Northern Ireland figure of 15 per cent might be the result of demand for higher education places which has always outstripped provision. Despite a recommendation of the Stewart Report in 1992 that only a few FECs should be able to offer higher education, in practice all colleges in the province do so.

Qualification aims

Data on the qualifications for which students enrol in further or higher education (qualification aims) is collected nationally, but not always in the same way for each individual UK country.

Table 2.3: HE enrolments, by qualification aims in FECs by mode of study 1994/95 (England)

Mode	HNC	HND	Degree	Other	Total
Full-time	3,616	19,613	1,364	4,653	29,246
Part-time	29,491	4,544	578	47,944	82,557
Total	*33,107*	*24,157*	*1,942*	*52,597*	*111,803*

Source: FEFC unpublished data from the Individualised Student Record (ISR) 1994/95

Although this means that an exact comparison cannot be made, the figures nevertheless provide useful information.

Most of the delivery of higher education by FECs is HNC, HND, and professional qualifications which range from sub-degree to postgraduate level. In England and Wales, 'Access to HE' courses are recorded in further education, not higher education statistics, hence they are not in the tables. They are discussed in section 3.3.1 on student progression, and elsewhere in the report.

FEFC's data on higher education in FECs (shown in Tables 2.3 and 2.7) differ from thase shown in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. The figures are more recent, and are derived from the 1994/95 ISR returns from 425 colleges out of a total 452. HE provision was found in 293 colleges. They show the number of enrolments by qualification aim in colleges in England for 1994/5. Students franchised-in from HEIs are excluded (see Section 3.3.2).

Tables 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively, show that HNC/D accounted for by far the highest number of higher education qualifications in FECs, with professional qualifications the next most common. For England it has not been possible to classify the 40 or so qualifications in 'other' but it includes professional qualifications and some postgraduate work. In all countries there are very small numbers in FECs

Table 2.4: Higher education enrolments in FECs (Wales), by mode and qualification aim 1994/95 (actual numbers)

	Foundation Year 0 (pre-entry)	HNCs	HNDs	First Degree Year 1	First Degree Years 2/3	Postgraduate	Professional qualifications	Missing	Totals
Prescribed HE	–	–	707	192	–	–	–	–	899
Part-time Prescribed HE	–	–	102	25	–	224	–	–	351
Non-Prescribed HE	17	212	–	–	–	–	–	–	229
Part-time Non-Prescribed	–	1,676	–	–	–	–	733	–	2,409
Totals	*17*	*1,888*	*809*	*217*	–	*224*	*733*	*748*	*4,636*

The missing numbers are as a result of those excluded from the End of Year Monitoring data but included in the published HEFCW Student Enrolments data 1994/95. This includes some students franchised out to FECs outside Wales.

Source: IES from HEFCW, Student Enrolments 1994/95, and HEFCW End of Year Monitoring 1994

Table 2.5: Higher education enrolments in FECs (Scotland), by mode and qualification aim 1994/95

	Other HE	HNCs	HNDs	First Degree Year 1	First Degree Years 2/3/4/5*	Postgraduate	Professional qualifications	Totals
Full-time	406	8,963	14,193	133	236	131	198	24,260
Part-time	8,832	16,492	1,085	518	677	621	2,532	30,757
Totals	*9,238*	*25,455*	*15,278*	*651*	*913*	*752*	*2,730*	*55,017*

The data are broken down into full-time, sandwich, part-time and block-release. The former two are categorised as full-time, the latter two as part-time.

The data have been broken down into different years, eg some are in their 3rd year of a HNC qualification, here they all go into HNC.

Other HE includes SVQ5, SVQ4 and Other HE.

In Scotland, there are no separate categories for Access and Foundation courses. The categorisation is largely left to colleges and Foundation is considered further education.

First degree year 1 includes honours and ordinary degree.

*First degree year 2/3/4/5 includes honours and ordinary degree.

Professional qualifications include those studying for a professional body and advanced courses not leading to a professional qualification.

Source: The Scottish Education Office, 1994/95, Based on student enrolments in 46 FECs in Scotland

taking degrees and postgraduate qualifications, and overall, the FECs also offer much more part time HE than full time.

FECs with higher education funding

Some colleges in England provide their own higher education courses (293 in 1994/95) and of those, some are funded directly by HEFCE (76 in 1993/94 and 74 in 1994/95). Within that number are 'mixed economy colleges'. There are no formal criteria to define this group, but usually more than 25% of their provision is higher education. This does not include franchising arrangements in which FECs deliver parts of courses on behalf of universities. Students on franchised courses are usually counted as enrolments for the university making the arrangement.

Table 2.6: Higher education enrolments in FE colleges, by mode and qualification aim (Northern Ireland) 1994/95

	RSA	Access (pre-entry provision)	Foundation Year 0 (pre-entry)	CED	HNCs	HNDs	First Degree Year 1	First Degree Years 2/3	Post-graduate	Professional qualifications	Totals
Full-time	—	—	1	—	28	2,224	—	—	—	118	2,371
Part-time	39	—	5	1	1,730	253	119	13	79	1,526	3,765
Totals	*39*	*(193)**	*6*	*1*	*1,758*	*2,477*	*119*	*13*	*79*	*1,644*	*6,136*

*The 193 cases in Access are subsumed within the other categories. The final total is 6,136.

The 13 cases in First Degree years 2/3 are based on statistics in Higher Education Provision in the Further Education Sector, an internal DENI report.

Source: Actual data DENI dated 16 April1996; Data for 94/95, based on enrolments as at 1 November 1994, source used: FESR 94/95.

Table 2.7: Major sources of funding for HE in FECs (England) 1994/95

Source of funding	Enrolments	%
FEFC funded	80,557	72.1
HEFCE funded	23,860	21.3
Neither FEFC nor HEFCE	3,776	3.4
Not given/required	3,610	3.2
Total	*111,803*	*100.0*

These data are based on 425 returns out of a total of 452. Also, the data give a count, not of the number of students but of the number of enrolments for qualifications.

Source: FEFC unpublished data and is based on the ISR

This is discussed further in section 3.3.2 and elsewhere throughout the report.

Again, using the unpublished but more recent FEFC data, Table 2.7 shows funding sources of higher education in FECs. Whilst HEFCE funded 21 per cent of higher education in FECs in England, the FEFC funded 72 per cent.

2.3.2 Further education in HEIs

Universities in England, especially the ex-polytechnics, offer their own further education or non-prescribed courses funded by the FEFC. This funding is quite small in comparison to overall higher education provision. The total grant from FEFC was £51 million and amounted to 0.5 per cent of the HE sector's total income (HEFCE, 1996). In 1995/96 the FEFC allocated funding to 54 HEIs for further education courses (FEFC, 1995). Of these, eight had gross allocations of over £2 million, the highest being The London Institute with £15.5 million, and De Montfort University with £6 million. A further five HEIs had gross allocations over £1 million. Those with significant increases on 1994/95 included Leeds Metropolitan University (increase of 30 per cent), and the University of Sunderland (increase of 27 per cent). The main pattern of further education provision in HEIs is for it to be provided by specialist HE colleges, particularly in art and design, and by the 'new' universities. Very few of the 'old' universities are allocated funding from FEFC.

Unpublished data (Table 2.8) show a total of 30,000 enrolments on further education courses based at HEIs. Almost twice as many were part-time as full-time, with a wide range of qualification aims.

In Wales there were 1,900 further education enrolments in HEIs in 1994/95. Of these, about 600 were fairly evenly divided between 'Access', Foundation years and professional qualifications. In Scotland there were 23,000 registrations on vocational further education courses in HEIs in 1993/94.

Table 2.8: FE enrolments in HEIs, by qualification aim and mode of attendance (England) 1994/5

Qualification aim	Part-time	Full-time	Full and PT
BTEC	1,681	4,512	6,193
C&G	3,416	255	3,671
RSA	618	0	618
Prof. qualifications	2,021	126	2,147
GCE 'A' level	161	0	161
GCSE	113	0	113
University/college	4,010	4,030	8,040
Other specified	1,388	804	2,192
Unspecified/exam	4,646	894	5,540
Unspecified/non-exam	824	213	1,037
None	871	181	1,052
Unknown	120	0	120
Total	*19,869*	*11,015*	*30,884*

Source: DfEE unpublished data

Table 2.9 shows how the HEIs in England predicted development in further education in their strategic plans. As we can see, the estimated total of 35,500 for 1994/95 is higher than the real total in Table 2.8 of 30,884. Art and design is predicted to be by far the largest programme area. This is because there are several specialist HEIs, especially in art and design education, which straddle the FE/HE qualification boundaries. Other than this, courses in the humanities are the highest, with 6,100 followed by engineering with 3,400. By 1997/98 the HEIs expect their further education numbers to rise from 35,500 to 52,000, with significant increases expected in science, business, engineering, health subjects, humanities and basic education.

Table 2.9: FEFC funded provision in HEIs (England) 1994/95-1997/98

Programme Area	1994/95 (no.s)	% of HE nos. funded by FEFC 1994/95	1997/98 (no.s)	% of HE nos. funded by FEFC 1997/98	% change from 1994/95 to 1997/98
Sciences	2,300	6	6,500	13	183
Agriculture	1,700	5	1,800	3	6
Construction	100	0	100	0	0
Engineering	3,400	10	6,000	12	76
Business	2,900	8	4,200	8	45
Hotel & catering	1,400	4	1,600	3	14
Health & community care	1,800	5	3,400	7	89
Art & design	14,300	40	16,000	31	12
Humanities	6,100	17	10,000	19	64
Basic education	1,600	5	2,500	5	56
Total	*35,500*	*100*	*52,000*	*100*	*46*

Source: HE institutions' strategic plans, July 1995, published by FEFC

3. A Classification of FE/HE Interaction

3.1 Introduction

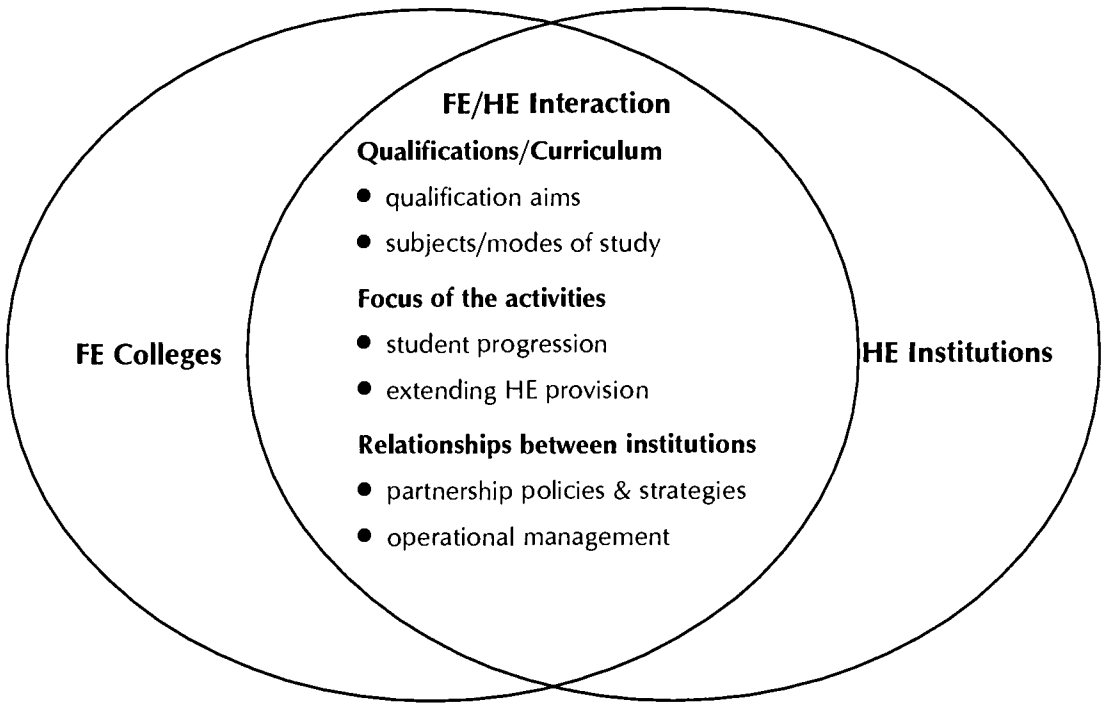
This chapter analyses the interaction between further and higher education provision through a simple classification or typology. The wide range of FE/HE interaction is not all recorded formally by national bodies, or by the individual institutions themselves. Any classification therefore must derive to some extent from the actual practice in the institutions, and data availability is very variable. The classification can facilitate an understanding of the interaction in order to manage it and monitor change.

We suggest that there are three dimensions to the interaction, within each of which we can identify key elements:

- The first dimension covers *qualifications and curriculum.* Although in educational terms one would expect the curriculum to be a dominant feature of many activities, in the case of FE/HE interaction, the qualifications themselves are central. This arises partly because of funding methodologies, and partly because many qualifications, particularly vocational ones, straddle the FE/HE divide. As discussed in Chapter 2, qualifications which are classified as higher education can be delivered in FECs and vice versa, and FECs' and HEIs' course provision can be a mixture of both. The subject areas and modes of study (*eg* full- or part-time) can also be analysed here.
- The second dimension is the *focus of the activity* within and between FECs and HEIs. The activities can be classified in two ways. Firstly, there are those which are intended to promote students' progress within and between the sectors, *eg* 'Access to HE' and Foundation courses, and secondly those which aim to extend the provision of higher education through franchising, validating arrangements, or outreach centres.
- The final dimension is the *type of relationships* which FECs and HEIs establish between them. These include forms of association or collaboration, which can be based on simple formal contractor/provider relationships, or closer partnerships characterised by greater opportunities for communication and activity between the staff and students of partner institutions.

The three dimensions of FE/HE interaction and their constituent elements are presented in Figure 3.1, and discussed separately in

Figure 3.1: Classification of FE/HE interaction



Source: IES 1996

this chapter. Details of the case studies' FE/HE interaction are given in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2 Qualifications and curriculum

3.2.1 Qualification aims

As we saw in Chapter 2, qualifications are central to the FE/HE interface. Their role in the progression and transfer of students from further to higher education, and within higher education, is one that permeates interaction between the sectors. Although some degrees or parts of them, and some non-vocational qualifications, are delivered in further education, the qualifications found at the interface are mainly vocational. The HNCs, HNDs, their Scottish equivalents, and professional qualifications predominate in interaction between further and higher education institutions. Bocock and Scott (1995) identify two types of qualifications at the interface, the first being 'advanced further education'. They argue that:

> *'HNCs and HNDs are long-established FE programmes which share many of the characteristics of non-advanced further education programmes in terms of course structures and curriculum culture as well their underlying vocational orientation.'*

The second type of FE/HE provision is 'quasi-university' which includes not only degree courses but also 'Access to HE' and

Foundation courses whose *'vocationalism is likely to be generic rather than specific, and their cognitive values more academic'*. The distinctions are made to provide a framework for exploring the issues arising from the provision of higher education in FECs. It is particularly useful in considering the ways in which the different cultures operate in delivering the curriculum to students.

FECs are seen as providing more participative, student-centred learning, usually in smaller classes. Participants in the case studies reported these as being the strengths of FECs, along with a more caring, pastoral approach. Bocock and Scott (1995) went into curriculum delivery in more depth and found the same evidence, but felt that too sharp a distinction should not be drawn between the two sectors, because the reality could be a continuum of teaching styles from colleges to universities. The universities which have a tradition of offering their own further education are more likely to have similar approaches to the FECs.

3.2.2 Subject areas and modes of study

The qualifications within the FE/HE interface potentially cover a wide range of subject areas, but the concentration of students is actually fairly narrow. Table 3.1 and Figure 3.2 show that in England, the top three subject areas account for 67 per cent of the total HE enrolments in FE colleges (Business and Administrative Studies is by far the most common with 42 per cent, Engineering and Technology 16.5 per cent, and Creative Arts and Design 8.5 per cent). Tables 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and Figures 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 show that business/administration and engineering/technology are also in the top three subjects in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and building is in the top six enrolments in all the UK countries. The distribution of subjects corresponds to the experience from the case studies.

3.3 The focus of the activities

There is a great diversity of interaction between further and higher education and this is difficult to analyse. One way to more easily understand what is happening is to group the activities according to the focus or purpose of each. The classification identifies two broad areas of activity, but recognises that they are interrelated. The two are: firstly, activities which facilitate student progression, and secondly, those which extend the provision of higher education to more institutions, locations or individuals.

3.3.1 Student progression

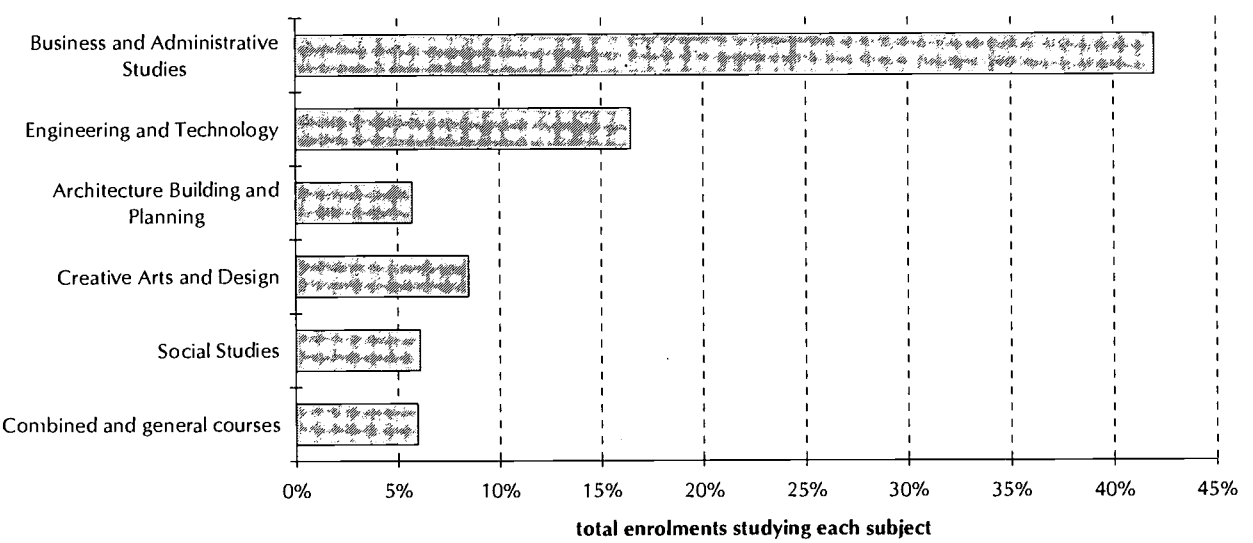
This type of activity focuses on preparing students who might not have traditional entry qualifications for higher education (*eg* Foundation or Year 0 courses, and 'Access to HE' provision) and on activities to transfer students between further and higher education, or within higher education.

Table 3.1: HE enrolments in FECs (England), by subject 1994/95

Subject	Total	Total %
Medicine and Dentistry	0	0.0
Subjects allied to Medicine	3,906	2.9
Biological Sciences	752	0.6
Agriculture and related subjects	1,834	1.4
Physical Sciences	1,671	1.3
Mathematical and Computing Sciences	5,793	4.4
Engineering and Technology	22,061	16.5
Architecture, Building and Planning	7,655	5.7
Social Studies	8,162	6.1
Business and Administrative Studies	55,911	42.0
Mass Communication and Documentation	673	0.5
Language and related disciplines	1,360	1.0
Humanities	170	0.1
Creative Arts and Design	11,371	8.5
Education	3,721	2.8
Combined and general courses	8,010	6.0
Missing	88	0.1
Total	*133,138*	*100.0*

Source: DfEE, from the 1994/95 FESR and ISR. The data is based on student enrolments

Figure 3.2: HE enrolments in FECs — top five subjects (England) 1994/5



Source: DfEE, from the FESR. The data is based on student enrolments

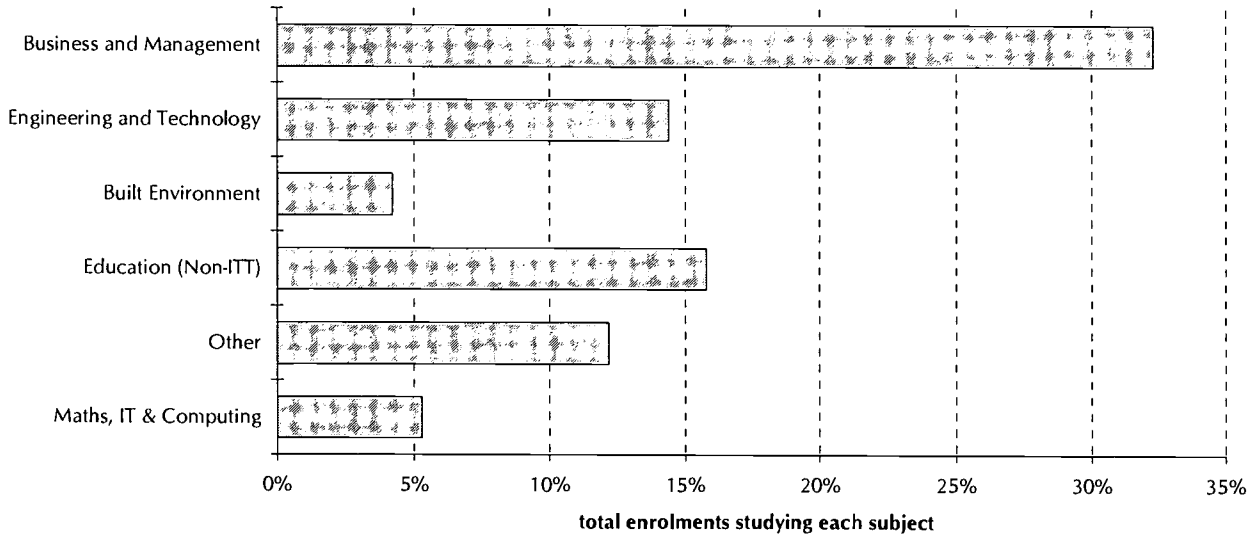
Table 3.2: HE enrolments in FECs (Wales), by subject and mode of study 1994/95

Subject	FT	% of total	PT	% of total	Total	% total
Subjects allied to Medicine	73	37.8	120	62.2	193	4.2
Sciences	99	58.9	69	41.1	168	3.6
Engineering and Technology	107	16.0	561	84.0	668	14.4
Built Environment	9	4.6	187	95.4	196	4.2
Maths, IT & Computing	77	31.4	168	68.6	245	5.3
Business and Management	458	30.6	1,039	69.4	1,497	32.3
Social Sciences	76	46.9	86	53.1	162	3.5
Humanities	89	100.0	0	0.0	89	1.9
Art, Design & Performing Arts	105	100.0	0	0.0	105	2.3
Education (ITT)	0	0.0	16	100.0	16	0.3
Education (Non-ITT)	0	0.0	733	100.0	733	15.8
Other	554	98.2	10	1.8	564	12.2
Total	*1,647*	*35.5*	*2,989*	*64.5*	*4,636*	*100.0*

This data refers to all franchised-out enrolments including non-fundable enrolments in Wales (some of which were franchised to locations outside Wales, N=310).

Source: HEFCW, data is based in student enrolments

Figure 3.3: HE enrolments in FECs — top six subjects (Wales) 1994/95



This data refers to all franchised out enrolments including non-fundable enrolments in Wales (some of which were franchised to locations outside Wales, N=310).

Source: HEFCW, data is based in student enrolments

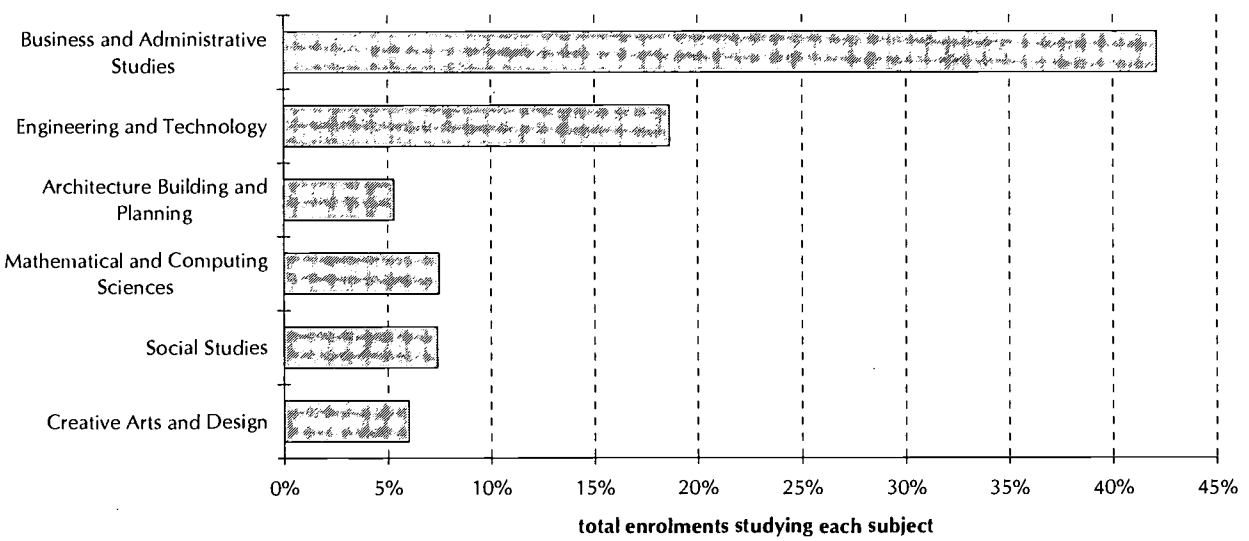
Table 3.3: HE enrolments in FECs (Scotland), by subject and mode of study, 1994/95

Subject	FT	% of total	PT	% of total	Total	% of total
Medicine and Dentistry	11	8.9	112	91.1	123	0.2
Subjects allied to Medicine	233	24.1	735	75.9	968	1.8
Biological Sciences	299	81.7	67	18.3	366	0.7
Agriculture and related subjects	361	63.6	207	36.4	568	1.0
Physical Sciences	301	68.3	140	31.7	441	0.8
Mathematical and Computing Sciences	2,127	51.8	1,982	48.2	4,109	7.5
Engineering and Technology	3,171	30.8	7,141	69.2	10,312	18.7
Architecture Building and Planning	572	19.5	2,362	80.5	2,934	5.3
Social Studies	1,926	47.3	2,144	52.7	4,070	7.4
Business and Administrative Studies	10,256	44.2	12,933	55.8	23,189	42.1
Mass Communication and Documentation	1,135	76.5	348	23.5	1,483	2.7
Language and related disciplines	95	14.3	570	85.7	665	1.2
Humanities	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Creative Arts and Design	2,611	79.7	665	20.3	3,276	6.0
Education	78	7.4	977	92.6	1,055	1.9
Combined and general courses	1,084	74.3	374	25.7	1,458	2.7
Total	*24,260*	*44.1*	*30,757*	*55.9*	*55,017*	*100.0*

Data from FESR 1994/95. Note, there are very few students classified as doing advanced courses in evening centres (35 in 1993/94). These are excluded from this data.

Source: Scottish Office Education and Industry Department

Figure 3.4: HE enrolments in FECs — top six subjects (Scotland) 1994/95



Data from FESR 1994/95. Note, there are very few students classified as doing advanced courses in evening centres (35 in 1993/94). These are excluded from this data.

Source: Scottish Office Education and Industry Department

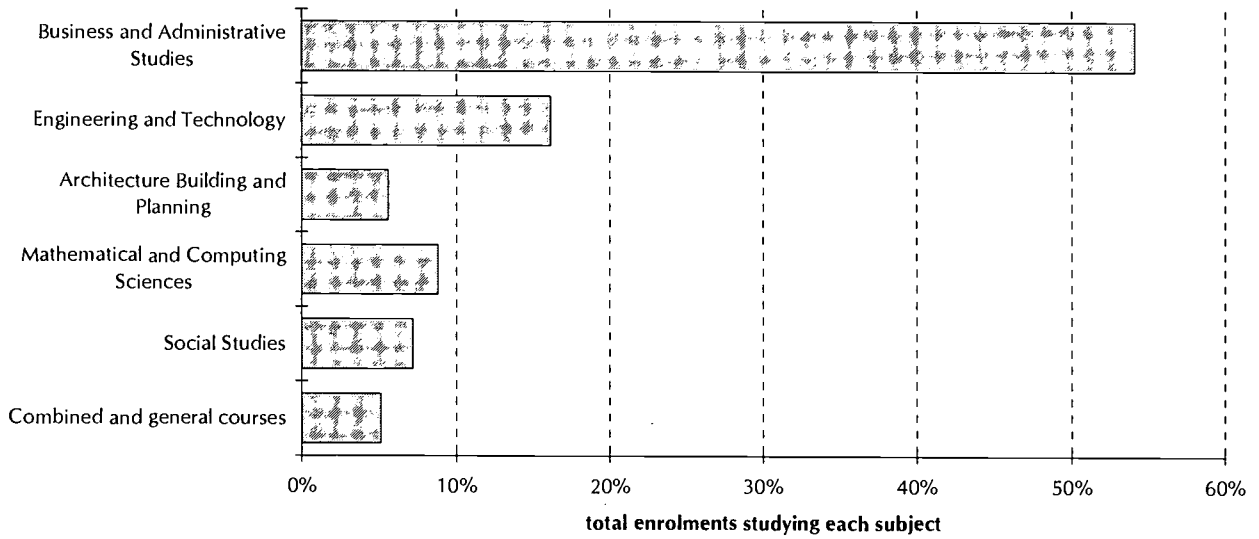
Table 3.4: HE enrolments in FECs (Northern Ireland), by subject and mode of study, 1994/95

Subject	FT	% of total	PT	% of total	Total enrolments	% of total
Medicine and Dentistry	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Subjects allied to Medicine	0	0.0	63	100.0	63	1.0
Biological Sciences	10	100.0	0	0.0	10	0.2
Agriculture and related subjects	0	0.0	16	100.0	16	0.3
Physical Sciences	0	0.0	5	100.0	5	0.1
Mathematical and Computing Sciences	297	55.3	240	44.7	537	8.8
Engineering and Technology	292	29.6	693	70.4	985	16.1
Architecture Building and Planning	121	35.5	220	64.5	341	5.6
Social Studies	205	46.3	238	53.7	443	7.2
Business and Administrative Studies	1,315	39.6	2,006	60.4	3,321	54.1
Mass Communication and Documentation	0	0.0	17	100.0	17	0.3
Language and related disciplines	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Humanities	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Creative Arts and Design	30	90.9	3	9.1	33	0.5
Education	0	0.0	49	100.0	49	0.8
Combined and general courses	101	32.0	215	68.0	316	5.1
Missing	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	*2,371*	*38.6*	*3,765*	*61.4*	*6,136*	*100.0*

Note, this data is based on enrolments on higher education courses at institutes of further education as at 1 November 1994.

Source: DENI data from FESR 1994/95

Figure 3.5: HE enrolments in FECs — top six subjects (Northern Ireland) 1994/95



Note, this data is based on enrolments on higher education courses at institutes of further education as at 1 November 1994.

Source: DENI data from FESR 1994/95

The transfer can include the Access or Foundation students, and others taking the first two years of a degree or HND in an FEC and then transferring to a university for the final year or two. Such activities are the hardest to quantify because they usually involve arrangements made locally at institutional level, and, as there are no requirements for them to be recorded for funding purposes, data is not collated nationally.

Foundation courses

Foundation courses are a preparatory year for a full degree programme, effectively Year 0. They can be delivered by FECs or HEIs. In FECs, the level of university control over the course content and assessment can vary, as can the level of agreement for the successful students to enter the university courses. Accurate data about student numbers on these courses is difficult to obtain because the courses can be recorded in different ways. HEFCE 1992/93 figures show less than 1,000 students on full-time, and approximately 6,000 on part-time Foundation/Year 0 courses in FE colleges. Business and management were by far the most popular subjects (HEFCE 1995). Unpublished HESA figures for 1994/95 show 704 students studying on Foundation courses which are provided on a collaborative basis between institutions. Foundation courses were used by the case study institutions mostly to encourage students to go on to degrees in subjects such as science, construction and engineering. Although they create a minimum four year degree, students can receive mandatory awards for foundation years, unlike Access courses. Data on students transferring from these courses to degrees are not collected nationally, but institutions keep their own records.

'Access to HE' courses

The numbers of 'Access to HE' courses or programmes have increased each year (from 539 in 1989 to 1,500 in 1993). In 1994/5 almost 14,000 entrants (two per cent of the total) had Access courses as their highest qualification on entry. These numbers included accredited and unaccredited access courses.

Universities can become part of an Accredited Validating Agency (AVA), a consortium of course providers and HEIs who are licensed to 'kitemark' the Access programmes. Thirty-eight AVAs operate at present with responsibility for over 1,000 'kitemarked' 'Access to HE' programmes enrolling an estimated 30,000 students each year. Ninety per cent of 'Access to HE' courses are delivered by FE colleges, and FEFC is responsible for funding them (HEQC 1996). In the last few years, most 'Access to HE' programmes have been accredited by Open College Networks (OCNs). There are 32 OCNs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These are local accreditation agencies for a range of education programmes, and many of the AVAs have now become OCNs. There are universities and colleges operating Access courses outside these networks, and many English universities operate their access

provision on a regional basis as part of the Universities and Colleges Access Network (UCAN), which allows some co-ordination of activities.

In Scotland, Access provision is run under the auspices of the Scottish Wide Access Programme (SWAP) or the Continuing Education Departments of Scottish universities. SWAP programmes are largely one year Scottish National Certificate programmes which upon completion give the student a guaranteed place on an HNC, HND or degree programme.

'Access to HE' programmes themselves follow no standard pattern and in terms of form and content they are not directly comparable with each other, nor with other entry qualifications such 'A' levels or GNVQs. However, under OCN agreements all 'Access to HE' courses must conform to certain requirements so that standards can be identified and compared across all OCNs, and students must achieve certain standards to be awarded the qualification.

Compacts

Compact arrangements give students who achieve a certain type or level of qualification, usually at further education level, a guarantee of progression to a place on a certain higher education course. Compacts can cover any qualifications and courses. Many FECs and HEIs develop them to aid the progress of particular types of students, usually to full-time courses. FECs and HEIs appear to be increasing compact arrangements with schools.

Two-plus-two or two-plus-one arrangements

Two-plus-two or *two-plus-one* are arrangements whereby the first year or two of an HND is provided by an FEC with progression to an HEI for either the final year or conversion to a degree. There seems to be great diversity in the nature of these courses and their progression arrangements, but there are no data to indicate the scale or scope of them. Many are franchised, with the funding initially going to the university, and under these arrangements the university usually designs and controls the whole course, and controls the admissions procedure for progression; the FECs merely deliver a specified curriculum on a contractor/supplier basis with the HEI.

Articulation

In Scotland, *articulation* (*eg* where the university undertakes to guarantee entry to a degree course for students following HNC/D in an FEC) accounts for around 90 per cent of the links between HEIs and FECs (as measured by student enrolments). Progression arrangements in the other UK countries are not as likely to offer guaranteed places to students. Progression can be aided by national credit accumulation and transfer systems (CATs), but although these operate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

between HEIs, further education is not part of that system. The Scottish and US CATs systems are most advanced in terms of being systematic and formalised. The SCOTVEC system of qualifications is more coherent than that operating in the rest of the UK. In the US case study area, articulation was operated in a very structured way at state level through the community college system, and increasingly through the technical schools (see Chapter 4, section 1).

3.3.2 Extending the provision of higher education

There are probably three main types of FE/HE interaction to extend higher education provision in the UK. Firstly, franchising of higher education courses to FECs by HEIs, secondly validation, usually by HEIs of courses delivered by FECs, and thirdly the development of higher education courses outside HEIs (*ie* outreach provision). The Council of Validating Universities (CVU), a non-statutory body with a remit to review validation issues for its UK members, provides definitions of terminology such as *franchised programme* and *validation*. However, there is generally much looser usage and sometimes the two activities are confused.

Franchising

In a franchised programme the university usually enrols the students, designs the course, and then pays a fee to an FEC which delivers part or sometimes all of the course. In these cases, the course remains wholly the university's responsibility in terms of quality and accreditation. The extent of this form of interaction between FECs and HEIs is difficult to quantify because the arrangements are usually made locally between individual universities and colleges.

HEFCE has figures for England which show that in 1993/94 there were 36,694 student places (home and EU fundable) franchised by HEIs to 288 FECs (HEFCE, 1995). Data collected in 1994/95 by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in Table 3.5, shows 51,560 students on collaborative/franchised programmes with other institutions. It must be noted that this includes other institutions as well as FECs. Changes in the way the data has been requested and collected each year creates difficulty in establishing any trends.

Validation

In a validation arrangement, a higher education course or programme is managed and delivered by an FEC, but the course is validated by an HEI. The students enrol at the FEC, but the HEI has the responsibility for judging the management, delivery of the qualification, the FEC and its resources, to be of appropriate quality. It appears from the case studies to be a growth area in two ways. Mixed economy colleges which have larger amounts of their own higher education continue to develop their range of

Table 3.5: Number of franchised students, by qualification aim and location (England), 1994/95

Qualification aim	Part taught at other institution	Wholly taught at other institution	Total
FE only	117	292	409
Foundation year	22	682	704
HNC/D	901	14,593	15,494
Non-degree/HNC/D	3,804	5,692	9,496
First degree (Year 0 and 1)	1,364	9,241	10,605
First degree (Year 2)	1,201	2,781	3,982
First degree (Year 3 or later)	1,425	1,728	3,153
Postgraduate	2,684	5,033	7,717
All levels	*11,518*	*40,042*	*51,560*

Source: HESA 1994/95 student record. Unpublished data.

higher education courses. General FECs tend to use validation for providing professional qualifications in specialist subject areas (*eg* health, counselling, Further Education Teachers' Certificates). The HEIs normally charge a fee per student for the validation of courses and these fees vary both within and between universities.

Outreach provision

The development of outreach activities, whilst not new, certainly showed signs of growth amongst the case study HEIs. Outreach allows the delivery of a variety of courses to local areas, normally using facilities other than HEI premises to reach the more inaccessible parts of the country, or population. As well as involving franchising or validation arrangements, HEIs and FECs can work independently of each other, or with community groups, adult education centres *etc.*

Outreach has in the past been used by FECs and HEIs for lower level, non-prescribed courses, or for adult and continuing education. HEIs are now developing outreach services, sometimes via departments of continuing education, to deliver accredited courses, including modules of degrees and professional qualifications. HEIs are also planning expansion through the development of distance learning techniques and, in particular, the use of the Internet. The development of outreach has been particularly active in Wales, no doubt influenced by the difficulties of communication between various parts of the country.

3.4 Relationships between institutions

3.4.1 Partnership policies and strategies

The types of activities described in sections 3.2 and 3.3 operate in a variety of organisational settings, some more formal than others.

There appears to be a hierarchy of association developing between HEIs and FECs, and from the case studies it is possible to identify two main types of arrangements:

- association
- preferred partnerships.

Unfortunately, there is no common basis for the terminology used. In England the term 'associate college' was established in the vocabulary of education by the former PCFC and was thought to have been superseded by other terminology. However, the case studies show this not to be the case. The term 'associate college' was used by all of them, albeit with different connotations. The brief analysis below highlights these differences, but concentrates on the basis for the arrangement rather than on the nomenclature used by individual institutions.

Association

This is a popular form of relationship which refers to a fairly loose arrangement whereby HEIs work with a number of different FECs and *vice versa*, through progression arrangements, franchised courses and validation, for example. However, the partners are free to enter into arrangements with other institutions at the same time. Details of the case study institutions' arrangements are described in Chapter 4, but the term 'associate college' was generally used to describe relationships of this type. Other terms used in this way were 'franchise college', 'affiliated college' and 'regional college'.

A regional focus was found in the developing *community college* frameworks in Scotland. It was also present in the well established system in the US case study, whereby all the community colleges and universities in one state came together to collaborate on provision. This approach is developing in an *ad hoc* way, particularly in England, where loose federations of colleges link with a university within a region.

Preferred partnerships

These arrangements refer to a university having stronger, formally agreed links, usually with up to six or seven partners. These were found in the case studies to be increasingly popular, because in this type of arrangement a university can confer certain rights or status on the FECs with whom it is linked, *eg* joint course development, planning, financial support and use of facilities. For universities, closer, formally agreed partnerships can mean tighter quality control. In the case studies, the terms 'accredited college' and 'a college of the university of XXX' were employed, as was 'associate college'. Some, but not all, of these were expected to be exclusive relationships for the FECs.

3.4.2 Operational management

The overall policies and strategies for FE/HE interaction are now usually formally enshrined in institutional systems in both FECs and HEIs. What are still less clear are the actual day to day strategies for managing interaction at the level of individual staff and students, within and between FECs and HEIs. Some FE/HE activity involves very little management, *eg* validation arrangements once they are set up, and some franchising links. However, there does need to be contact, communication and administration of any joint activities, and these issues are linked to funding and conditions of service in the two sectors. These are matters which were addressed by the case study institutions, and the staff time and costs involved were causing some concern. This is explored further in section 4.4.

4. FE/HE Links in Practice

This chapter provides an overview of the issues involved in managing FE/HE activity at institutional level. It draws on the UK and US case study findings, and the papers prepared by the five additional universities. Profiles of the case study institutions are given in the Appendix. Examples of activities from the case studies are given in italics.

Section 4.1 provides a snapshot of the main patterns of activity we found, and gives a summary of the equivalent of the FE/HE interface from the USA case study. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 explain the institutions' reasons for developing the activities in their current form. The policies and strategies adopted in managing them are outlined in section 4.4. Chapter 6 discusses how universities and colleges see the FE/HE interface changing and how they feel it is likely to develop.

Where particular characteristics of the universities have appeared significant (*eg* location, or the age of the university), these are referred to, although the size of the study is such that no statistical significance can be attached to them.

4.1 Main types of FE/HE interaction

4.1.1 Patterns of activity in the case studies

The activities found in the case studies included franchising and validation, with Access to HE, Foundation courses, and other progression arrangements such as summer schools and Compacts. The range of subjects and qualifications mirrored the national picture, but with the 'new' universities generally having a wider range. The most common subject areas were business studies, engineering, maths and computing. The links were mainly through HNC/D level or professional qualifications, with small amounts of degree work. Most universities were delivering a variety of educational provision though outreach centres, and teaching a wide community including employers, in both rural and urban areas.

4.1.2 The US case study

A case study in the US was selected to see whether the university/ college system there had any particular lessons from which

FE/HE could benefit, and specific points are referred to throughout the report. Further information about the relevant part of the US system is given in the Appendix. Below is a summary of the case study and its main features.

The university system

All post-secondary education in the case study state is undertaken by two distinct state-wide systems: the university system and the technical college system. The university system consists of 13 universities plus 13 college centres (community colleges). The universities vary in the extent to which they are research-led, but offer mainly four-year degrees. The college centres primarily offer two-year (lower division) courses for students planning to transfer to the universities. In 1971 the universities and college centres had 'merged' into one system, but with universities remaining as separate and distinct institutions.

The 13 college centres are to some extent organised as one institution (*eg* with one single maths department across all 13, and staff belonging to departments which span them all). They have always played a major role as transfer institutions, and every campus has a transfer committee to facilitate the process. They each offer Associate Degrees but not technical/vocational courses, and devise their courses largely to meet the requirements of the universities to which students will transfer. A joint admission programme allows them to be admitted simulta-neously to a college centre and the university which they would like to transfer to. Success is measured by the number of students who transfer to university, and by their subsequent achievement.

The technical college system

There are 16 technical colleges in the state system. They focus on vocational training and adult continuing education, their main remit being to provide courses in response to the needs of local communities. In three cases a liberal studies university track programme, similar to the college centres, is offered and in recent years there has been demand from students for transfer opportunities. A series of articulation agreements has been developed between specific technical college and university programme areas.

Issues and developments

There will be increasing emphasis on creating a more seamless experience for those wishing to move between the two systems — university and technical — but no plans to merge the two. A system-wide committee has been set up to develop the transfer agreements. A computerised Transfer Information System (TIS) provides information on the transferability value of courses and credit towards degree requirements. There is discussion about

the college centres offering 'upper division' (the last two years of degree) courses, but no agreement on this.

Future concerns include the duplication of provision created by the technical college system, and maximising student transfer by a clear credit accumulation and transfer system. There is likely to be increased interaction, and a key area will be the working out of transfer/articulation agreements at programme level (*eg* business studies), on a state-wide basis, rather than between institutions which is extremely time-consuming.

4.1.3 Size and scope of the FE/HE links in the UK case studies

The case study institutions were not consistent about defining 'a link' with higher education, and so numbers of links or partnership arrangements are not strictly comparable, but generally the 'new' universities had links with larger numbers of FECs (between ten and 20, compared to eight to nine for 'old' universities).

Universities

Universities were able to provide details of numbers of students involved in franchising arrangements, but were less clear about the total numbers of students involved in the whole range of links with FECs.

One university gave a figure of about 3,500 students (23 per cent of the total) involved in validation, franchising or joint programmes with FE overall. It had 1,800 students franchised to 15 FECs — the highest number we found.

Seven hundred to one thousand franchised students was common for 'new' universities, with less than a hundred being a typical figure in 'old' universities. However, the latter estimated that in addition they each had a few hundred students on validated programmes. In all except two cases the number of students franchised to FE amounted to under five per cent of the universities' total student population.

Overseas links

Although universities were not asked specifically about franchising to overseas institutions, it is significant that some had pursued international links equally or more vigorously than links with FECs in the UK. For some, income and numbers of students on validated or franchised arrangements in other countries exceeded those from FECs in the UK. (Two universities quoted annual income from overseas student links as between £700,000 and £800,000, compared with £200,000 and £300,000 from UK links.)

The FE colleges

Colleges varied in the numbers of links with universities and the numbers of students involved. All the colleges except one had links with several universities (between five and 11). This one had moved two years ago to a 'preferred partnership' with one university. One of the other colleges was in the process of reducing its 11 separate links to one overall partnership.

In the general FE and tertiary colleges, the number and percentage of higher education students and income from higher education was low (five per cent or less). In the mixed economy colleges, higher education students accounted for 20 to 25 per cent of their total student numbers, the one in England receiving about 12.5 per cent of its income from HEFCE for its own higher education courses. In England and Wales two of the FECs' income from franchising was about £500,000 each — five per cent of one college's income, but less than one per cent of the other's.

4.1.4 How the case study links were initiated

Many individual FE/HE links had been in operation for several years and had usually been initiated through individual lecturers with common interests. However, in the last three to four years activity had been initiated on a larger scale, with the development of institutional policies and strategies on FE/HE. This is discussed further in section 4.2.2.

There were differences in the findings from 'old' and 'new' universities, in that colleges and 'new' universities had approached each other to establish various link arrangements, whereas all the 'old' universities we visited had first been approached by FECs — none of the universities had made the first move. The 'old' universities had been cautious in deciding whether or not to develop links and had only a small number. However, they realised the significant advantages in furthering their links with FE and the wider community, and were continuing to respond to approaches. The colleges visited in the UK countries reported several instances of being approached by 'new' universities, often from outside their region or country, offering them 'franchise and/or validation deals'; some of these had developed into links but others had not for various reasons.

4.2 Universities' reasons for the development of links

The universities and colleges offered no single reason for the development of FE/HE links, but saw them as a way of meeting several needs. These were generally the same for all institutions, but individual circumstances drove the extent to which certain types of activity had developed. The points developed here are ones which were considered likely to continue to influence FE/HE activity.

4.2.1 Student recruitment

All the universities in the study felt to some extent that they had to compete for students, but whereas some links with FECs in the past might have been made to increase student numbers, no one had increased full-time student numbers since 'capping'. In this situation, the links continued with the motive of *ensuring* recruitment rather than *increasing* it and the extent of this varied between different universities.

There were two main ways to use FE/HE links for the purposes of recruitment:

- to attract applicants to certain courses such as science and engineering which recruit low numbers
- to look at FECs as a recruiting ground for the newer types of higher education students.

All universities in the study had found an increase in the number of young students, as well as mature students, who wished to study locally, as discussed in Chapter 2. This was reinforced in some rural or semi-rural areas by parochial attitudes and transport difficulties, but the main differences in the extent to which the links were used for recruitment were between 'old' and 'new' universities. The difference was mainly based on the number and types of applicants to the two types of universities, and this led to a clear distinction in approach as explained below.

The 'new' universities

These universities had been increasing their student numbers whilst still having polytechnic status, and had a history of accepting a wide range of students. They already had well-developed arrangements with FE colleges so that students could progress through 'Access courses', franchised arrangements and jointly developed degree or HNC/D work. Most of these case study universities saw recruitment as one, but not the only, key reason for their links with the FE sector — the main advantage being FEC's close local connections with potential non-traditional students.

These universities tended to have a geographically much wider network of FE contacts and activity. Although they had a heavy concentration of potential students in their own locality, they had been active in approaching FECs outside their region and outside their own country, particularly to set up franchise and validation arrangements.

The 'old' universities

These universities had developed some links with FECs for science or engineering courses (*eg* Year 0 Foundation Courses or

Year 1 of a degree/HND) both to boost student numbers, and to ensure that applicants had the skills and abilities to pursue the course successfully. Although they had widened their admissions policies to some extent, they were still very selective, and reported recruiting young people with high 'A' level grades to many courses (*eg* 40 applicants to one place on one course). The staff in those departments were still reluctant to take students with different qualifications or experience, so there was less development outside the areas of low recruitment.

However, more recently, senior managers in the 'old' universities had been rapidly developing links with FE colleges as a more general recruitment policy for two reasons. One was to open access routes to students from different backgrounds and locations, because they were keen to have a wider social mix of students and wanted the university to be seen as less elitist. The second reason was to increase the numbers of local and non-traditional students in the event of a future shortfall of young, nationally recruited ones. However, whilst links with FECs were becoming increasingly important to them, the scale of activity was comparatively small, was restricted to regional or local areas, and did not seem to form the central core of recruitment policy overall.

4.2.2 Institutional development

Official policies

Whilst personal and professional links at course team level had often been the catalyst for the original development of FE/HE links, senior management support had usually followed and moved them forward, making them part of the institutional system. Policies and strategic plans for developing larger scale and/or longer term FE/HE development had been prepared in all universities, and all colleges except one. In the case of some universities with less of a tradition of interaction with FE, Vice-Chancellors had led from the front to encourage the development.

Change and survival

Several universities said that the need to ensure the survival of specific departments had been a significant factor in the development of links with FE, particularly in engineering and building. The links gave them students and/or income; it also enabled some to franchise the part-time, lower levels of work, allowing the university staff to concentrate on courses which earned more income.

In the three 'old' universities we visited, we were asked to interview heads of Departments of Continuing Education (all previously Extra-Mural Studies). These departments were seen by the universities as key to their development of part-time

courses for adults in the local community and wider region, but they had also realised that there was a clear need to adapt in order to survive. The tradition of adult liberal education had been useful but impossible to maintain. All were now accrediting their continuing education courses because of changes initiated by the funding councils, and were in the process of further developing their outreach provision through FECs and other community links.

Higher education's need for additional accommodation

Universities were using links with FECs to overcome accommodation constraints in two ways. Firstly, some had reached the limit of their buildings (and particularly teaching space) and did not have sufficient capital to expand. They therefore franchised work in areas of growth such as business courses, so that they could keep up student numbers, but use college premises to accommodate them.

Secondly, universities operating largely from a single campus had the problem of trying to fulfil a wider community role from that single site. They had used FE colleges as well as other bases such as adult education centres, or new bases of their own, to reach out to the community in a way that universities with a variety of sites had not had to do.

Higher education mission drift?

Some university senior managers expressed the desire to give priority to the development of research and post-graduate work, and so were contemplating franchising and validation of HNC/D and other lower level work to FECs. In reality, all were continuing with this work but policies varied — some wishing to keep the full range of qualifications, others to move most of it to FECs or other institutions. One manager said that the university did not want to rely so heavily on what was described as *'the unpredictability and instability of undergraduate funding.'*

Keeping in touch

All universities felt that they had to keep abreast of new developments, particularly in vocational education — NVQs, GNVQs, core skills and competence-based qualifications. They were all at different stages of knowledge and development, with the 'old' universities generally slower to get involved in these areas. All felt that these areas would become more important, and did not want to be left behind, so used their links with FE to keep themselves informed and involved in developments. One college said that the university had described its link work within the university as 'a Trojan Horse'.

4.2.3 Increasing emphasis on regional roles

In section 3.4 we outlined the ways in which colleges and universities are moving towards relationships with a regional focus. In the case studies and additional university papers we found two key factors which seemed to be driving this movement, the institution's own internal desire for a regional role, and external economic and social factors specific to their locality. These are explained below.

Institutional missions

All case study universities claimed that they had always had a mission — usually explicit — to serve the wider community and their region as a whole. The regions did not seem to be confined to clear political or geographical boundaries, but were based on loosely defined areas where they had traditionally had links with the community. These also represented a critical mass of population from which potential students would be able and willing to travel to one or more centres, and which could form financially viable operations.

The 'old' universities had begun to emphasise their community/ regional role more in the last two to three years, some admitting that they realised that their profile in the community was lower than that of the 'new' universities. The old sensed that they were seen as elitist and unlikely to attract the kinds of students approaching higher education through non-traditional routes. The 'new' universities had on the whole been more active in having a wider local and regional presence over a longer period. This was usually because of their historical roles which ensured a more diverse range of students and, in some cases, locations.

Economic and social factors

Regional characteristics had influenced universities' activities. Some case study areas were disadvantaged in terms of the lack of higher education provision, or the low staying-on rates of school leavers. These covered the range from inner-cities and urban areas, to rural areas with transport and communication problems. Four universities we visited— 'old' and 'new' — had become involved in economic regeneration and development. The universities had taken some action themselves but had also been approached by other agencies such as local authorities, economic development units, and TECs. Funding from these sources and the European Union had been significant in helping the universities to develop capital projects in particular.

Two examples included the setting up of outreach centres in 'deprived' areas. One university had been approached by a local council, and finance from the council, the EU and others had created a major 'new' centre under the university's own name. It offered higher education courses with only a limited amount of work contracted to FE. Another

university was the focus for a city-based learning centre to bring all education and training providers together, including the other local university. Local government, other development funds and the EU funds were used, but the initiative was started by the university's link with a national charitable trust.

Whilst the universities were certainly looking to their regions as the natural focus for interaction with FECs, this did not appear to act as an obstacle to developing links with other colleges well beyond the regional boundaries. This was least developed in Scotland where there were few links with English universities, for example, apart from some very specialised fields of study. It was more evident in other parts of the UK, however, and in Northern Ireland the links of local FECs with English universities was, in part, a response to the general under-provision of HE places in the province.

4.3 FE colleges' reasons for the development of links

The colleges' motives for becoming involved in the different types of activity with higher education were more or less the same for all of them, although the extent and emphasis varied. None felt that it was a basis for increasing student numbers. All had had to reach growth targets in the last three years but felt that there were easier and better ways to increase numbers than through higher education links. The main reasons given for FE/HE activity were:

- to provide increased access and progression routes for FE students, and particularly local students, to higher education
- to use and develop existing college staff expertise and resources
- to diversify funding sources so as not to be wholly dependent on FEFC funding
- to improve the status and profile of the college.

The numbers and proportion of students involved in links with higher education, even in the mixed economy colleges, showed the small part it played in their overall provision. The small number of links (between five and eleven) also showed that the colleges were wary about the types of arrangements they wanted to be involved in.

A point of interest was that two colleges expressed interest in developing links with 'old' universities for reasons of status and quality. Comments from other 'old' universities confirmed this because they had also been approached by FECs who wished to develop links. One interviewee at an 'old' university said that the college *'sees us as the jewel in their crown.'*

One college decided to rationalise its links with its 11 partner universities. It approached several of them and asked the universities to

make presentations to the college. The college chose only one university on which to concentrate all its franchising and validation activities, with a five year changeover period. The arrangement is almost but not entirely an exclusive one and it is defined as 'a college of the university of X'. The college feels that this offers a closer relationship, economies of scale, and a more coherent and better quality framework. It chose an 'old' university, and whilst that was not the main criterion, the status and reputation of the university were seen as an important part of marketing the new arrangement to potential students.

4.4 Managing the links

4.4.1 Formal management strategies

Institutional policies were backed up in many cases by high levels of support at senior management level, often through internally powerful boards and committees. High level meetings of universities and their partner college senior managers were usually held twice or three times a year on a formal basis, and had increasingly taken on a planning role as well as exchanging information.

Two universities arranged strategic level forums for principals of colleges, eg an Associate College Advisory Group to look at the FE/HE links for the whole region and at specific issues such as staff development.

However, internal policies on staff time for teaching, research and development, conditions of service, use of resources and facilities were still not well developed in either colleges or universities. These were issues at course level, which staff involved on a day to day basis felt that senior managers needed to resolve. These are mainly discussed in Chapter 5.

One university which had developed FE links with 20 colleges over a wide geographical area had set up a 'Regional Office' to manage all the franchised links and to develop new ones. The office is a separate department and cost centre. It takes over all the administration of the links from departmental staff, and facilitates course and subject networks and meetings. Taking over the administrative burden has helped university staff, but there is still a feeling that there is insufficient time to manage the links.

4.4.2 Operational management

The majority of links seemed to be characterised by the dominance of the university hegemony — academic and administrative. Although college staff were involved in development and to some extent in decision-making, they were generally the 'junior' partners in the formal links outlined below. The activities were supported by formal systems of committees, contracts, memoranda of agreement and, in some cases, handbooks and manuals (see section 4.4.3 Quality management).

Franchising

On franchised higher education courses, FE colleges usually had responsibility for recruitment of students, although they were enrolled by the university. The FE staff carried out work on a contract basis, often with the whole course structure, materials and assessment devised and run by the university. The funding regimes for franchising were worked out by the universities and tended to be uniform within universities, but across them it varied. They usually gave the colleges a percentage of the university's own funds which they had received for the students, and held back a percentage for administration charges. Some universities held back ten per cent and others 30 per cent; others varied it depending on the mode of course delivery.

Whilst the colleges were left to manage their own elements of the course within this structure, they were vulnerable for several reasons: recruitment might be low and the course would not be financially viable, the university could lower the level of fees paid, pull out if they were not satisfied, or decide not to run the course. So, whilst franchising offered the universities flexibility, its instability could make it difficult for colleges to manage.

One college course with 121 HND students in one year had recruited only 48 the following year and was likely to close. One university was however, paying a higher franchise fee to a college than it received from HEFCE for the students. It felt this was ultimately cost-effective in that it brought numbers onto the degree course.

Validation

The universities were paid a fee by the college (examples ranged from £150 to £350 per student) to help set up and then monitor higher education courses delivered and managed in the college. The universities kept very tight control because they were the validating bodies which had to give agreement or refusal in the first instance, and they also set up and managed the quality procedures. However, these arrangements usually gave the FECs more autonomy, partly because the students were enrolled as FEC students and the FEC could claim its own funding without the vulnerability of a franchising contract.

Student progression/articulation

Access courses or Foundation (Year 0), or HND Years 1 and 2, designed for students to progress to universities, were operated by FE colleges with varying levels of management and quality control by the universities. The progression processes also varied, with some universities guaranteeing places or interviews to students, but in many cases neither of these. Some access students had to compete for university places and had no guaranteed entry, even though they had achieved the required grades. Students on HNC/D courses generally seemed to have

better chances of automatic progression (if they achieved the required standards) than Access students. Whilst Access students usually performed well at degree level (not all universities tracked their progress) it was very hard for them to be accepted on courses which had high numbers of applicants.

An Access course linked to a popular subject at one university had been closed because the university had so many applicants that it did not wish to recruit outside the 'A' level cohort.

There were many examples of individual or group activities to try to get better progression arrangements for FE students.

One university and college have a Compact arrangement where places on degree courses are guaranteed to students who have achieved certain grades on one particular GNVQ course. There is a joint steering group, and staff from the two institutions work closely together on the curriculum and assessment aspects of the GNVQ.

A city-wide group of colleges has been developing supported selection procedures to try to encourage the admission of non-traditional entrants into the more prestigious universities which traditionally take younger highly qualified applicants. Applicants get a guaranteed interview and exemptions from some parts of HND/C or degree courses.

One university has initiated a regional credit framework for post-16 education. It is working with five colleges to redesign the FE curriculum on a modular credit accumulation base which articulates with the university's modular CATs system. It is intended to guarantee progression to higher education for those who achieve at lower levels.

Partnership agreements

Both parties, but particularly colleges, said that they wanted links to operate on a more egalitarian footing. At the same time, both universities and colleges were planning to limit or rationalise their FE/HE activities. These two factors were leading increasingly to more structured partnership arrangements which we have called 'preferred partnerships' (for a fuller explanation of different types of arrangements see Chapter 3). One college in the study had had a preferred arrangement with one university over two years and was enthusiastic about the benefits. Another was in the process of arranging a partnership with only one university instead of the current eleven.

Both the universities and the colleges we interviewed were generally not in favour of exclusive arrangements (*ie* where colleges are only allowed to have one HEI partner) and we found examples of only two universities (a case study in Scotland, and a university cited in the 'additional' papers) which operated exclusive partnerships. It is likely that preferred partner colleges receive special status and privileges in exchange for exclusive arrangements with a university, but we found the

extent to which any of the relationships offered practical benefits to the colleges varied regardless of exclusivity. Some of the activities involved in the range of partnerships included:

- joint recruitment and marketing of courses
- franchise students and staff using the university campus and all facilities
- IT links with the university campus
- a newsletter for franchise students
- university funds for college resources.

In one case, HE students in the FEC have access to all university campus facilities and are members of the students' union. Regular visits are organised to the campus and there is exchange of staff. Some funds are made available from the university for the college to build up their learning resources.

Variation between FE colleges

Some FECs were better placed than others in terms of operating as equal partners in their FE/HE links. The mixed economy colleges offered whole HNDs and degrees in their own right and claimed some income direct from HEFCE. They were able to develop validation arrangements reasonably easily, and had a spread of higher education which created certain economies of scale. The general FE and tertiary colleges had mostly franchising arrangements for Foundation, HNC/D and professional qualifications, and as pointed out earlier were more vulnerable.

However, the FE colleges could still exercise some choice about the partners with whom they developed links. All said that they had refused certain approaches from universities for various reasons: *eg* distance, which made it difficult to guarantee quality; the franchising fees; the cost of validation; or problems with communication with the individuals or the institution.

4.4.3 Quality management

Quality systems

Quality management of most FE/HE activity in the case studies was monitored by a range of internal and external systems, covering FE resources, teaching and assessment. Colleges' quality systems were not referred to by respondents because of the nature of most of the activities, *ie* franchising, validation and progression. For these activities the university had to be the main arbiter of quality and therefore had to satisfy HEQC criteria. The university quality frameworks were seen as useful and necessary by college staff, but with some criticisms of the amount of higher education bureaucracy. An HEQC audit of collaborative activity had been carried out in some case study

institutions, and there had been an HMI report on higher education in FE colleges in Northern Ireland.

Quality — students, staff and resources

Some interviewees in a few universities expressed general fears within the university about the quality of the staff, the teaching, the resources and the students in FECs. University senior managers felt that these fears were groundless and were trying to overcome them. They were generally expressed by university staff who had no contact with FECs, whereas those who were closely involved were pleased with the overall quality of the links with further education.

Achievement of students from FECs was shown at course level to be good (some interviewees claimed it was better than that of non-FE students) but there was little overall tracking of achievement to degree level yet. FEC staff were generally praised, by the university staff who dealt with the links, for their abilities and especially their teaching skills. Resources were in some cases said to be better in FECs — especially the number of computers, although it was recognised that even with on-line communication, FEC learning resources and libraries could not compete with universities. Although the quality/validation procedures were seen as a good way of checking learning resources generally, this was raised as an area of concern. (For further comment on this and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the further and higher education experience, see Chapter 5.)

5. Benefits and Concerns

Chapter 4 explained what motivated the colleges and universities in the case studies to develop the activities which were described there: this chapter summarises how successful they feel the FE/HE activity has been for them. Section 5.1 outlines the benefits they felt that they and their students gained. Section 5.2 looks at the factors they felt promoted successful interaction, and section 5.3 explores the range of factors felt to be inhibiting success or giving cause for concern.

5.1 The benefits of FE/HE links

The main benefits cited by interviewees are given below, but are not in any order of priority. Rather, it was felt that the relationships were advantageous in many ways, some of which were difficult to quantify.

5.1.1 Benefits for universities

- Recruitment. As explained earlier, the UK universities had not increased full-time student numbers since the introduction of the MASNs but a significant benefit of the FE links was in enabling them to recruit students to specific courses with low numbers of applicants (*eg* sciences and engineering), and they had evidence that this had worked. There was no clear picture of how far universities had used the FE links for recruitment to maintain overall student numbers, but all felt that a major benefit had been to give them access to a wider pool of potential students through FECs' contact with the local community. Universities were monitoring the numbers of students coming from the partner institutions and were increasingly collecting information about students' backgrounds and entry qualifications.
- The universities felt that links with FECs enabled them to fulfil their mission to widen participation in higher education generally. They wished to provide a genuine ladder of opportunity to groups of people who have no established tradition of entering higher education, and for whom moving to attend a university would not be an option.
- Income from the links was cited as one benefit by universities which had financially-based agreements with colleges for

validation procedures or franchised courses. One university department quoted an income of £250,000 which supports up to ten jobs in the department and a dedicated franchise officer post. Some universities preferred validation because it seemed to be more a cost-effective way of earning income, although some interviewees felt that the true cost might not be covered by the fees.

- Involvement in new areas of work and staff development were felt to be important benefits. This was measured to some extent by the amount of activity going on, and how far staff wanted to get involved. One interviewee felt that it was particularly successful if university staff who did not need to recruit more students became involved.

5.1.2 Benefits for FE colleges

- Offering progression for students was seen as the most important benefit. Whatever the arrangement with higher education, it enabled FECs to offer courses with clear progression routes to higher education qualifications. This was felt to be good for students and good for the colleges' own recruitment. The number of individual and consortium initiatives we found which were trying to open up more routes to universities seems to indicate that progression is becoming more important (see section 3.3.1).
- The status conferred by offering higher education qualifications, and the explicit connection with a university, were important to all but one college. The others had all produced separate high quality publicity and prospectuses for their higher education link activity, and were using the university name prominently as a 'selling point'.
- Staff development was an important aspect of joint activity for FE staff because many liked teaching at higher education level. There were varying levels of opportunity for real access to the university environment (*eg* to research, staff and resources), or to joint working with higher education, but in professional terms the arrangements were usually considered satisfying.

5.1.3 Benefits for students

In this study we did not interview students directly, but asked university and college staff to give us their views about the student experience.

- The opportunity to progress to higher education courses was seen as one of the main advantages for students who might not normally apply to university because of their qualifications or expectations. The colleges monitored their success closely by looking at grades achieved, the number of students achieving, and rates of progression to the next stages of a course or qualification. Drop-out and achievement rates of

students who did progress to higher education from FE were less closely monitored by the universities, although at course level their achievements appeared to be as good as or better than those of other students. The system of tracking student achievement in the US case study was much better developed. One element of it is that the technical schools are required to undertake graduate surveys which include satisfaction with the training received, as well as destinations.

- A convenient local base to study for a higher education qualification was seen as beneficial for some students who might have work or family commitments. In rural areas, for those a long way from a university, an outreach location was becoming increasingly important, backed up by electronic communication. Those near enough to university facilities and with a link which allowed for access, were able to use libraries, attend lectures and feel part of a university.
- The supportive environment of FE colleges was considered of great benefit for non-traditional higher education students, especially those with psychological or social barriers to studying at higher education level. This support was exemplified by the amount of personal contact with staff, and the level of guidance and pastoral care. It was felt that students generally had more individualised programmes of study, smaller classes and better opportunities for resource-based learning.
- The academic ethos of higher education was also seen by some interviewees as beneficial to students where they had contact with an HEI. It was described by one as — *'the indissoluble link between teaching and research'*. Another interviewee felt that what the higher education experience offered was *'less dogmatic teaching and greater tolerance of uncertainty; a more reflective and less goal-oriented learning experience'*.

5.2 Factors promoting success

- The quality of the personalities and relationships within the FE/HE interface was the main point made by all interviewees. Firstly, it was important to have enthusiastic individuals who are instrumental in getting link activities off the ground and making them work. Secondly, despite the acceptance that the two sectors have different cultures and traditions, all staff involved in further and higher education had to be respectful of each others' strengths and experience in order to make joint activity work. This applied to senior staff as well as to individual lecturers and administrators.
- Senior management support and encouragement was considered important for the continued expansion and development of the interface (see also Bird *et al.*, 1993, p. 15, Bocock and Scott, 1995, p. 16). Although individual links had developed or survived largely without it, there were seen to be two ways

that it could help. In the first instance it could raise the profile and status of the work so that it gained acceptance in the whole institution, and secondly it could provide resources and systems so that the operational side of the links could work effectively. The first of these had happened in the case studies, but the second was less well-developed and the operational side of the links seemed to need further attention.

- Staff development had been an important element of success for some institutions and others were increasing it, encouraged by the HEQC audit process. The types of activities which had been successful had been joint FE/HE ones on topics such as curriculum and qualifications mapping, FE/HE progression, and information for admissions tutors. One or two universities felt that the amount of documentation and administration involved in link activities meant that administrative staff should take part in staff development as well as academic staff.
- The development of CATs frameworks was considered important to the continuing success of FE/HE links. To facilitate student progression, it was becoming increasingly important to have systems of credit transfer for vertical mobility from lower to higher level courses between several college and university partners. However, the actual level of use of the frameworks was not clear. The systems were not well developed in all universities, and differed from the FE ones. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.
- Mutually beneficial funding arrangements between FE and HE partners were considered important. There were so many different types of arrangements that it is difficult to generalise, but the main factor seemed to be a willingness to negotiate in a climate of trust, rather than each partner seeing the other solely as a source of funds. Increasing numbers of universities looking for partner colleges had led to competition which had helped colleges who were 'shopping around' for validation deals and franchise fees. Ultimately, those we spoke to were opting for the quality of the link rather than the best deal (see also Scott and Bocock, 1995, p. 16). External funding from the EU, development agencies *etc.* had been the key to some joint capital projects.

5.3 Barriers and issues

5.3.1 Cultural differences

We found that further and higher education still seem to have two different cultures and that sometimes there were clashes. These did not seem to have caused severe difficulties but were apparent to a greater or lesser degree in various institutions.

Colleges generally felt that the university systems and procedures, whilst ensuring high quality, were old-fashioned and sometimes

overly-bureaucratic, for example in the number of committees and procedures to which new developments had to be submitted. The procedures often slowed down development, and one university felt that it had lost links to others because the colleges could not wait for decisions which took more than six months to make.

Some interviewees felt that there were staff in their own universities who believed that FEC staff were not sufficiently qualified to teach higher education, and/or that the standards of the university would be diluted by admitting more non-'A' level students. This belief continued despite the success of the universities' links, the tight quality frameworks, and the success of the students. These staff were reported not to want any involvement with FE/HE links (see also Brownlow, 1994 p. 6). This caused particular problems when those staff had responsibility for admissions to courses.

We did not interview any staff who were opposed to FE links, but concerns were expressed by some senior managers in universities which are very selective and for which there is competition for places. They were worried that allowing a student onto a course with different entry qualifications from others who were rejected could lead to legal problems in what they considered a litigious environment.

The change of environment for students from FE to a university was felt by some higher education staff to be difficult because these students had been more 'spoon-fed' at college. They might find it harder to learn independently and in larger groups, and therefore need additional support. There was evidence of non-progression on to the university or the next stages of the qualification, rather than student drop-out once they were on the courses. Staff who had given some thought to the issue of non-progression or had asked students, felt that the difficulties were usually due to travel problems or to family and/or financial difficulties.

5.3.2 Operational management

The main operational difficulties appeared to be firstly whether there was sufficient time allowed in both FECs and HEIs for keeping in touch, or for joint activity, such as development of course materials and assessment procedures. This often led to individual college and university departments working out staff timetables without reference to each other. Franchise arrangements, however, were sometimes criticised by FEC staff because they generally offered little opportunity for interaction — the course could be an 'off the shelf package' offered by the university, delivered by the college.

The second problem area seemed to be for FEC staff who were not generally given time for the kind of research or professional

development which is needed to teach at higher education level. The staff in the two sectors are on different conditions of service and this causes some difficulties. Two colleges were unable to respond to a university request to get involved in joint research to any great extent because they had no time allowance or funding to cover it.

5.3.3 Qualifications

There were concerns about the future of certain types of courses which form a large part of the FE/HE interface. Firstly, there was a fear that HND courses could be vulnerable. Interviewees knew of some universities offering students places on degree courses for the same entry criteria as an HND, and feared that a degree might replace the HND as more students were able to make the choice. In some areas there had been low recruitment to some HNDs, although in others the courses were holding up well and were sometimes over-subscribed (*eg* in Business Studies).

Similarly, there were worries about the future of Foundation courses because they create a degree lasting four years. Although they seemed to be still recruiting locally, there was a feeling that students might be increasingly loath to embark on a Foundation course when they could get a place on three-year degree courses with the same entry qualifications.

Although the number of Access courses continues to grow, some colleges reported recruiting smaller numbers, and some courses were felt to be vulnerable. These were particularly the ones linked to more academically selective universities or courses with increasing competition for places. The numbers progressing from Access to degree courses in some case study institutions were very small for this reason, a finding borne out by the recent IES study on student choices (Connor *et al.*, 1996). The fact that students cannot get mandatory awards to study for these courses also increases the chance that students might choose from a widening range of other options.

Other difficulties mentioned, which might develop more generally, were centred around BTEC Higher National courses. Firstly, at course level there was a college delivering a BTEC HND course validated by the university via a BTEC licence. The course could be converted to a university degree, and the college had to satisfy both the university and the BTEC validation procedures which were different and sometimes incompatible. Secondly, one university found the BTEC licence led to additional bureaucracy which was disproportionate for its small number of vocational students.

Franchising arrangements had led to colleges feeling vulnerable because there were a small number of courses which had closed. This was due to low recruitment or because the university had wanted to withdraw the course. Even without closure, small

numbers of students created groups which were not financially viable. This obviously left colleges with resourcing difficulties, but universities did feel that sometimes colleges were over-optimistic in their perception of how popular a course would be.

5.3.4 Financial arrangements

FE colleges in England and Wales do not receive capital funding for higher education work. Those in our case studies felt that the fees that they did receive, whether from the universities or the funding councils, tended to cover only running costs, not additional resources. Some looked enviously at the university resources and staff time and felt that they were to some extent providing higher education 'on the cheap' (see also HEFCE, 1995). One or two universities gave additional funding to their FE partners so that they could provide better resources for students, but others did not seem to be contemplating this.

Colleges and universities were not meticulously costing the amount of time spent on FE/HE links, but there was a fear that the real cost of the work could be more than they were receiving. This was particularly true if courses involved, for example, lecturers' time for travel, materials, monitoring of progress, or carrying out assessment.

5.3.5 Resources

There were mixed feelings in the UK about how detrimental might be the lack of access to higher education campuses and to general resources for higher education students in FECs. It was recognised that those students could be disadvantaged in terms of access to fewer expert staff and overall facilities. One view was that for some students the problems of distance and time in getting to the campus might outweigh the lack of student union facilities or even the lack of some lectures and seminars. However, the absence of comparable library resources in FECs was the main worry for both parties who usually felt that IT and the use of the Internet could not compensate.

Senior managers in FE colleges said that some of their staff were worried that higher education courses and development would be resourced at the expense of the core FE work. The managers said that they ringfenced the higher education money and provision, but had subsidised higher education courses temporarily if small numbers had been recruited. All were adamant that their FE provision would continue and develop, as well as higher education work. They saw work with higher education as just a widening of their portfolio.

6. Future Developments

This Chapter looks to the future of the FE/HE interface. It draws on the case studies, the papers from additional HEIs, interviews with national bodies, and the literature review.

Section 6.1 looks at national factors which are likely to influence the general direction of the interface, and any constraints to future consolidation or development. Section 6.2 outlines the developing regional dimension and its implications for the future. Section 6.3 returns to the classification of FE/HE interaction presented in Chapter 3 and considers its future shape and issues likely to arise. Section 6.4 identifies wider issues and concerns for the future of both sectors.

6.1 The influence of external factors

In Chapter 2, we discussed the key factors outside the control of the institutions which had influenced the form of interaction between them. In this Chapter we revisit these briefly to see how they are likely to drive or constrain the future development of the interface.

6.1.1 National funding policies

The national bodies involved, and the 'old' universities have tended to be cautious about qualifications, students and institutions which cross the divide between further and higher education or sit somewhere in between. There are some, usually 'new' universities, who feel that the divide is an artificial one, and that it is the achievement of qualifications that should determine educational progression, not necessarily movement between institutions. Whilst their advocacy of a more comprehensive post-16 education system is not shared by all, there were different types of institutions in this study who felt that the separation of further and higher education funding, particularly in England and Wales, causes difficulties for them, their partner institutions and their students.

Funding policies are recognised by the national policy bodies, and institutions themselves, as one of the strongest mechanisms for driving change. As both FECs and HEIs expect changes to the structure of the FEFC and HEFCE, and possibly to the funding methodologies, the resulting uncertainty is felt to be

hampering development as everyone waits to see what will happen. The review of higher education by Sir Ron Dearing is only just beginning, but most institutions in this study seem unlikely to change, increase or develop FE/HE links radically, until any recommendations are announced — unless funding methods change in the meantime.

However, assuming the current regime continues, the findings of this study indicate some possible scenarios:

- Continued development of FE/HE interaction, even if full-time student numbers are not increased. HEIs will use FE links to recruit and maintain student numbers. FECs also need to meet growth targets and may wish to diversify their sources of income. Development of links with HEIs is one way to achieve these objectives.
- No further increase, and possible reduction, in franchised provision to FE colleges. Northern Ireland feels that it has a special case for expansion of higher education through FE colleges, because it has an undersupply of higher education places and many students go outside the province to study.
- Pressure for more HE to be delivered in FECs. HEFCE has estimated that the average unit cost for some HE courses in FE is half that of those delivered in a university (HEFCE, 1995). Any calculation of the cost needs to take account of the type of provision FECs offer (*ie* usually levels 1 and 2 of a higher education qualification), the subjects most commonly offered in FECs which include a high proportion of business and administration, and the fact that in many cases the curriculum is set and marked externally. In Northern Ireland, higher education in FECs is funded as part of further education provision and is accepted as being much cheaper to deliver in FECs, but there appears to be no pressure from DENI for more higher education to be delivered in FECs.
- Pressure for better funding of HE in FE. HEIs and colleges are increasingly looking at the real cost of HE provision in FE. Mixed economy colleges in particular would like to be able to get their own capital and research funding, and some are bidding for 'non-formula funding' for which they are eligible.

6.1.2 The changing student profile

As we discussed earlier in this report, student demand for higher education is changing. HEIs and FECs will be expected to provide higher education for older students, and for those who would not in the past have aspired to it, as well as for their traditional cohort of young people. The declining level of student grants is likely to further increase the numbers of full-time students who wish to study nearer home — within 30 to 50 miles depending to some extent on transport arrangements. On the other hand, low grants might discourage take-up of higher education generally.

6.1.3 The changing nature of qualifications

The much hoped-for seamless robe of qualifications which would enable students to move between further and higher education could become more of a reality if the national CATs systems develop effectively. However, in some HEIs the system has only just been put in place, in FE there is no single system, and between further and higher education a variety of local and individual arrangements exists. Because of this variety, an overall FE/HE CATs system in the next year or two looks very unlikely, but there are some models emerging:

- The development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) could be the basis for an FE/HE framework in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Scotland has the SCOTVEC system and is developing SCOTCATS which will increasingly involve General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQs).
- In Wales the FE modular credit-based system is considered to be better developed than that for higher education and the two are being articulated.
- The state-wide system of credit transfer between community colleges and HEIs in the US case study appeared to be well-developed and systematic. There was a clear formal structure in place which involved all the institutions, with an emphasis on keeping students informed. However, the systems between technical colleges and HEIs are still developing.

6.2 Development of the interface at regional level

Within the scope of this study there were clear indications that the roles of HEIs are becoming increasingly regionally focused and that this has some implications for the interface. The development of the regional dimension is outlined here, and the likely effects on the activities are discussed in Section 6.3.

6.2.1 How the regional roles are developing

- All HEIs in the study had decided to adopt a regional focus as part of their mission. There was a lack of clear geographical boundaries to the 'regions', and the HEIs seem to be constrained mainly by their physical resources and market forces — namely the presence of other education providers in the area.
- HEIs with a strong regional presence and profile have initiated or formalised networks or groupings of their partner colleges. In some areas they are collaborating on planning higher education across the region, or on more specific activities — in one case, development of a regional CATs framework with FECs. Other activities include, for example,

HEIs developing partnerships and compacts with schools, and setting up outreach provision with community groups.

6.2.2 Why regional developments are likely to continue

- Recruitment to higher education seems to be one of the main drivers for HEIs in establishing links with FECs. The colleges are good at attracting, and providing for, mature, locally-based, non-traditional students, and links give the university access to them — 'growing our own students' as one university described it. In the short term, HEIs want to maintain overall numbers or fill vacancies on specific courses, for example in sciences and engineering, so that departments can stay viable. In the longer term, the old HEIs in particular want to back up their recruitment strategies in case of a shortfall of younger students.
- Many HEIs feel that it is important to develop higher education for people who traditionally have not taken part in it, or who live in areas where it is not provided. At the same time, those in this study saw themselves as the main regional higher education provider and were developing that identity explicitly. The use of FECs as local outposts for delivery helps to reach potential students in the community and to provide a more supportive environment, as well as, in some cases, raising the university's profile locally.
- FECs are likely to focus on regional links for two reasons. Firstly, they provide their students with clear progression routes to higher education, and this is good for their own recruitment. The FECs also want closer, better quality relationships with HEIs and are less likely to increase links with a wide geographical spread.
- The role of external bodies (*eg* local authorities, development agencies, TECs *etc.)* was significant in this study. They had approached several HEIs to ask them to be involved in economic regeneration in their regions, and this coincided with some HEIs' expressed desire to play a philanthropic or civic role. The external bodies have provided funding, or helped to get funding from the EU or charitable bodies, or in one case from the FE Competitiveness Fund, to support sometimes substantial capital projects. This type of activity occurred in all UK countries and further developments are ongoing.

6.3 The future shape of FE/HE interaction

Having looked in the last section at developments at national and regional level and their potential impact on the FE/HE interface, we now turn to the classification of the interaction between institutions to draw conclusions, explore potential development, and highlight the key issues.

6.3.1 Qualifications and curriculum

Qualifications are at the heart of most interaction, but they cause many difficulties mainly because of their variety, the involvement of different funding bodies, and the combination of internal and external validation. The curriculum straddles the two sectors, and must be managed in some cases across two institutions and two cultures. Future developments seem set to continue the difficulties as more higher level qualifications, such as NVQ and GNVQ level 4 develop, and existing qualifications are modularised. The main developments include the following:

- There seems to be a question mark over the future of HND qualifications. It is commonly known that students are able to obtain a place on a degree course with the same entry qualifications, and this gives rise to concern that students regard the HND as the 'booby prize', as one FEC described it. A conversion to an honours degree via an HND takes four years and students might be discouraged by this. However, some institutions see the HND as a useful qualification in its own right or as a stepping stone for non-traditional students, and feel that part-time HNDs could develop if students want them.

- Newer qualifications such as NVQ level 4 and GNVQ level 4 will compete with HNC/HND, as will Associate Degrees if their suggested development goes ahead. In the USA, Associate Degrees, as the major source of entry to the last two years of a degree, create a clear academic progression route to higher education, but even there progression from vocational qualifications is more problematic.

- Degrees in academic subjects could increasingly be taken up by non-traditional students, *eg* through outreach and joint FE/HE provision. The popular conception of higher education for these students is that they take vocational subjects, but mature people are returning to study to take degrees in, for example, music, humanities, and archaeology. This might be a pointer for the future as degrees (even vocational) no longer guarantee a job, and students choose a general education as opposed to vocational skills.

- Part-time provision of higher education in both FECs and HEIs is expected to increase in response to student demand, but benefit rules and the lack of funding for adult returners are likely to continue to cause difficulties for this provision, and a rise in fees for those students paying their own way could affect take-up. Employers' needs for training are expected to increase, but even more of this is likely to be of short duration and flexibly delivered at a university, college, or workplace.

6.3.2 Focus of the activities

Student progression is one of the most important aspects of FE/HE interaction, but it is one of the least well-documented, so

success is difficult to measure, either within institutions or nationally. With a range of FE/HE arrangements on offer, and a variety of terminology such as 'associate college' or 'affiliate college' it could become increasingly difficult for students to understand what are the best initial choices of courses and institutions. FECs will continue with arrangements to aid student progression and to offer parts of higher education qualifications, but the main possible developments are outlined below.

- Entry to the higher education system is based increasingly on progression rather than application, that is, students are accepted onto higher education courses without applying through UCAS. There is a proliferation of qualifications, modules and credit accumulation schemes available to students, and local credit frameworks are likely to operate between individual institutions or within regional groupings such as those in the US case study. All these systems can make it easier for students to transfer within and between institutions, but can make the much hoped-for 'seamless robe' look more like a patchwork quilt. Clarity and coherence, with objective guidance is needed for students, especially in a situation where institutions compete for numbers.

- Articulation agreements which are developed in conjunction with, and offer guaranteed progression to certain courses, as in Scotland, are likely to develop further. Fear has been expressed that exclusive progression arrangements for students which operate through some FECs in Scotland could restrict student choice. Compacts are similar to articulation arrangements but are not usually exclusive arrangements for the students. They are also likely to be developed between HEIs and schools as well as with FECs. An increasing number of agreements in future are expected to concentrate on curriculum progression, that is, matching the curricula of the two articulating qualifications such as a GNVQ and a specific degree course. Groups of institutions working together on this, as in the US case study, would be more cost-effective than individual institutions operating alone.

- 'Access to HE' courses are popular with students and with FECs, but there is increasing competition for some university places which is squeezing 'Access' applicants out. University admissions staff and recruiters at selective HEIs need greater understanding and knowledge of what non-traditional students can achieve and the skills they possess. Foundation courses, also seen as valuable 'feeders' for university courses and described by one as 'the bread and butter of our science intake' could be at risk. There has been variable recruitment for some, and the fact that a student has to take four years to gain a degree might make them increasingly unpopular.

- Validation arrangements are expected to increase because HEIs see them as a reasonably cost-effective source of income, and colleges, especially mixed economy colleges, like the

'freedom' that this arrangement gives in developing and managing the course compared to franchising. The mixed economy colleges are likely to continue to obtain validation for HND or degree level work, but general FECs will probably concentrate on seeking validation for professional qualifications in the health and business areas in particular.

- Franchise arrangements can leave FECs vulnerable as HEIs are quite open about the fact that if they have fewer recruits, then they fill up their own courses first. Even with a six months' notice period for HEIs to withdraw, for example, some FECs will not wish to become too dependent on this kind of arrangement. So these links are to some extent dependent on student numbers overall. As well as national policies such as 'capping', effective joint recruitment strategies could be an issue for the future.

- Outreach centres are likely to continue to develop, with a growing number of HEIs involved in delivering modules, whole degrees, or other qualifications in local communities. These could be self-contained, using FECs as well as other premises, and with joint FE/HE development, or with HEIs doing all their own teaching. In the latter case, there is a possibility of duplication if they do not make links with FECs and their community provision.

6.3.3 Relationships between institutions

- Links between FECs and HEIs will continue but are likely to reduce in number, with some HEIs developing what one called 'a suite of partnership arrangements', ranging from close and possibly exclusive links — 'preferred partnerships', to looser relationships of association and collaboration. There will be an increasing emphasis on these stronger formal links offering good quality relationships. The HEIs will look for reliable partners who can deliver what they need, and adhere to their quality systems. FECs will look for relationships where their students and staff benefit, and where they have some influence on the form and content of the partnership. In these 'quasi-federations' (Bocock and Scott, 1995), both will increasingly have clear agreements about the nature of each type of link and what is expected of each partner.

- Overall, the national significance of these relationships is difficult to assess because data are not available on trends in activity, and not all relationships show up on recorded data. In England, the full implementation of the Individualised Student Record (ISR) in FE and a new HESA field for data on franchising and other arrangements will improve the information available over time. In terms of numbers, in general, other than in mixed economy colleges, the proportion of total higher education students in FECs and that of further education students in HEIs is relatively small. In terms of income generated, both types of provision represent a

comparatively small proportion of their own and national budgets. Of course, to judge the significance of FE/HE interaction in terms of the direct contribution they make to budgets misses the other potential benefits, such as students' progression routes and access, and staff and institutional development.

- HEIs will continue to drive the management of FE/HE interaction because of the nature of the activities. However, colleges are 'shopping around for the best deals' and deciding which HEIs offer the best partnerships. More 'old' universities are likely to be approached by FECs because their perceived status and quality seems to be important to FECs which use it in, for example, publicity and awards ceremonies.

- The day to day management of the interface activities will need to be addressed by both sectors. In some institutions there are only *ad hoc* arrangements for course management, and the lack of staff time for administration, and particularly for FE staff to prepare work, is becoming a problem. Institutional policies need to be backed up by clear management strategies, and some institutions feel that discussion with lecturers' unions could be necessary because of the differences in conditions of service between the two sectors.

- FECs and HEIs expect multi-media forms of communication to be one of the keys to the development of FE/HE interaction. They aim to link staff and students in different centres via the Internet, computer based learning packs and video-conferencing. There is special emphasis on this in FECs and HEIs which serve rural areas such as Wales. The two main issues are whether everyone will have access to the appropriate hardware and software, and whether this will compensate for being at a distance from the main university.

6.4 Wider issues

In this section we look at some of the wider issues and concerns that are likely have implications for the further and higher education sectors as a whole. Some are more speculative, such as 'mission drift', which is feared, but for which there is no evidence, and others such as mergers and quality issues which are of more immediate concern.

6.4.1 Competition

Even within collaborative networks it is likely that the current FE/HE interface could increasingly be an area of competition for certain types of students. Competition could be between individual HEIs, but also between the FECs and HEIs. The 'new' universities and FE colleges both see non-traditional students and community-based education as their natural client group and part of their remit. The 'old' universities are new players in the

game but are increasingly involved, and are being approached by colleges and others such as local authorities, TECs and development agencies who want to be associated with their traditions and reputation.

A potential cause of more competition to both HEIs and FECs could be the number of new universities which are said to be at the planning stage. It is believed that 15-20 local councils have plans at various stages of development for universities in their own localities. Some of these would be close to existing FECs and HEIs, and would no doubt compete with them for students.

6.4.2 Planning *vs* market forces

In the case studies, individual institutions were in favour of the freedom to choose with whom they have links, and what form those links should take, but they recognised the need for some kind of planning, probably based on regional networks. It can be argued that collaboration and planning can avoid duplication of provision, allow for economies of scale, and provide students with more coherent choices. This planning could be based on a system of channelling funding through at least one HEI, to regional clusters or confederations of colleges, as proposed by HEFCE. However, there is strong support for planning arrangements which are based on voluntary collaboration and which are not led by national funding mechanisms. In Scotland, the SOEID is now holding higher education numbers in FECs steady, and exerting more control over the introduction of new degree courses in FECs, as part of the overall policy to constrain higher education expansion.

6.4.3 Mergers

A few mergers between HEIs and FE colleges have taken place or are planned, but could become part of a general pattern of mergers between stronger and vulnerable institutions rather than just between HEIs and FECs. Mergers between FECs, or between HEIs and specialist colleges such as teacher training, nursing, schools of art *etc.* are probable in all the UK countries. In England, there are several 'new' universities and general FECs which are discussing the possibility of a merger in the near future. Mergers could offer both parties mutual benefits and increased security in the short term. For example, further education staff in one merger were transferred on to higher education salary scales, and there were predicted savings on middle management costs, and economies of scale (NATFHE 1996). The universities involved believe that a merger would improve their ability to stimulate and meet future needs for further and higher education in their locality.

However, fears have been expressed by FEFC and by individual institutions that FEC/HEI mergers could lead to confusion about the overall mission and philosophy of the merged institution,

and that some of the strengths of both systems might be lost. A merged institution which provides education from the age of 16 to all levels including postgraduate, and which includes community level provision along with international research, is largely new and untried. Lack of any national policy in this area means that there is no reason why this cannot happen, but there has been no national debate about the development of such institutions and the effect they could have on education provision, particularly in the local community.

In the US case study, there are no plans to merge the technical and university systems — there are fears that the colleges would lose their flexibility and that such a merger would generate concerns about the HEIs' academic standards. There the emphasis has been on providing a more seamless experience for students moving between the two systems whilst retaining their separate characters.

6.4.4 Mission drift

The fear of 'mission drift' has been expressed in relation to the new institutions which might result from mergers between FECs and HEIs, where it is feared that they could neglect the FE student cohort and curriculum. There is also fear that FECs with higher education provision will neglect some of their traditional constituency to concentrate on higher education work. This latter fear was mentioned only fleetingly by the case study institutions. Although some FE colleges might want to expand their higher education work, the ones in the study were certain that their core work is further education and that higher education would not be given preference over it in any way. The local nature of further education, and the way that its provision is geared to small-scale demands (*eg* local employers or those with specified needs in the community), seems to be a focus that both FECs and HEIs want the colleges to retain.

A possible problem was identified by FECs, HEIs and others, as 'upwardly mobile' universities. It was thought that these might concentrate development on research and post-graduate work, and leave a gap in the lower level of higher education provision. This lower level work could be franchised to FECs, but would involve an element of vulnerability for the FECs. Equally, some HEIs will want to expand part-time lower level courses and retain at least some of this themselves.

6.4.5 Diversity or specialisation?

Uncertainty about funding means that both FECs and HEIs could feel obliged to diversify rather than rely on one type of student or funds as their chief source of income. Thus, although we found no real confusion about their respective roles and missions, there could be a scatter-gun approach as they seek to retain their respective strengths whilst maintaining diversity.

Some HEIs will continue to offer and develop further education in their own right. Just as FECs offer higher education to meet the needs of students, so these universities seek to satisfy demand, particularly from mature students and employers. Some HEIs who wish to develop their further education work intend to do so through mergers with FECs.

There is currently no indication that general FE colleges will take on the final one or two years of HND or degree work, although some of the mixed economy colleges could do so. Most are likely to continue with what has been described as 'advanced further education' (Bocock and Scott, 1995), which is mainly sub-degree level vocational work. However, in the US case study area, increasing higher education student numbers are leading to a suggestion that more of the colleges, which traditionally only offer the first two years of a degree, might be used to deliver the higher levels. If expansion of higher education were to occur, then it is possible that the same would happen here.

There could also be a process of differentiation within the FEC sector with three possible types of FE college emerging:

- colleges which place an increasing emphasis on higher education work and on closer links with HEIs
- colleges which, while developing higher education courses and links with HEIs, maintain a broader portfolio of work, in providing for the needs of the local community
- colleges which offer limited or no higher education provision, and develop few or no links with HEIs.

6.4.6 Quality

The quality issues discussed in relation to the FE/HE interface usually concern the quality management of the courses and qualifications in the FECs, including staff expertise and student achievement. These are covered in most cases by formal structures, and although there have been some concerns, there is a general feeling that any additional systems could overload the system. FECs continue to be concerned that the higher education experience is less supportive for students, and that the transition to higher education needs to managed carefully.

There is also acceptance that the quality of the higher education experience for students in FECs, if not the same, should be comparable to that in HEIs. Some arrangements between FECs and HEIs have virtually no interaction between the two, with no link for students with the HEI campus or staff. However, there is an argument that as there are different types of students, so they might need different experiences of what is seen as a full university education, and that this direct contact with the HEI is less important for mature students located at a distance. It might become more important if larger numbers of young full-time

students are recruited through local FECs and expect a different experience. Another concern is about access to university libraries and information, which, even with new communications technology, might prove difficult. There is some indication from this study that better quality partnerships are sought by FECs, who feel that students benefit from increased interaction with partner HEIs.

What might be needed is an agreement for students, so that information is publicly available about what the relationships mean for them in terms of progression, and the resources, staff and facilities which will be available to them. One model for this might be found in further education. The FEFC has produced 'control criteria' and a model legal contract for provision which FECs franchise to other institutions (FEFC, 1996). This developed in response to problems with some provision. The 'control criteria' include a requirement for institutions to provide initial guidance for students, a learning agreement, details of how progress will be monitored, and of the staff who will be involved, and details of quality assurance. Although the FEFC criteria were drawn up to ensure the legality of arrangements, an agreement making explicit to institutions and students what is involved in a jointly-provided programme, might be welcome.

6.5 In conclusion

This research set out to produce a clearer map of the FE/HE interface across the UK, and to investigate the nature of the overlap and interaction between the two sectors. The study consisted of an analysis of current data, consultation with national bodies, and an in-depth study of a small but representative sample of universities and some partner colleges. It has provided an assessment of the scale of the interface, a classification of the interaction between FECs and HEIs, and interesting examples of practice from the UK and USA. The authors hope that it will prove to be a useful addition to the current debate.

On the basis of findings from this study, and if the *status quo* in terms of student numbers, funding *etc.* is maintained, activity at the FE/HE interface will continue into the foreseeable future. It is regarded by colleges and universities as beneficial for them and for students, although concerns remain around issues of day-to-day management of some joint activities. In the main, the further and higher education sectors wish to retain their separate but complementary characteristics and strengths, although cultural differences do cause some difficulties.

The research evidence indicates that the amount of higher education delivered in FECs is not likely to increase dramatically, if at all. However, a sudden expansion of higher education could lead HEIs and/or funding bodies to use FECs to deliver more HE level work. The very small scale of further education

provision in HEIs makes it difficult to predict future trends in this area. The number of links between FECs and HEIs looks set to decrease as both partners decide to concentrate on stronger, mutually beneficial links.

Students will no doubt welcome greater opportunities for a seamless educational experience through the increasing maze of qualification routes, and might be more interested in the quality of their educational experience than in who provides it. Students' rising demand for higher education closer to home is encouraging the regional dimension of the interface. This is already established in some areas, with universities and their partner FECs meeting to plan joint activities, and in some cases, higher education provision across a 'region' which they have defined. It was clear from the research that there is support for increased regional planning, but little for a centralised prescriptive system.

Whatever factors shape the future of the FE/HE interface, including recommendations from the current review of higher education, the general consensus of participants in this research was that change should ensure mutually beneficial relationships for further and higher education, and have at its heart the best interests of the students.

Appendix: Case Studies and National Contexts

A1.1 The case study institutions

Case study 1: University and link college

A university with 15,000 students (about 75 per cent of which are part-time), operating mainly from a single campus, and with a tradition of widening access to higher education, particularly in rural areas. It has links involving 3,500 students with 19 FECs, spread very widely, and the FECs are free to form links with other HEIs. The interaction includes franchising, validation, and joint course development in mainly HNC/Ds in business and construction subjects. The link FEC visited in this case study has about 35,000 students, predominantly part-time. It has four campuses and links with two HEIs from ten to 40 miles away. The link with the case study university has by far the biggest number of higher education students, with over 600 on franchised courses in mainly business, engineering and further education teacher training.

Case study 2: University and link college

A university founded over 100 years ago and based on a city centre campus. It has links with nine FECs, including a mixed economy college, some very close and others in more distant rural areas. It has franchised work to FECs in general degrees, Foundation years, HNDs (mainly in science and engineering), and has Access to HE links in maths, science, engineering and humanities. The university has opened two outreach centres 40 and 60 miles way, to offer degree modules in the largely rural community. The link college visited for the case study has 43,000 enrolments and also has links with five other universities. Of its daytime provision, about 25 per cent of full-time, and 30 per cent of day-release is higher education. It has its own higher education courses in a wide range of subjects and franchised HNDs in courses including building, computing and engineering.

Case study 3: University and one link college

A university with 10,000 students, based in an urban area. Its main emphasis is on vocational education in which it has strong specialisms. There is a tradition of community provision to a wide range of students, particularly mature ones. There are links with ten FECs locally. Franchising work is limited, and only

covers 200 students on applied science HNC courses in five FECs. Articulation agreements, where students attend FECs for HNC/Ds and are able to enter years 2 or 3 at the university, operate through exclusive arrangements with three FECs and with other non-exclusive colleges. The link college visited for the case study is a community based college, with nearly 8,000 students, located near to the university. It has a high academic reputation and a good record of students progressing to higher education. It has links with four universities, mainly articulation agreements in HNC/D, but some franchised work in science and computing.

Case Study 4: University and one link college

A university based in a town and operating from one main campus. It has 9,000 students, mainly full-time undergraduates. The university was founded approxi-mately 30 years ago and has a strong academic reputation nationally and internationally. It offers some vocational subjects through links with 12 colleges of further and higher education in the region, of which seven are FECs. The main interaction is through franchised Foundation Years, or Year 1 of science and engineering HNDs/degrees, for small numbers of students. The link FEC visited in the case study is a mixed economy college which is 30 miles from the university. The FEC runs courses validated by that university, and others, on a franchised basis. It has over 12,000 students, the majority of which are part-time, and about 25 per cent of its provision is higher education. It also has links with ten other HEIs, but has a five year plan to reduce these to links only with the case study university.

Case study 5: University

A university founded over 40 years ago and based on a single campus close to a city centre. It has a strong academic tradition nationally and internationally, and has 10,000 students, of which three quarters are full-time. It has links with eight FECs, and several other HEIs, which run courses validated by the university, involving several hundred students. These are mainly in business and management subjects or professional qualifications. Some FECs are located some distance away from the university but all are in the same region. It has a science foundation course, and franchise arrangements which cover approximately 60 students in three FECs on health, science and engineering degrees. The university is developing outreach centres in order to offer higher education in rural areas across the region.

Case Study 6: University

A university with a strong vocational tradition arising from its past as two separate higher education colleges and a polytechnic. It has three campuses, with some subject specialisation on two,

although a wide range of courses is provided at each. The university serves a largely rural community and has links with 20 FECs. It has 1,000 students on franchised courses of which about 60 per cent are part-time, and 800 students who are registered under Compact schemes. The franchised courses include HNC/Ds in business and engineering, but also public services and health subjects. Six of the colleges also provide franchised courses in non-vocational subjects such as history, English and sociology. The university has a regional office which co-ordinates all partnership arrangements.

Case study 7: FE College

A general FEC based in a city. It has 35,000 students, mainly part-time, and operates from four campuses. It is the biggest provider of further education in the county and about ten per cent of its work is higher education. It operates a preferred partnership arrangement with one university 60 miles away which has close links with five other FECs in the region. The case study FEC operates franchised courses, has some validation arrangements, and Compacts for students on certain courses. The main areas of its own higher education, and the linked programmes, are engineering and construction HNC/Ds and Foundation year, with some further education teacher training.

Case study 8: United States: university

The details of this case study are provided in Chapter 4. The US system of FE/HE provision is different from that in the UK, and is explained at the same time as the points from the case study findings are presented.

A1.2 The national contexts

A1.2.1 Wales

The Welsh Funding Council (WFC) is the umbrella organisation which covers the notionally separate FEFC for Wales and the HEFC for Wales. They are housed within the same building and are called divisions. Of the two universities in Wales, one is the main player in terms of collaboration with FECs. It is likely to maintain links with FECs throughout Wales, but have stronger links with a small number of FECs.

For the WFC, one of the key issues is adequate provision on the basis of geography, particularly for the remote rural areas. A variety of franchising arrangements has developed, and, typically, they involve an HEI having ultimate responsibility for quality assurance for the course in question, which is delivered using the FEC staff and facilities[1]. The Wales Advisory Body for Public

[1] Bird *et al.* (1993) p. 54.

Sector Higher Education (WAB) has decided that part-time vocational provision could be best maintained and extended, and the quality of delivery enhanced, by associating the courses with an HEI which then has ultimate responsibility for quality assurance. Funds for these courses have been directed to the HEI which made arrangements with the FECs concerned, including financial support. It is likely that there is a lower level of involvement of staff from the HEI in the teaching and delivery of these courses than with franchising arrangements in the other UK countries.[1]

In terms of future developments, the WFC does not foresee any mergers of HEIs and FECs. However, they believe that there will be increasing pressure for FECs to merge, particularly the smaller ones, in order to survive. There is one merger currently under way. Course delivery could change, in that the HEI premises cause problems, either because they are in a poor state of repair or are limited for space. Expansion is likely to be through satellite operations and the development of IT learning methods. This is also relevant because of poor transport and the need to reach rural populations. There is currently a working group examining quality issues in FE/HE. This is expected to recommend tighter performance targets.

A1.2.2 Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, students are funded on the basis of the institution at which they enrol — FECs or HEIs. DENI and the institutions themselves accept that under the current funding methodology it is cheaper to deliver higher education in FECs. The differential is based on the unit cost of the institution. FECs will become incorporated in 1997, but there has been local management of colleges since 1991. The Department for Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) devises full-time higher education quotas which attract mandatory awards, and also currently approves course proposals.

There is under-provision of higher education places in Northern Ireland and many students still go out of the province to study. The consolidation of numbers in the last couple of years has hit the development of higher education in FECs just as it was beginning to expand, and there is still a need for more higher education places. DENI expects the consolidation of numbers to continue until 1998/99, but feels that Northern Ireland has a special need for overall expansion of HE, because there are fewer higher education places and a higher per capita entry into higher education than on the mainland. Consolidation has led to competition between institutions and a more selective intake of students for higher education courses. This means that fewer can take part in higher education in the province.

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[1] Bird *et al.* (1993) p. 54.

DENI is supportive of higher education in FECs and happy for FECs to franchise work from universities or develop their own HE. However, it feels that FECs should concentrate on what they are good at: *ie* further education. The Stewart Report in 1992 recommended that full-time higher education should only be developed in six or seven FECs, while all could offer part-time HE. In practice, because of the 'capping' of student numbers, the criteria for FECs which can offer higher education have been temporarily suspended. Only three colleges meet them completely, and all 17 FECs in the province now offer some HE. In 1995, there was an inspection of higher education in FECs which showed that it was operating successfully with good results for students and low drop-out rates.

A1.2.3 Scotland

In Scotland, funding is based on institutions, with SHEFC funding HEIs and SOEID funding FECs. SOEID funding for FECs therefore covers higher education as well as FE courses, and SHEFC funding for HEIs may cover some non-advanced provision[1]. Scotland is already some way towards a common credit currency, with a recognition of the mutual benefits for institutions and students within the SCOTCATS and SCOTVEC systems[2]. The main problem affecting the higher education sector at the moment is the reduction in funding as a result of the decision to cap full-time higher education entrants to 1994/95 levels. This is affecting higher education in FEC provision, and as HEIs cut back their provision, it is unlikely that arrangements with FECs will expand.

The most common type of link in Scotland is *articulation* (not a term used in England and Wales). This is basically a credit awarding system by HEIs, recognising HNDs and HNCs taught in FECs[3], but it also enables students to transfer during HE studies, and to enter the second or third year of degree courses. It has been associated with the important role played by SCOTVEC in facilitating the growth of HNC/D provision in the FECs. While articulation is the most common type of link, there is a variety of others including access courses, joint degrees and franchising.

Multiple franchising, or validation on the scale practised in England, was not evident in the case study in Scotland. Most FECs have formal partnerships usually with more than one

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1 HEQC, *Aspects of FE/HE Collaborative Links in Scotland, 1995*; see also Gallacher J *et al.*, in Abramson *et al.*, 1996.

2 Abramson *et* al.

3 Helen Alexander *et al.* in the *Scottish Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, Vol. 2 (2) 1995; see also Gallacher J *et al.*, in Abramson *et al.*, 1996.

university, though often have a firmer partnership with just one or two. Some FECs suggested that their students would be advantaged by forming partnerships with different HEIs for different courses, depending on the excellence of an HEI's provision in particular areas. In some cases, this was therefore a matter under active consideration.[1] The SOEID discourages exclusivity agreements, and funding arrangements discourage the transfer of resources between HE and FE, which is the main reason why so little franchising has actually taken place. Also, in Scotland the funding formula is different in that there is no differentiation made between non-advanced FE and other FE.

A1.2.4 North America

In the US, education, including higher education, is primarily the responsibility of the individual states and not the federal government. This means that there are wide differences between areas, and that it is difficult to generalise from one state to another. The analysis below is a broad reflection and may not be directly applicable to all states.

One of the most striking differences between the post-16 education system in Britain (and Europe) and the US, is that in the US, the striving for parity of esteem between academic and vocational education within single institutions is not an issue, whereas in Europe it appears as a clear objective for most governments.

Community colleges in the US are similar to FECs, in that for many students from minority ethnic group or low income backgrounds they serve as a major gateway to higher education. They are local colleges which in addition to providing a range of vocational and academic courses are also designed to act as feeder institutions for four-year colleges. In terms of quality, students entering community colleges tend to have lower levels of educational attainment than those who enter four-year institutions. While initially designed to improve access to a range of qualifications for local people, including four-year institutions, two-year colleges are increasingly stressing their role as local educational resources for people continuing their education but not wishing to gain a particular academic qualification.[2]

A key role for many community colleges is to act as transfer institutions. Half their students are studying liberal arts and sciences programmes. After two years (full-time) studying in community colleges, for which they receive full academic credit and an associate degree, they are eligible to transfer to four-year higher education institutions. Even at the elite Berkeley campus

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1 HEQC, Scotland; see also Gallacher J *et al.*, in Abramson *et al.*, 1996.

2 Court G, Connor H, *The US Labour Market for New Graduates*, The Institute of Manpower Studies, 1994.

at the University of California, almost 40 per cent of students are transferees.[1]

Community colleges are user-led in the sense of developing curriculum responses to diverse groups of students. Because they provide a modular programme and are semesterised, they allow greater flexibility. This is true also for most HEIs. Students may start at a variety of points in the year, gaining credit in one college that will be recognised by others, including local, state and Ivy League universities. Community colleges also have close links with local state universities, often including university involvement in their governance. Finally, they offer a great variety of provision, from the vocational to the academic, and from supplementary language provision to degree work.

In terms of links with the local labour market and employers, about one half of those attending two-year institutions (community and junior colleges) enrol to acquire job related skills, and employers are represented on advisory committees for vocational courses.

[1] Scott P, *A Tertiary System*, p. 17, Centre for Policy Studies in Education, University of Leeds, 1995.

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The FE/HE Interface: a UK Perspective

S Rawlinson, D Frost, K Walsh

Universities and FE colleges both offer higher education qualifications, many of them in partnership, but the extent and nature of the overlap and interaction – the FE/HE interface – is not clear. This report assesses the scale of the interface from data available in the UK, and classifies the types of interaction between universities and FE colleges. It highlights the benefits and concerns to those involved, and likely future trends. The research findings are based on a project carried out by IES in 1996 for the Committee of theVice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP).

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