

Further Education and the Delivery of Higher-level Qualifications

Understanding the
contribution of further
education to the
delivery of Level 4
(higher) and
professional
qualifications – Final
report

March 2008

Of interest to anyone wishing to understand
the contribution of FE to higher-level
qualifications

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Note on Statistics

There are some significant problems with the statistical base used to estimate the size and scope of provision at Level 4 and above in the further education (FE) sector. The basic reasons for this are as follows (see paragraph 81 for specific details).

- The existing data sources are designed for administrative and bureaucratic, rather than for strategic and analytical, purposes.
- These purposes do not prioritise the efficient production of consistent statistical material.
- Data collection and analysis is divided between the two funding agencies, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), plus the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), all of which compile and categorise data on different bases.
- The curriculum and policy framework for provision at Level 4 and above has been in a state of constant flux ('policy churn') for the last 20 years.
- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has led to reclassifications of the level and sector of certain kinds of provision.
- There is evidence that individualised learner record (ILR) returns are sometimes filed unnecessarily or inaccurately (HEFCE, 2007a, p. 3).

This is highly problematic, and has been a matter of concern ever since the Dearing report. As Ursula Howard, the director of the National Research and Development Centre, has put it:

To create an accurate information base and empirical data for policy and research, we consider that alignment of data collection from FE colleges and [higher education institutions] is a matter of urgency. This is likely to require work towards a unique learner identifier number.

Parry and Thompson (2002), foreword

Unfortunately, in the five years since these words were published, only a little progress has been made towards this, and this has had significant implications for the comparability and credibility of statistics about higher-level provision in further education colleges (FECs).

- Most existing analyses tend to be divided by funding sector (HEFCE or LSC) or by data-collection method (ILR or HESA).
- Data classifications and derivations vary between the sectors and types of provision, as well as across time, with results that are inconsistent and often incompatible.
- Even within the sectors, there are difficulties in producing time series data, due to variations in data collection and categorisation from year to year.
- Attempts to co-ordinate data are further hampered by duplication and inconsistencies between the sectors.

As well as these general issues, there are some additional problems that are specific to the current research project. Originally it was hoped to co-ordinate HESA and ILR data systematically. But unfortunately, the release of the HESA data was subject to so many delays, and the data released was too incomplete to permit learning aims taught through FECs to be filtered out. It consequently proved impossible to combine the two datasets, still less to ensure that the data was properly cleaned and matched.

This means that a robust, comprehensive synthesis of 'HE in FE' is not possible at the moment.

Instead, it is only possible to produce an approximate statistical picture of the sector, and the **limitations on the accuracy of the data** must be borne clearly in mind by readers.

Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of coherent statistics about higher-level provision in FECs, the data presented here is sufficient to provide important insights into the general shape and characteristics of this particular role of the FE sector.

Executive Summary

- 1 There is a growing consensus that the only means by which the advanced economies can compete in the era of globalisation is by building on their comparative advantage in education, knowledge and skills, especially at higher levels (Levels 4 and above in the National Qualifications Framework). Since the Dearing report of 1996/97, it has also been increasingly recognised that the further education (FE) sector is ideally placed to improve the accessibility and scope of higher education (HE) at a time when this is a growing economic and political priority.
- 2 The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) are the two bodies that share responsibility for this level of provision. They have therefore been co-operating to establish a co-ordinated strategy for action in this area.
- 3 In the course of this, the LSC has become aware that, though there is a large corpus of literature relevant to the delivery of higher-level qualifications through further education colleges (FECs), there is currently no coherent, up-to-date overview of the subject. In particular, there is a lack of current information on provision classed as 'non-prescribed' HE, which consists mainly of professional and technical qualifications offered by professional bodies.
- 4 The present study was therefore commissioned to fill those gaps by consolidating existing data and adding to it, wherever possible.

Outline of method

- 5 There were three basic strands of research used in this study:
 - a **literature review**, which saw the compilation of an introductory bibliography (Annex C), followed by an analysis of the previous literature on the subject;
 - a **statistical analysis** of educational records, primarily aggregate individualised learner record (ILR) returns prepared by the LSC, which was combined with published research from HEFCE to yield an overview of the sector's academic and demographic profiles; and

- a small number of **qualitatively oriented interviews** with stakeholders in the FECs and in professional bodies, in order to gain some insight into the issues currently facing the FE sector. These included five college principals or HE co-ordinators, as well as senior representatives of professional bodies whose learning aims have the highest enrolments.

Research issues

- 6 In the course of the research, it became clear that the division of funding, administrative and analytical responsibilities between several agencies (the LSC, HEFCE, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)) for higher-level courses in the FE sector has caused, and continues to cause, significant problems in terms of the consistency and comparability of data. Considerable efforts have been made to put the available material into a coherent form for the present research. Nevertheless, **all statistics should be regarded as approximate**, and appropriate caution exercised in their interpretation, especially when they are used in time series (see note on statistics).

Major findings

Basic administrative and funding structures

- 7 A wide range of higher-level courses is available through FECs, but they can be grouped into three basic types:
- higher-level vocational courses, primarily higher national diplomas (HNDs), higher national certificates (HNCs) and national vocational qualifications (NVQs);
 - 'traditional' higher education, primarily undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and certificates/diplomas of higher education; and
 - professional and technical qualifications awarded by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.
- 8 For historical reasons, the funding and administrative arrangements in the sector are complex. HNDs, HNCs and traditional higher education are 'prescribed' for funding by HEFCE; the LSC funds NVQs, and also has the right, but not the obligation, to fund professional and technical qualifications ('non-prescribed' HE).

- 9 Discretionary funding from the LSC for non-prescribed HE is particularly problematic: it has led to:
- variations in funding in local LSC areas, according to local priorities (a 'postcode lottery'); and
 - the withdrawal of funding at short notice in response to pressures from non-discretionary funding.
- 10 Both these issues were cited by many of the people who participated in this research. There was particular concern that many colleges immediately cancel provision in response to funding cuts, instead of attempting full-cost delivery, even though it seems that full-cost provision attracts at least as many enrolments as subsidised provision.
- 11 The LSC and HEFCE are currently working together to rationalise the delivery of higher-level vocational learning and skills, and have developed a framework for future collaboration. This programme has begun the process of identifying and resolving problems in the provision of non-prescribed HE.
- 12 In terms of relative costs, the provision of higher-level courses in FECs does not appear to be significantly cheaper than in higher education institutions (HEIs), on account of the greater number of contact hours with teachers and the smaller classes timetabled by FE colleges.

Demographics

- 13 In spite of downward pressure on numbers in the sector caused by funding pressures and the expansion of conventional HE, the sector has held up remarkably well. Enrolments at higher levels are consistently in excess of 180,000 learners, and in excess of 100,000 full-time equivalents (FTEs). This means that FECs account for 11 per cent of all HE by learner headcount, and 8 per cent by FTEs.
- 14 HND and HNC enrolments have declined rapidly – from 82,700 in 2000/01 to only 28,900 in 2005/06, but they are apparently being replaced by foundation degrees. NVQ enrolments have held steady at around 24,000, after an increase in 2003/04.

- 15 Higher-level provision in FECs has a good representation of ethnic minorities, as has HE generally. However, this research has confirmed that FECs are considerably more effective than HEIs at targeting disadvantaged learners.

Courses

- 16 A small number of courses account for a disproportionate number of enrolments: the top 20 highest-enrolling courses had nearly 64,000 enrolments between them.
- 17 The dominant courses are in areas of high economic and social importance: business (including accountancy and management), education, health and social care, construction, and various types of engineering.
- 18 A small number of professional bodies are dominant in this provision, most notably the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).
- 19 The highest-enrolling courses are **not** restricted to the largest colleges, but are widely distributed, suggesting that they meet a widespread demand.

Colleges

- 20 A clear majority of the 460 institutions usually classified as FECs are involved in higher-level provision – 384 in 2005/06.

Quality and style of provision

- 21 FECs are viewed as highly accessible in both geographical and psychological terms. This is supported by colleges through the high number of contact hours between teachers and students, as well as by extensive learner-support mechanisms.
- 22 Accessibility and learner support are key factors in enabling FECs to attract and retain a broader social range of learners than is the case in HEIs.
- 23 If the representatives interviewed for this research are anything to go by, among professional bodies views as to the quality of FEC provision are somewhat mixed, and depend largely on whether HEIs or private training providers are used as a reference. FECs cannot compete with the library facilities and profound expertise in HEIs, but they were generally viewed as superior to private training providers.

- 24 In terms of teaching quality, there was a perception that FECs do a 'solid job' and that teachers are highly committed to their students.
- 25 However, the professional bodies tended to have concerns about college management, particularly in two areas: support of expert staff, and willingness to go out and sell full-cost provision, instead of trying to maximise public subsidy.

Outcomes and progression

- 26 Due to the limitations of data-collection methods, it has only been possible to develop statistics for outcomes and achievements for aims recorded on ILR returns.
- 27 Retention and achievement are improving steadily, and are especially good in courses funded by HEFCE, showing that FECs are able to deliver traditional HE to a high standard.
- 28 Outcomes remain poorer for ethnic minorities than for white learners, and for disadvantaged than for non-disadvantaged learners.

Conclusions

- 29 FECs make a highly significant contribution to higher-level provision, especially for learners who might otherwise find HE difficult to access because of lack of prior academic attainment, inadequate funding, geographical location, or lack of confidence.
- 30 However, there are some issues surrounding non-prescribed HE, such as different funding rates for the same provision across the LSC and HEFCE and the fact that non-prescribed provision has not previously been identified as a priority for funding across the LSC. A number of colleges, especially those wedded to a public-subsidy model, are cancelling provision as soon as funding is withdrawn and are not looking hard enough at co-funding or fee income as a means of sustaining the provision. Some professional bodies are of the view that this needs urgent attention if the loss of an important source of social mobility and economic benefit is to be prevented – non-prescribed HE offers alternative routes to progression into the professions.
- 31 These problems are, however, only one particularly conspicuous aspect of the incoherence that has resulted from HEFCE's and the LSC's divided funding

and administrative arrangements for higher-level provision in the FE sector. In the past, there has been a tendency for 'HE in FE' to fall between the cracks in successive funding and policy documents, and this needs to be addressed as soon as possible. If that can be done in an effective way, there is good reason to believe that the FE sector will play an invaluable and irreplaceable role in the provision of higher-level education and training.

- 32 The LSC and HEFCE have a clear awareness of the basic issues and have developed a joint agenda for higher-level vocational learning and skills. This provides an excellent opportunity to explore and resolve some of the major issues facing this part of the FE sector. In particular, both organisations can, within their shared funding responsibilities, ensure that non-prescribed HE especially is nurtured and grown.

Recommendations

- 33 Steps should be taken to harmonise data collection and analysis by the LSC and HEFCE. The introduction of the unique learner identifier will enable outcomes and progression, and the true extent of HE activity in further education colleges (FECs), to be tracked accurately. It might even be advantageous if all data collection and analysis were concentrated in a single organisation responsible to both the LSC and HEFCE.
- 34 The LSC should attempt to co-operate more closely with the professional bodies. In particular, it should give earlier warning of changes to funding policies that are likely to impinge on non-prescribed provision at both national and local level.
- 35 In addition, it should consider supporting those professional bodies willing to help colleges move from a public-subsidy to a more entrepreneurial model of offering full-cost provision. The entrepreneurial model is an important lever in the move towards transforming the FE system to meet demand.
- 36 There should be continued collaboration with HEFCE in order to support the delivery of the Leitch aspiration for provision at Level 4 and above. In particular, there should be further exploration of the possibility of identifying higher-level skills as a priority for the LSC. This would help prevent the current widely perceived tendency for the Level 2 and Level 3 entitlements to dominate funding decisions, and help protect vulnerable professional

qualifications until the full benefits of the Joint Progression Strategy collaborative programme of work on higher-level skills filter through.

- 37 The collaborative work with HEFCE should continue within the framework of the higher-level vocational learning and skills (HLVLS) agenda, and the progress made so far in developing a joint agenda for HLVLS should be built on. Moves should be made to harmonise the funding policies of the LSC and HEFCE for higher-level provision, so as to ensure that there is a seamless transition at the interface between the higher and the further education sectors for both colleges and learners.

Introduction

Rationale for the research

- 38 The dramatic transformation of the world economy that is accompanying globalisation will have an enormous impact on the skills profiles of employment in the UK. It is now estimated that, by 2020, 40 per cent of the UK workforce will need to be educated to Level 4 (degree equivalent) and above. This means increasing the number of graduates in the UK population to 4.5 million – or 530,000 a year, instead of the current 250,000 (Sector Skills Development Agency newsletter *Involve*, 11 December 2007).
- 39 The further education (FE) sector has a long tradition of providing courses equivalent to Level 4 and above in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Since the Dearing report of 1996/97 and the recent Leitch review of skills, it has been increasingly recognised that, if this tradition can be built on, further education colleges (FECs) can potentially play an important role in increasing participation and achievement in higher education (HE).
- 40 Indeed, it is now widely acknowledged that the flexibility and accessibility offered by the FE sector will have a key role to play if Lord Leitch's ambitious vision is to be realised.
- 41 The government has therefore charged the further and higher education funding councils, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), with drawing up co-ordinated strategies for supporting and developing the provision of higher-level courses in FECs. In response, HEFCE has produced a series of documents on best practice and on the future development of so-called 'HE in FE'; and, in May 2006, the LSC published its first Higher Education Strategy (LSC, 2006).
- 42 In order to ensure that it has a robust evidence base to inform its evolving HE strategy, the LSC commissioned the present study, to provide an initial overview of the contribution of FECs to provision at Level 4 and above.

- 43 The primary aims defined for the research are:
- to co-ordinate and present in coherent form the major findings of previous research into qualifications at Level 4 and above that are delivered through FECs;
 - to supplement this with additional statistical and qualitative research; and
 - to give special attention to the delivery of higher-level professional qualifications.

Methodology

- 44 The research consists of three basic strands:
- a **literature review**;
 - a **statistical analysis** of educational statistics, primarily aggregate individualised learner record (ILR) returns prepared by the LSC; and
 - a small number of **qualitatively oriented interviews** with stakeholders in the FECs and professional bodies.

Literature review

- 45 There is a substantial body of literature relevant to provision at Level 4 and above in FECs. This includes:
- policy documents, White Papers and legislation produced by successive governments;
 - funding and administrative documents produced by the funding councils;
 - research reports, policy and consultation documents produced by the funding councils; and
 - research reports and reference works produced by interested non-departmental government bodies, notably the former Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA).
- 46 This literature is not always directly focused on the contribution made by FECs. It is also extremely diverse and has tended to be divided according to finance stream (HEFCE and LSC). It is, therefore, difficult to present in a coherent form (but we have tried to do so in Annex C). Furthermore, there is a

lack of substantive, coherent overviews. The most sustained examination of the issues is to be found in the LSDA reports by Gareth Parry and his associates. But these are lacking in real detail at college and course level, and are growing increasingly outdated (Parry and Thompson, 2001; 2002; Parry, Davies and Williams, 2003, 2004).

Statistical analysis

47 In order to compensate for the weaknesses in the literature, the present research has combined statistics from the general literature, official publications and statistical releases with new analyses of aggregate ILR data prepared by the LSC. These in-depth ILR analyses present some of the first detailed information on the scope and balance of provision in the sector, but they are subject to important caveats detailed below in paragraphs 49 to 52.

Qualitative research

48 The literature review and statistical analysis have been supplemented by ten in-depth interviews – with five principals or HE directors at carefully selected providers in the FE sector, and five senior figures who deal with qualifications and awards at professional bodies. This research is intended to give some insight into the views of key players in higher-level provision in the FE sector, with special attention to the role of qualifications awarded by professional bodies.

Research issues and caveats

49 It was originally intended that this research should culminate in a report structured around various themes related to the ‘contribution’ made by FECs to Level 4 provision, such as ‘the progression contribution’, ‘the crossover contribution’, etc. Unfortunately, the evidence is neither sufficiently unambiguous, nor sufficiently compatible to support such a structure. Tracing progression, for example, is extremely difficult because of the difficulties in tracking learners through the system. These difficulties stem partly from the lack of a unique learner identifier, and partly from the fact that the LSC does not have research that parallels HEFCE’s ‘graduate destinations’ analyses.

50 The report nevertheless retains a thematic approach, but with each theme representing basic structures that have shaped provision at Level 4 and above

in the FE sector. Some of these coincide fairly closely with the original categories; others less so. The themes used here are:

- basic structures – outlining basic institutional and political structures, including an overview of the basic course types at Level 4 and above;
- demographics – focusing on the number and profiles of learners enrolled in higher-level courses nationally;
- courses – identifying the major courses by area and subject;
- colleges – focusing on course and learner profiles at an individual college level;
- quality and style of provision – focusing on the style and particular characteristics of higher-level provision offered through FECs; and
- outcomes and progression – outlining the conclusions that can be drawn as to learner retention and achievement on the basis of the limited evidence available.

51 Statistical and qualitative data has been placed where it is most relevant to these issues, rather than in discrete sections.

52 In order to give as much insight as possible into the themes originally identified, attention is paid in the conclusions to drawing out the data to give a coherent sense of the various ways in which FE contributes to the delivery of qualifications at Level 4 and above.

The Basic Framework

Learning aim types

- 53 Local further education colleges (FECs) have a long tradition of providing education at levels that are beyond high school and broadly equivalent to university-level education. Unlike universities, however, FECs (like the old polytechnics) do not have the right to award their own qualifications. Their higher-level provision therefore consists of a variety of learning aims that are validated or awarded by external institutions or awarding bodies.
- 54 These higher-level qualifications are very varied, but can be broadly classified into **three categories**:
- higher-level vocational courses and qualifications, usually in technical or craft fields;
 - more traditional 'academic' HE courses, validated and awarded by partner higher education institutions (HEIs) but delivered locally;
 - qualifications awarded by professional and regulatory bodies, such as chartered institutes, often in full or partial satisfaction of membership requirements.
- 55 The three basic types of higher-level course offered embrace a number of different types of learning aim.

Higher-level vocational and technical qualifications

- 56 These consist primarily of:
- the **higher national diploma** (HND) and its part-time version, the **higher national certificate** (HNC), offered in various vocational areas. These were originally accredited by the Business Education Council (BEC) and the Technician Education Council (TEC), which were combined into the Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC). That, in turn, became the Business and Technology Education Council (also BTEC) in 1991;
 - all **national vocational qualifications** (NVQs) at Level 4 and above, developed from 1986 onwards by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (abolished in 1997) and now mostly offered through Edexcel and validated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

57 In addition, the **Certificate in Management Studies** can be included in this group of qualifications.

Academic higher education courses

58 In addition to the technical and vocational pathway, FECs often also offer a variety of degree- or sub-degree-level courses with a strong academic focus. Although the teaching and assessment is academically oriented, they are often explicitly regarded as the academic stage of preparation for particular career paths.

59 Because FECs are not able to award these qualifications in their own right, they must be validated, accredited and awarded by partner HEIs. These courses include:

- **diplomas of higher education** (short, undergraduate-level courses not leading to a degree) in vocational areas;
- **certificates of higher education** (short, undergraduate-level courses not leading to a degree) in more academic subject areas;
- **undergraduate and graduate degrees**, which are either:
 - a. designed, validated and awarded by **HEIs** with degree-awarding powers, but taught by FECs; or
 - b. designed and/or delivered by FECs in their own right, but accredited and awarded by partner HEIs;
- **foundation degrees** developed in co-operation with other institutions and awarding bodies, focused on vocational areas, and designed to provide a recognised pathway into employment or else to an advanced (usually final) year of an Honours degree.

Professional qualifications

60 There are also many courses accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies that have traditionally been offered through FECs. These awards tend to have a professional focus, and often lead, wholly or in part, to chartered membership of the body concerned. For further information on professional bodies, see Annex A.

- 61 Originally, the professional bodies concerned usually limited themselves to setting syllabuses and arranging for exams to be set, administered and marked. However, most professional bodies involved in the sector now engage in a wide range of quality-assurance procedures to ensure that those centres that offer their courses, whether in the public or private sector, meet rigorous quality standards. This is recognised in the fact that many professional bodies have now secured recognition as awarding bodies.
- 62 Professional bodies prominent in this field include the:
- Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT);
 - Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD);
 - Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS);
 - Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX);
 - Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM);
 - Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB).

Public policy and funding streams

- 63 Public funding for higher-level courses taught in the FE sector has traditionally been of two basic kinds: the institutional or 'block' grants, used to pay the core expenses involved in running an individual institution; and tuition fees, calculated at defined rates per student and course type. The general trend of the last 20 years has been to:
- reduce the proportion of the institutional grant, in favour of grants calculated on the basis of the number of students and courses taught; and
 - increase the financial contribution made by individual learners and/or their employers.
- 64 The cost of a course that does not qualify for public funding must be defrayed entirely by tuition fees paid directly by the learner and/or by a subsidy from the individual FEC offering that course. Within this general framework, the precise funding mechanisms used for individual courses are complex and, arguably, illogical – a result of the peculiarly complex history of the sector since 1987 (see Parry and Thompson, 2002).

Pre-1987: Advanced and non-advanced further education

- 65 Before 1987, funding arrangements for higher-level courses in the FE sector were relatively simple.
- 66 The sector consisted mainly of FECs and polytechnics owned and run by local authorities. Courses offered through these institutions were either ‘non-advanced’ (high-school level) or ‘advanced’ (university level), with FECs focusing more on non-advanced education, and polytechnics more on advanced.
- 67 Advanced FE was supported by funds drawn from the Department for Education and Science (DfES) and allocated to local authorities through the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education (NAB). This body had to approve (or turn down) all proposed new course offerings, in line with national and regional strategic priorities, and it was then responsible for transferring the necessary funds to the local authorities.

Post-1987: Prescribed and non-prescribed higher education

- 68 In the later years of Conservative government, there was a sustained attempt to reform education, with a particular focus on dismantling local authority control of the sector. This led to dramatic changes in FECs and polytechnics, and in due course to the erosion of the ‘binary divide’ between further education (local authority-controlled FECs and polytechnics) and higher education (the traditional, autonomous universities).
- 69 The first stage of this process was the removal of polytechnics from local authority control and their establishment as independent institutions. FECs remained in local authority control. Both types of institution continued to provide courses that were awarded by external bodies.
- 70 It was at this point that funding became increasingly complex. The NAB was abolished, and funding for polytechnics and colleges was channelled through:
- a new Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC);
 - the rate support grant, the basic grant to local authorities from central government that enabled them to fulfil obligations not funded through local rates.

- 71 At the level of the institutional grant, the PCFC was responsible for funding the polytechnics, while local authorities remained responsible for the FECs. However, this still left responsibility for tuition fees to be decided.
- 72 In the case of advanced FE, certain courses were '**prescribed**' on the schedule of the 1988 Education Act (revised and extended in 1998) for funding by the PCFC. Prescribed courses included:
- all first-degree and postgraduate courses leading to recognised awards;
 - the HND;
 - the diploma of higher education;
 - full-time and sandwich courses lasting more than a year and leading to a nationally recognised award; and
 - all other higher-level courses lasting at least one year full time.
- 73 Other courses were 'non-prescribed' and remained the responsibility of the local authorities, which were given the right, but not the obligation, to fund them. These courses included:
- the HNC;
 - the certificate in management studies;
 - courses validated by professional bodies; and
 - some higher-level vocational courses.
- 74 To add to the confusion, certain nominally 'prescribed' courses, most notably the HND, continued to be funded through local education authorities (LEAs) for historical and political reasons (Parry and Thompson, 2002, p. 5).

The Further and Higher Education Act: 1992

- 75 In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act resulted in the polytechnics becoming degree-awarding universities and the FECs becoming independent of local authority control. At this point, the PCFC's responsibilities were rolled into those of the former Universities Funding Council, and a single funding body for higher education was created – the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). All the funding responsibilities that were previously in the

hands of the local authorities were now transferred to a new body, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). This included non-prescribed HE, which was frozen at 1993 levels and encouraged to decline. The small amount of anomalous, prescribed HE that had remained with the local authorities (principally HNDs) was also transferred to FEFC.

Amendment to the Schedule of prescribed courses: 1998

- 76 In 1996/97, the Dearing report strongly advocated the further development of HE through the expansion of short, sub-degree programmes franchised from HEIs to FECs. In order to avoid adding unnecessary complexity to the existing funding arrangements, Dearing recommended that the two funding councils should continue to exist, but that all provision defined as higher education (including 'HE in FE') should be transferred to HEFCE.
- 77 The government accepted this recommendation, and in 1998, as a preliminary measure, HNCs and all part-time higher-level courses of at least two years' duration (including block and sandwich courses) were added to the Schedule of prescribed courses. At the same time, attempts were made by the funding councils to resolve the anomalous funding of certain prescribed courses (HNDs) by FEFC. These courses were finally transferred to HEFCE in 2000. This established the basic framework inherited by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) when it took on the responsibilities of FEFC in April 2001.

Alternatives: Franchising, collaboration and partnership

- 78 Although the expansion of non-prescribed HE was discouraged, FECs were able to expand their provision of prescribed HE by entering into collaborative arrangement with HEIs. The most common basic arrangement was 'franchising', where students were registered at an HEI to take a course offered by the HEI, but where the student and all (or part) of the teaching were sub-contracted to the partner FEC. This enabled HEIs to rapidly increase their enrolments, and therefore their fee income, without having to make massive investments in infrastructure. At the same time, FECs were able to take advantage of the more generous funding for higher education channelled to HEIs through HEFCE. More recently, comparable funding arrangements have been developed for formal consortia of HEIs and FECs, but with the funding channelled through the 'lead institution' of the partnership.
- 79 An alternative arrangement has been for partner HEIs to accredit provision developed largely within the FEC and taught to students who are actually directly registered at the FEC. In this case, the college has received funding in the form of student fees direct from HEFCE.
- 80 The result of these arrangements was three basic types of funding stream:
- non-prescribed provision funded directly by the LSC;
 - prescribed provision funded indirectly by HEFCE through various partnership and collaborative arrangements; and
 - prescribed provision funded directly by HEFCE.

Impact of the funding and policy framework

- 81 The division of advanced further education into prescribed and non-prescribed higher education, along with subsequent funding and policy developments, has led to considerable complexity:
- higher-level vocational and technical education is now split between the LSC and HEFCE, with the LSC funding higher-level NVQs and HEFCE funding HNDs and HNCs;
 - university-equivalent education is funded entirely by HEFCE, but is divided between directly and indirectly funded provision, with indirectly funded

provision being channelled through a variety of collaborative arrangements (franchises, partnerships, consortia);

- the LSC alone has the power to fund non-prescribed education, but is not obliged to do so, with the result that funding varies from one local LSC to another, according to local priorities. The upshot is that much of this provision is available only at full cost.

- 82 There are further administrative implications to all of this. Students registered at an FEC are returned on the LSC's individualised learner record (ILR) regardless of the source of their funding; whereas students who are franchised, and therefore registered at an HEI, have their records returned to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). There is therefore no co-ordinated system of data collection across the FE and HE sectors. In addition, HEFCE has found evidence of significant amounts of inadvertent duplication between ILR and HESA returns (HEFCE, 2007a).
- 83 Attempts to transfer funding responsibilities for all higher-level courses also led to a huge increase in the number of colleges receiving direct funding from HEFCE in 1999/2000 – from around 70 before 1999 to around 270. Since then, numbers have been reduced somewhat due to the increased use of franchising and collaborative arrangements, which HEFCE has encouraged, especially for smaller providers.
- 84 The challenges posed by the divided funding responsibilities have now been clearly recognised by both the LSC and HEFCE, and they are now working collaboratively to develop coherent policies and procedures for higher-level vocational learning and skills (HLVLS). They have already created a framework for action in this area, and are now developing a detailed programme of work (LSC, 2007). This offers a major opportunity to rationalise and co-ordinate policy, funding and provision across the FE/HE interface.

Costs of the sector

- 85 Internal LSC figures suggest that LSC direct funding for courses at Level 4 and above increased from £31 million to £41.5 million between 2002/03 and 2004/05.
- 86 In line with a change in the size of the sector as a whole, LSC-funded learners have declined in number since 2003/04.
- 87 The proportion of learners indirectly funded (by HEFCE) has slowly increased, following the introduction of:
- new funding arrangements in 1999; and
 - foundation degrees in 2001.
- 88 In 2005/06, 35 per cent of aims recorded on FE ILRs for aims received direct HEFCE funding, and a further 2.3 per cent were eligible but no funding was claimed.
- 89 In 2005, 146 colleges received direct funding from HEFCE, with resources (grant plus fee income) varying from nearly £10 million to less than £20,000. Within that spread, 23 colleges received HEFCE direct funds of more than £2 million; a further 25 grants were made of between £1 million and £2 million; and 58 colleges received less than £500,000 (Parry, Thompson and Blackie, 2006, p. 58).
- 90 The number of colleges receiving direct HEFCE funding has fallen year on year since 1999/2000.
- 91 Evidence that provision in the FE sector is less costly than in HEIs appears to be ambiguous.
- Studies of lower qualifications, such as the art foundation diploma (Level 3) suggest significantly cheaper delivery in FECs. However, HEFCE's research (published in 1998 and 2000) on the comparative costs of HNCs and HNDs in FECs and HEIs found little difference (HEFCE, 1998; 2000).
 - Staff time is cheaper in FECs, but lack of large lecture halls and the more intimate FE teaching style mean small classes, which consequently need more staff time. (The substantial recent investment in new buildings and facilities may have changed this.)

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that most colleges nevertheless remain committed to high levels of contact time between students and teachers (see section on Quality and Style of Provision below).

Current changes to funding and institutional structures

- 92 Those people who took part in the present research had considerable misgivings about various aspects of current and future funding regimes, especially about the provision of professional education.
- 93 There was a general consensus that, because LSC funding for professional education is largely discretionary, there is a real danger that it could suffer disproportionately from funding pressures, and that this could have a negative effect on learners.
- 94 This is particularly true in view of the increasing emphasis on the principle that education should be responsive to employers' and learners' needs and be more 'demand led'. The corollary of this is that both learners and employers should make a greater financial contribution to their education. According to one director of education at a professional body, the future of professional education in the FE sector is 'on a knife edge', and things could go either way.
- 95 There were a number of particular areas of concern cited by interviewees from both FECs and professional bodies. These included:
- the current LSC Public Service Agreements (PSA), which focus on the attainment of a 'full' Level 2 or Level 3 and lack specific targets for Level 4 and above;
 - the lack of clear and consistent guidelines on what will and what will not be funded, and the reasons; and
 - the tendency for public funding to be removed from courses without adequate warning or explanation.
- 96 The upshot is that, in spite of good intentions, local LSCs have found it difficult to justify directing resources to higher-level courses.

- 97 The feeling was that this could all too easily end up depriving those most in need of opportunities for career and personal progression. In addition, one respondent pointed out that an absence of higher-level courses offered through FECs risked reinforcing the perception that the technical and vocational route was 'inferior' to more traditional models of higher education.

'The cost issue is obviously fundamental – the availability of public funding makes the courses more available... In general, FE colleges can afford to be more oriented towards the individual, whereas private training providers tend to...go where the money is, and that's with the employer. But there are many people...whose employers will obviously not pay for their course, and for them the availability of funding is a key issue – if they're at home with two kids and the course was going to cost – I don't know, but say £1,000 – they wouldn't be able to do it.'

'Funding is certainly high up the agenda. With higher-level courses, some [local] LSCs stopped funding completely. This seems to happen without our knowledge so that it's difficult to prepare for it.'

'There is a sense that some centres are falling away for reasons of funding, that if things aren't sorted out [current measures to improve enrolments] might just be a temporary shot in the arm.'

'I'm afraid I'm rather pessimistic. I think it will be hard to persuade colleges to take on more professional qualifications because there is such a drive from the government on getting everyone to Levels 2 and 3.'

- 98 This should not be taken to imply that respondents objected in principle to the idea that employers and learners should contribute more to the costs of their education. Most representatives of professional bodies were mindful of the need to contain public expenditure and are broadly more than willing to play an active part in helping colleges make the adjustment to a more entrepreneurial model.

- 99 However, there was a general emphasis on the importance of **supporting FECs** to make the cultural adjustment from a predominantly public funding-based model to a more entrepreneurial approach.
- 100 In particular, there was concern that a large number of colleges are entrenched in a public-subsidy model of management, in which cuts in funding are translated directly into cuts in provision. In spite of the good will of programme co-ordinators and teachers, some college principals and their management teams have tended to take a 'top-down' and 'bottom-line' approach, focused on maximising public funding rather than developing full-cost provision.
- 101 There was evidence that the larger professional bodies are more than willing to actively engage in helping colleges make the adjustment to the new funding model by approaching college principals direct. They would be particularly willing if they were given appropriate back-up by the LSC.

'There needs to be more support to college principals to make the change to a new approach. We need to support them to break the typical funding model...and move to a more entrepreneurial approach. And we are certainly willing to do our bit in achieving this.'

- 102 This is especially important because many respondents reported anecdotal evidence that, among the minority of more 'entrepreneurial' providers who had changed to a full-cost model, enrolments had actually increased at the same time as tuition fees. In many cases, the higher costs were believed to have eroded the prejudice that FE was 'second best' to more expensive, private training providers. This was felt to be an especially important factor in increasing the appeal of FE to employers.

'We have found that those providers who have made the switch to full cost have actually seen slight increases in enrolments. There seems to be a perception among employers that higher cost means higher quality.'

- 103 On the other hand, there was concern that some public resources needed to be effectively targeted at need. Most agreed that there was unmet demand for non-prescribed HE, and that some of this would require subsidy if the demand was to be addressed.

‘There is unmet demand. For many of these professional qualifications we can and do charge healthy fees, because in many cases they will pay. But in sectors where there is a lot of freelancing or self-employment or micro-businesses, although they are hungry for development, they cannot afford to pay high fees.’

‘I genuinely do think that there is a need for funding training for middle management...and that the ultimate beneficiary would be the British economy.’

‘There is a need for funding to support disadvantaged areas where there may be [small- and medium-sized enterprises] who cannot afford to pay private training providers.’

Demographics: Sector Size and Composition

Sector size

104 Unfortunately, due to the division of funding and administrative responsibilities discussed above (paragraphs 49 and 50 and paragraphs 81 to 84), it is difficult to make accurate estimates of the volume of provision at Level 4 and above that is delivered through the FE sector. Due to inconsistencies in data definitions between years and possible duplications of data, **all statistics should be regarded as approximate**, especially when used in time series.

105 As a starting point, and on the basis of previously published official statistics, Parry, Davies and Williams (2004) estimated the number of learners in the sector in England at around 187,300 in 2000/01.

Table 1: Headcount of learners at Level 4 and above in further education colleges, England 2000/01

Year	Registered at FEC	Franchised to FEC	Total	Total FEC population	Total HE population
2000/01	c.150,000	c.37,000	187,300	3,700,000	1,400,000

Source: Parry, Davies and Williams (2004), pp. 5, 8

106 At this point, then, learners in further education colleges (FECs) comprised **approximately 13 per cent** of all learners at Level 4 and above. For the present research, provisional statistics have additionally been developed on the basis of individualised learner record (ILR) returns, which have then been combined with estimates by HESA of the number of franchised learners at FECs to yield estimates of the total delivery of provision at Level 4 and above through FECs.

Table 2: Learners at Level 4 and above in FECs: Headcount, England, 2000/01–2005/06

Year	Registered at FEC	Franchised to FEC	Total	Total FEC population	Total HE population
2002/03	139,512	44,039	183,551	4,797,084	1,474,415
2003/04	145,448	n/a	n/a	4,433,654	n/a
2004/05	137,264	51,018	188,282	4,302,324	1,601,685
2005/06	133,451	51,226	184,677	3,835,137	1,634,856

Sources: ILR F05 (full year) returns, Learner files, filtered for L4+ using L_NVQLEV and for 'live' learners using I_live_b; (HEFCE, 2004a; 2004b; 2006a; 2007a); summary figures not available for 2002/03 – the figure here derived by manually removing non-FECs from data tables; HE population from HEFCE (2005; 2006b; 2007b)

107 The combination of broadly static enrolments in FECs, combined with increased enrolments in higher education institutions (HEIs) has led to a slight reduction in the overall proportion of HE provision in FECs since 2000/01. However, the proportion remains substantial, at **more than 11 per cent** even in 2005/06.

108 Due to the large proportion of part-time learners in the FE sector, when similar statistics are developed for full-time equivalents (FTE), the proportion diminishes somewhat, but is still substantial, at a little **more than 8 per cent** in 2005/06.

Table 3: Learners at Level 4 and above in FECs: FTEs, England, 2005/06

Year	Registered at FEC	Franchised to FEC	Total	Total HE population
2005/06	66,021	37,116	103,137	1,263,517

Sources: F05 ILR data for Learner, 2005/06; HEFCE (2007a, Table 1; 2007b)

Composition by learning aim type

109 Parry, Davies and Williams (2004) carried out provisional analyses on the proportion of learners engaged in different types of qualification courses in 2000/01. These provide a basis for tracking how the profile of this provision has changed over subsequent years (with due caution, given the issues concerning the accuracy of the statistical data).

Table 4: Learner numbers (000s) by qualification type, 2000/01

Post-grad	First degree	Other undergraduate							Higher level		Institutional credit
		HND	HNC	Dip HE	Cert HE	Other dip	Prof	Other	NVQ 4 & 5	Other	
8.0	24.9	39.6	43.1	1.7	0.6	4.3	0.2	1.8	20.8	42.4	0.1

Note: Total 187,300

Source: Parry, Davies and Williams (2004)

110 **HNDs** and **HNCs** have historically been the largest categories of provision.

However, numbers have been declining dramatically – together constituting 44 per cent of the entire FEC enrolments at Level 4 and above in 2000/01 (which itself was a considerable fall from the 52 per cent of the mid-1990s) (Parry and Thompson, 2002, p. 24). According to the aggregate ILR for Learners for the full year 2005/06, by 2005/06 there were only 28,900 enrolments for these qualifications, compared to 82,700 in 2000/01. On its own, the decline in HNDs and HNCs is large enough to represent the most significant element in the overall decline in learner numbers at Level 4 and above since 2003/04.

111 **Foundation degrees** are being offered in an increasing number of FECs.

Indeed, there is evidence that they are directly replacing HNDs/HNCs in some colleges.

112 Further details on foundation degrees have also been made available by the LSC for the present research.

Table 5: Number of students enrolled on HNCs, HNDs and foundation degrees, 2003/04–2005/06

Academic year	FECs			
	HNC	HND	Foundation degree	Total
2003/04	20,575	19,850	3,035	43,465
2004/05	16,890	16,025	6,840	39,755
2005/06	14,825	14,090	9,715	38,630

Source: LSC documentation

- 113 These figures suggest that foundation degree enrolments in FECs are only partially filling the gap created by the decline in HNCs/HNDs.
- 114 However, other evidence suggests a healthier picture. The most complete statistics published to date suggest that these figures may be a considerable understatement of actual enrolments, as many foundation degree students are franchised through HEIs and are therefore not reported on ILR returns. A more realistic view is probably offered by the statistics recently published by HEFCE on foundation degrees, based on a careful reconciliation of ILR data from the LSC and HESA returns. These figures give the number of new entrants to foundation degree courses in 2004/05, the most recent year for which reliable statistics are available.

Table 6: New entrants to foundation degrees taught at FECs, 2004–05

Full time		Part time		Total
HEI to FEC	FEC to FEC	HEI to FEC	FEC to FEC	
4,365	3,295	1,665	1,750	11,075

Source: HEFCE (2007c), Table 4

- 115 This means that FECs represent almost exactly half of that year's 22,110 foundation degree entrants (HEFCE, 2007c, p. 13). Moreover, these entrants only represent a proportion of foundation degree students studying in any given year, as the vast majority of foundation degrees are multi-year courses.
- 116 Finally, it is worth noting that the number of colleges offering foundation degrees has experienced significant growth – from only 88 in 2002/03, to 160 in 2003/04, and 255 in 2004/05 (HEFCE, 2007c, p. 14). This represents 88 per cent of general and specialist FECs, suggesting that future growth in the number of colleges offering the degrees is likely to be modest. However, foundation degrees remain in their early stages, leading to the expectation that many colleges will increase their offer of foundation degrees. This is likely to result in enrolments increasing at rates greater than those in HEIs.
- 117 **NVQs** increased notably from 2002/03 to 2003/04 – from approximately 22,200 to 24,900 enrolments – and, according to the aggregate ILR for Learner statistics for 2002/03 and 2003/04, they have remained steady since. This relatively small leap may in part reflect the general increase in the number of

learners taking courses at Level 4 and above that occurred in 2003/04, as well as the government's continuing drive to raise workforce qualifications.

Composition by learner profile

118 Learners appear to be **overwhelmingly local**, especially for 'non-prescribed' education (Clark, 2002). In addition, it is possible to use the ILR data to undertake provisional analyses of the gender, age and ethnicity profiles of learners registered at FECs (this excludes learners indirectly funded by HEFCE).

Gender

119 In parallel with the rest of the FE and HE sectors, the general bias in favour of female learners is gradually becoming more emphatic, with the balance changing from 54.7 per cent female and 45.3 per cent male in 2002/03 to 58.0 per cent female and 42.0 per cent male in 2005/06 (source: ILR for Learner full-year statistics, 2002/03 and 2005/06).

Age

120 Age-banded analyses – using the LSC's standard bands for different types of learner – show that the majority of learners fall into the category of adult learners, aged 25–59. However, the fact that the standard age bands used for analyses on ILR data split learners aged 19–24 into two small groups serves to conceal the fact that learner ages peak strongly between 18 and 21, the traditional ages for higher education at the first-degree level, as can be seen by comparing Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: FE learner numbers by age, banded, 2002/03

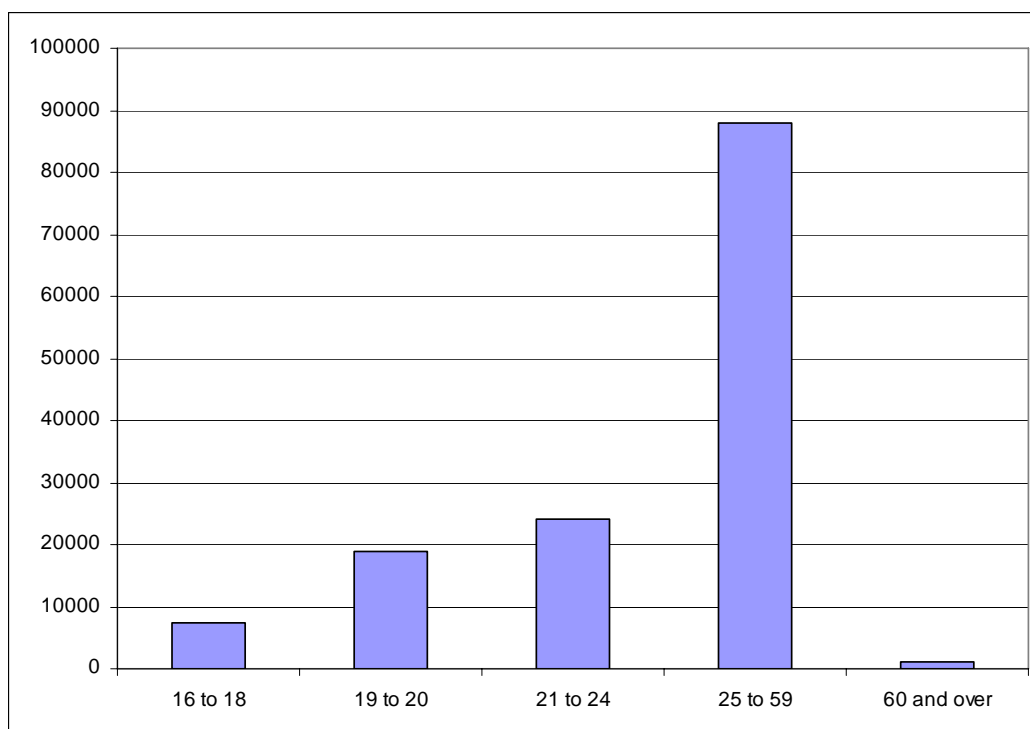
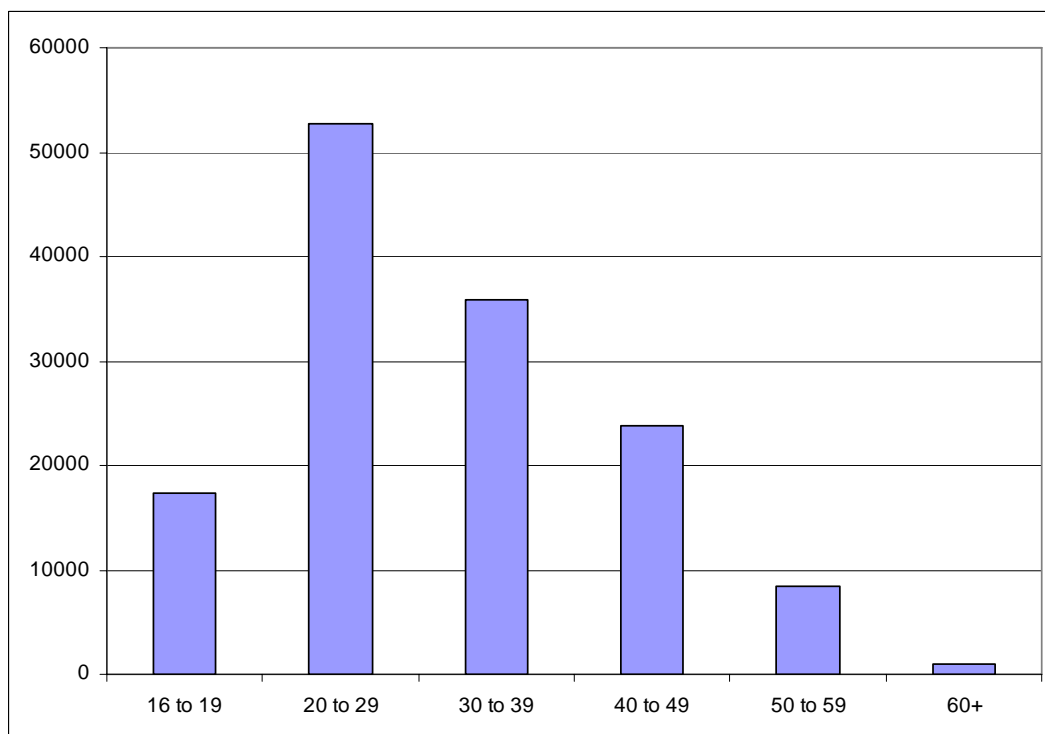


Figure 2: FE learner numbers by age, even bands, 2002/03



121 The implication is that FE has a dual function at Level 4 and above. On the one hand, there is a substantial amount of provision that parallels the major emphasis of the universities – degree- and sub-degree-level courses for young

people. However, the absolute majority of the higher-level work of FECs consists of providing education to older learners.

Ethnicity

122 Although the majority (83.4 per cent) of learners enrolled on courses at Level 4 and above were white, there was also a high representation of ethnic minority groups, compared to the general population.

Table 7: Ethnicity of Level 4+ learners

	2002/03		2003/04		2004/05		2005/06	
White	114,634	82.1%	121,746	83.7%	115,021	83.9%	111,275	83.4%
Black	5,333	3.9%	5,894	4.0%	5,515	4.0%	5,999	4.5%
Asian	7,441	5.3%	7,832	5.4%	7,871	5.7%	8,080	6.1%
Chinese	1,003	0.7%	1,138	0.8%	1,106	0.8%	921	0.7%
Mixed	1,362	1.0%	1,703	1.2%	1,780	1.3%	1,829	1.3%
Any other	1,918	1.4%	1,948	1.3%	1,818	1.3%	1,789	1.3%
Not known	7,821	5.6%	5,187	3.6%	4,153	3.0%	3,558	2.7%
Total	139,512	100.0%	145,448	100.0%	137,264	100.0%	133,451	100.0%

Note: 2001 Census for comparison – Great Britain: White 91.9%; Mixed 1.2%; Asian 4%; Black 2%; Chinese 0.4%; Other 0.4%.

123 The representation of black and Chinese learners is particularly high, at almost twice their representation in the general population.

124 The good representation of ethnic minorities broadly parallels findings for HE in general.

Disadvantaged learners

125 Apart from a strong peak in 2003/04, the proportion of disadvantaged learners (defined as having a home postcode in an area officially recognised as being deprived) has remained fairly constant (around 22 per cent) in the body of learners studying in FECs at Level 4 and above.

Table 8: Proportion of learners from disadvantaged areas

Year	Not disadvantaged %	Disadvantaged %	Total % (number)
2002/03	77.1	22.9	100 (139,512)
2003/04	73.8	26.2	100 (145,448)
2004/05	77.4	22.6	100 (137,264)
2005/06	78.2	21.8	100 (133,451)

Source: Aggregate F05 ILR data for Learner, 2003/03–2005/06

- 126 The spike in 2003/04 accounted **on its own** for the substantial peak in learner numbers that year. It would be worth exploring the reasons for this – does it reflect the direct or indirect results of particular funding initiatives in this year, such as the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund?
- 127 It is difficult to make comparisons between the HE and FE sectors for disadvantaged learners, because the published statistics are not derived on the same basis. Headline statistics on rates of participation in HE from low-participation neighbourhoods tentatively suggest that these rates may be substantially greater in FECs than in HEIs. However, it should be borne in mind that figures from low-participation neighbourhoods are intrinsically likely to yield low rates.

Table 9: Proportion of learners in HE from low-participation neighbourhoods

Year	Learners not from low-participation neighbourhoods %	Learners from low-participation neighbourhoods %	Total %
2002/03	86.2	13.8	100
2003/04	85.5	14.5	100
2004/05	85.1	14.9	100
2005/06	84.4	15.6	100

Source: www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2007/pi.asp

- 128 Nevertheless, additional evidence can be found from data on foundation degrees, compiled on a more systematic basis by HEFCE, which actually does make a direct comparison between FECs and HEIs.

Table 10: Foundation degree entrants 2004/05 at HEIs and FECs in England: percentage from low-participation neighbourhoods

Institution type	Age group	Full time		Part time		Total	
		Number of entrants	% from LPN*	Number of entrants	% from LPN*	Number of entrants	% from LPN*
FEC	Young	1,700	27	205	31	1,905	27
	Mature	1,280	26	1,385	24	2,665	25
HEI	Young	4,330	16	460	23	4,790	17
	Mature	4,365	18	4,800	17	9,165	17
Unknown		1,080		965		2,045	
Total		12,750		7,815		20,570	

* Low-participation neighbourhoods

Source: HEFCE (2007c), Table 16

- 129 These figures suggest that, in spite of the different methodologies used to generate the figures cited for FECs and HEIs in Tables 8 and 9 above, they correspond sufficiently closely to reality for reasonably robust conclusions to be drawn.
- 130 This confirms that, notwithstanding the difficulties in comparing the data, the broad consensus that FECs are considerably more effective at targeting learners from disadvantaged areas does appear to be justified.

Courses: Subjects and Areas

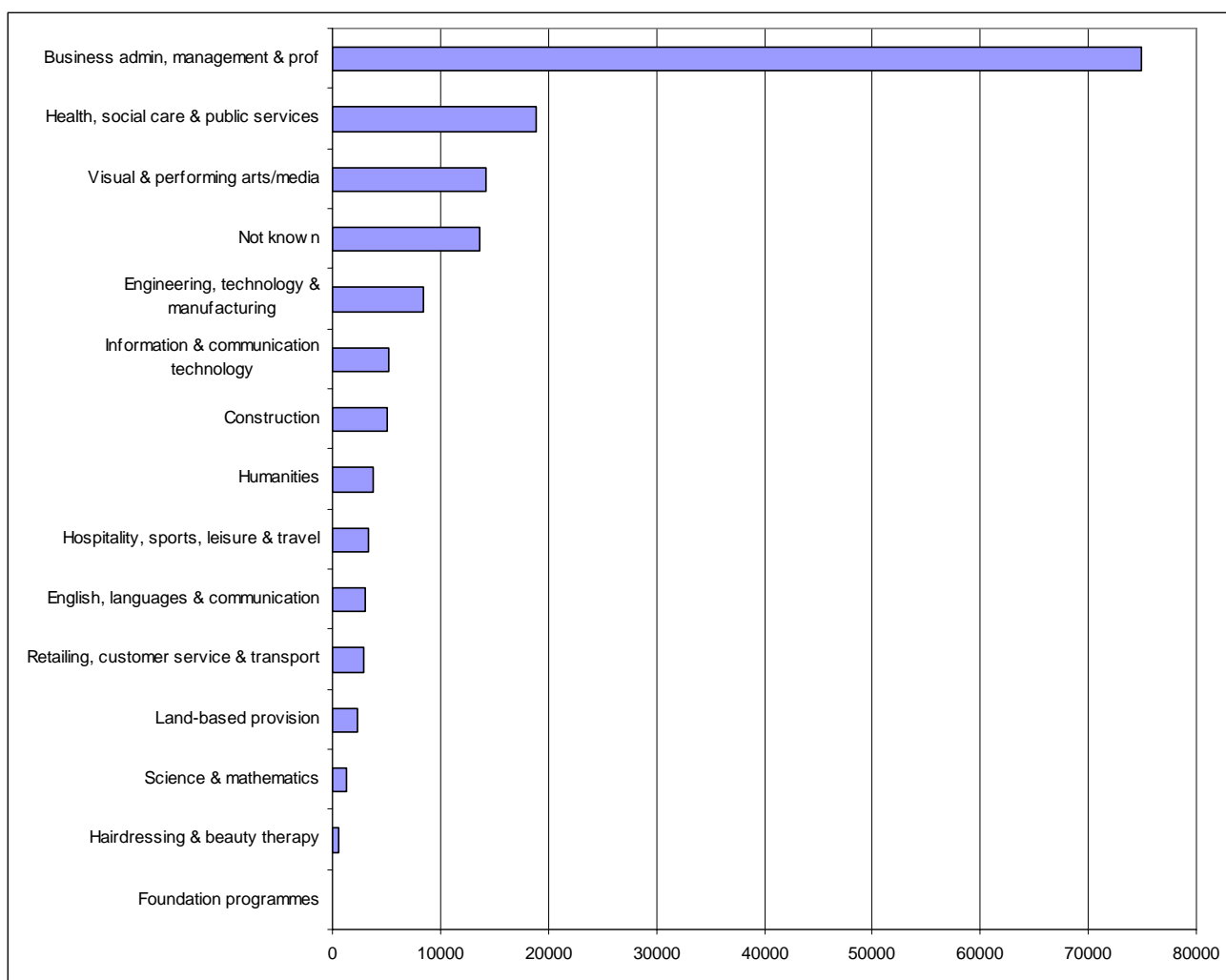
131 Within the various qualification types, there were 1,900 separately identified learning aims in 2005/06.

- **National** enrolments on these courses vary enormously – from one to nearly 10,000.
- The top 20 or so courses, which enrol more than 1,000 learners each, account for more than 30 per cent of all enrolments.

132 Most of these major courses have ‘non-prescribed’ learning aims.

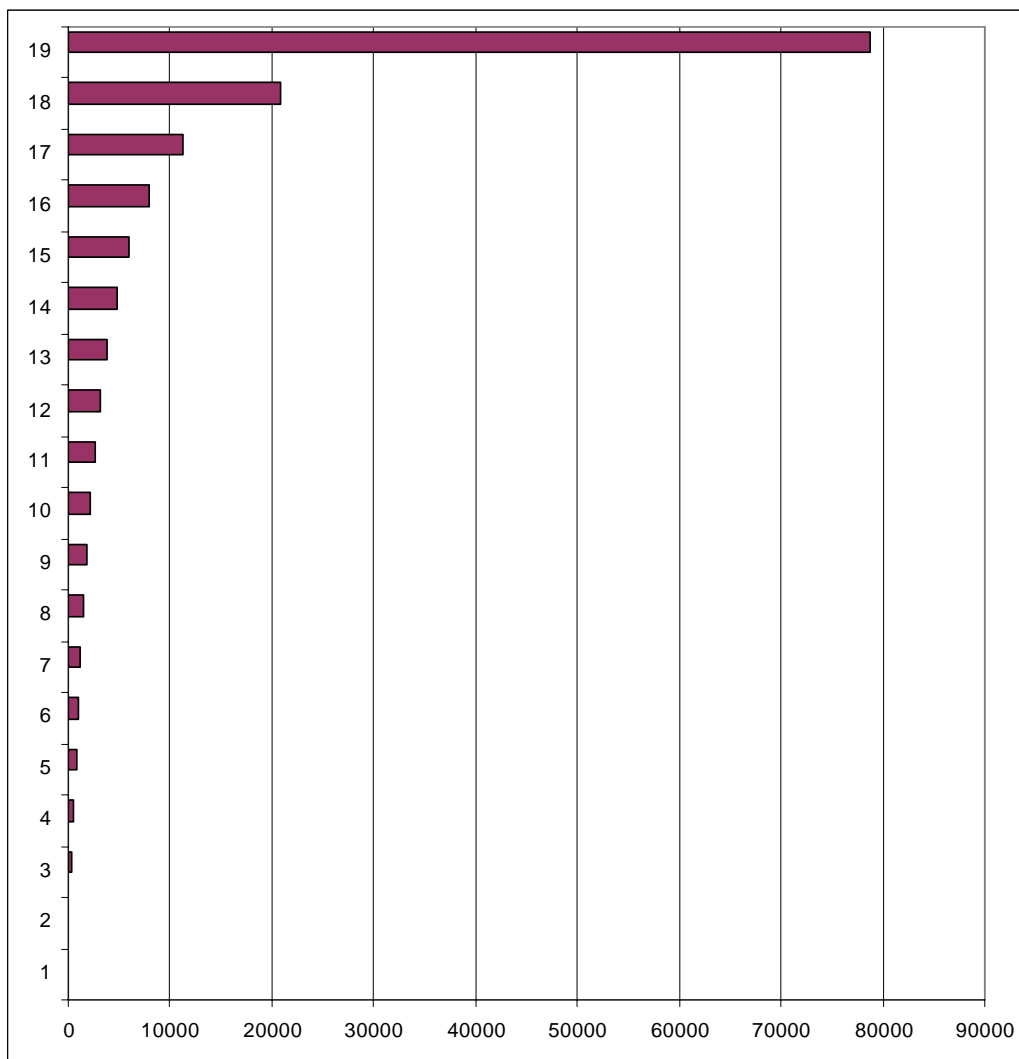
133 The distribution of higher-level courses among subject areas appears to be fairly consistent from year to year, with a clear majority being in the business, administration and management sector.

Figure 3: Enrolment by subject area (area of learning), 2005/06



134 More detailed analyses show that a relatively small number of courses account for a strikingly disproportionate number of learners. This is made dramatically clear by graphing total enrolments in groups of 100 courses, from the 100 highest enrolling to the 100 lowest enrolling.

Figure 4: Learning aims enrolments (century cohorts)



135 The 20 or so courses that register more than 1,000 learners each **consistently** represent more than **30 per cent** of the entire volume of higher education (HE) provision recorded on individualised learner record (ILR) returns in any given year, and the 40 or so courses that enrol 500 or more learners account for more than 40 per cent. This dominance of the high-enrolling courses appears to have strengthened slightly over the last few years, perhaps because of the slight decline in the size of the number of non-prescribed aims represented in the ILR data (with the caveats noted above in paragraphs 49 to 52).

Table 11: Major courses at Level 4 and above, by enrolments, 2005/06

Learning aim reference	Learning aim title	Number of enrolments	%	Cumulative %
10029424	AAT NVQ Accounting	8723	5.9	5.9
10014846	C&G Certificate in FE Teaching Stage 1	8627	5.8	11.6
10014858	C&G Certificate in FE Teaching Stage 2	5669	3.8	15.5
ZUNAH15A	Higher Level, Business, Administration and Law (SSA 15), Generic Award	4570	3.1	18.5
10020871	NVQ in Registered Manager (Adults)	2728	1.8	20.4
00114135	PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education)	1923	1.3	21.6
00103247	CIPD Graduateship	1719	1.2	22.8
10047943	NVQ in Health and Social Care	1640	1.1	23.9
10022715	C&G Award in Conducting Internal Quality Assurance of the Assessment Process	1628	1.1	25.0
10031959 & 10031960	CIPD Postgraduate Diploma in Personnel and Development	1521	1.0	26.0
10024384	NVQ in Registered Manager (Adults)	1502	1.0	27.0
10026642	Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA)	1500	1.0	28.0
10025893	Diploma in Management, CIMGT – Chartered Management Institute	1300	.9	28.9
10030487	BTEC Higher National Certificate in Construction	1232	.8	29.7
ZUNEH15A	Higher Level, Business, Administration and Law (SSA 15), PW A	1194	.8	30.5
ZUNAH06B	Higher Level, Information and Communication Technology (SSA 6), PW B	1060	.7	31.2
Q1050142	NVQ in Care	994	.7	31.9
10047979	NVQ in Health and Social Care	951	.6	32.5
10022843	Edexcel Award in Conducting Internal Quality Assurance of the Assessment Process	931	.6	33.2
10033683	BTEC Higher National Certificate in Business	903	.6	33.8
10051387	ABC Diploma in the Theory and Practice of Counselling	896	.6	34.4
10023963	C&G Certificate for Adult Literacy Subject Specialists	884	.6	35.0
10030554	BTEC Higher National Certificate in Electrical/Electronic Engineering	879	.6	35.5
00100575	HNC in Business	866	.6	36.1
10039351	CIM Professional Diploma in Marketing	864	.6	36.7

Learning aim reference	Learning aim title	Number of enrolments	%	Cumulative %
10050346	CPCAB Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling	862	.6	37.3
00114172	University Certificate in Education	806	.5	37.8
00100947	HND in Nautical Science	803	.5	38.3
ZUNEH04C	Higher Level, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (SSA 4), PW C	752	.5	38.8
00100573	HNC in Building Studies	725	.5	39.3
10025431	TCL Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages	716	.5	39.8
00114178	Diploma in Nursing	709	.5	40.3
10032605	BTEC Higher National Diploma in Computing (General)	701	.5	40.8
10034419	ILEX Higher Diploma in Law	674	.5	41.3
10033671	BTEC Higher National Diploma in Business	670	.4	41.7
1001486X	C&G Certificate in FE Teaching Stage 3	644	.4	42.1
Q1028327	IM NVQ in Management	532	.4	42.5
10043263	BTEC Professional Certificate in Management Studies	510	.3	42.8

Source: Aggregate F05 ILR data for Aims 2005/06, filtered for 'live' aims (using L_live_b = 2 or 3)

136 As can be seen from this table, the dominant courses are in the following subject areas:

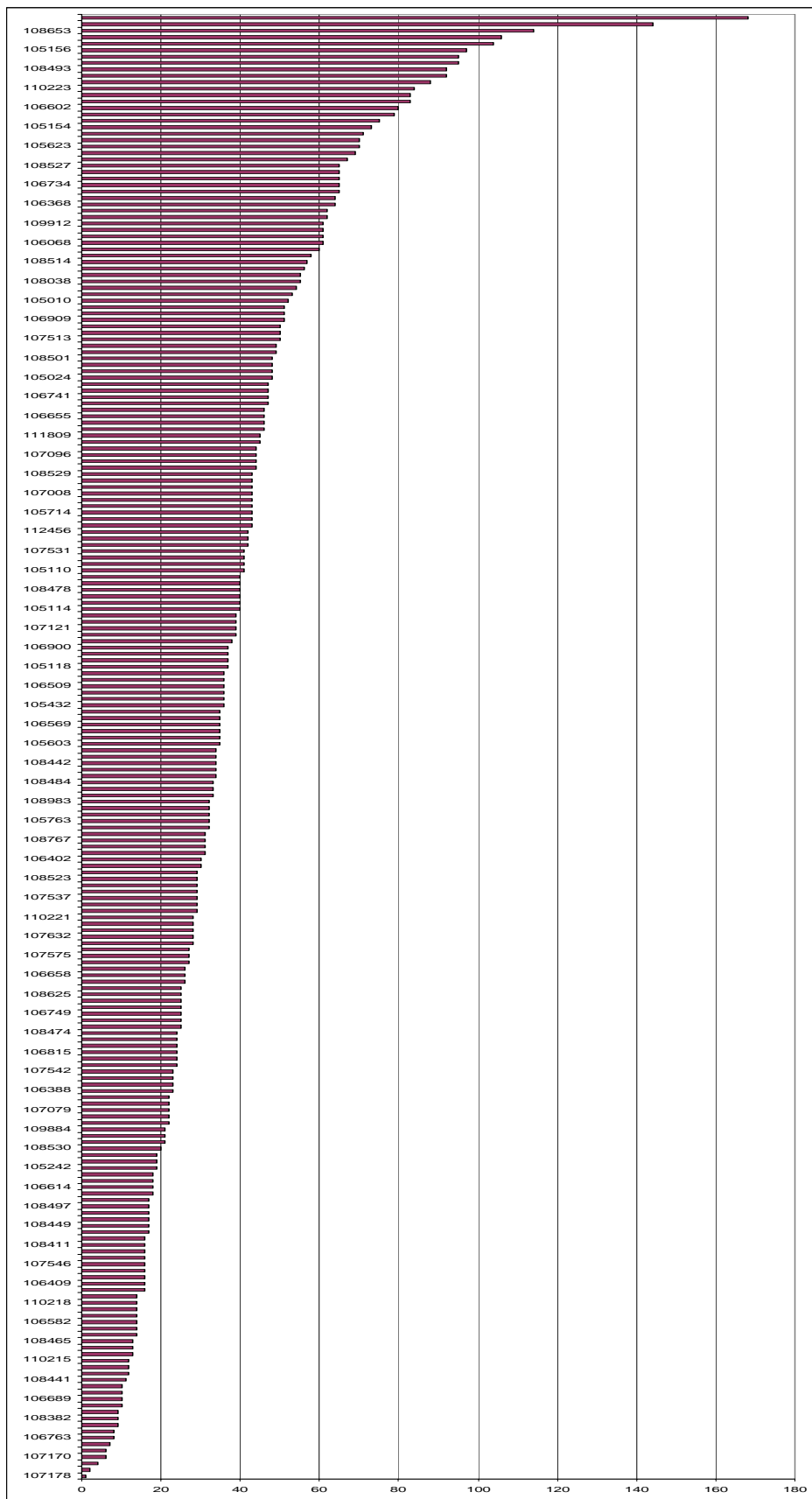
- 1 business related (accountancy, finance, management);
- 2 education and training (teaching qualifications);
- 3 health and social care;
- 4 construction;
- 5 engineering (various areas).

137 These are all areas of considerable economic and social importance to the UK economy.

138 This parallels the pattern in wider non-prescribed provision: in 2002, 60 per cent of students taking non-prescribed courses were taking business-related courses (Clark, 2002).

- 139 A small number of statutory/regulatory professional bodies are dominant in the non-prescribed professional provision. These include the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Chartered Management Institute (CIMG), Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS), the Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX) and the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB).
- 140 It should be noted that, on the basis of the analysis undertaken here, it appears that the AAT and the CIPD are by far the most prominent providers at this level.
- 141 The evidence suggests that there is widespread local demand for professional courses. The largest-enrolling courses are not concentrated in the largest-enrolling colleges, but are widely distributed around the country, suggesting that they respond to widespread local need. This can clearly be seen from the enrolments for the AAT accountancy NVQ. The pattern is for most colleges to teach cohorts of 20 to 50 people; even the few large enrolments do not exceed 150 people. This is clearly illustrated in the following graph, which plots enrolment numbers against providers in order of declining enrolments.

Figure 5: AAT accountancy enrolments by provider, ordered by largest to smallest enrolments



142 However, there is some variety in the attitudes of professional bodies to the recruitment of providers.

'Basically, when we actively pursue a provider it's to improve coverage... So we have someone looking at where courses are and aren't available and where there are major providers who aren't offering our courses, and then we'll contact them and try to engage them.'

'We don't approach them – we have accreditation systems and [further education colleges) choose to approach us if they want accreditation.'

143 Shared convictions as to the potential of the FE sector were evident among most respondents. As one professional body representative commented: 'We'd be happy to engage with all the FECs, because we know they'll do a solid job.'

Colleges

Composition by learner profile

144 There is not a great deal of research at the college level in the literature, but some basic points can be made that have been confirmed by the current research. The first is the large number of colleges involved in this level of teaching.

Table 12: Number of active providers, 2002/03–2005/06

Year	Active providers
2002/03	372
2003/04	394
2004/05	385
2005/06	384

Source: Aggregate F05 ILR data for Aims, 2002/03 to 2005/06

- 145 This represents a clear majority of the approximately 460 institutions usually classed as further education colleges (FECs). Among these, however, a small number of colleges account for a disproportionate number of learners, and these clearly specialise to a considerable extent in higher-level provision.
- 146 Many of these colleges belong to the mixed economy group (MEG), so called because of their characteristic combination of considerable volumes of provision at the levels of both FE and HE. To be eligible for membership, colleges must consistently enrol more than 500 full-time equivalent (FTE) HE students funded by HEFCE. There are, however, some colleges that have a large number of students registered on courses at Level 4 and above, yet are not part of MEG. This is especially apparent when we focus on headcounts rather than on FTEs, as in the following table.

Table 13: The 25 largest FECs at Level 4, by learner headcount

Rank	Provider no.	College name	FEC reg	HEI reg	Total	MEG
1	108311	Bradford College	3969	78	4047	Y
2	107059	Suffolk College	3915	0	3915	Y
3	107111	Newcastle College	2812	82	2894	Y
4	106490	Cornwall College	1223	1556	2779	N
5	111553	MANCAT	2631	118	2749	N
6	106749	Blackburn College (ELIHE)	2551	33	2584	Y
7	105156	City of Bristol College	1667	637*	2304	N
8	108529	Blackpool and the Fylde	2223	20	2243	Y
9	108661	New College Durham	1888	165	2053	Y
10	107121	South Tyneside College	1794	176	1970	N
11	108514	Kingston College	565	1339	1904	N
12	106947	City College Norwich	374	1434	1808	N
13	107019	Doncaster College	1676	0	1676	Y
14	106448	Warwickshire College	1546	22	1568	Y
15	105714	Croydon College	1523	21	1544	N
16	108521	Havering College	1469	53	1522	Y
17	105907	St. Helen's College	1407	86	1493	Y
18	106655	Worcester College of Technology	1103	378	1481	Y
19	106863	Stockport College	1412	44	1456	Y
20	107632	Grimsby Institute of F&HE	1240	154	1394	Y
21	105000	Barnfield College	877	506	1383	N
22	107785	Wigan and Leigh College	1240	125	1365	Y
23	106924	Myerscough College	311	1038	1349	Y
24	106564	Colchester Institute	237	1087	1324	Y
25	116105	Oxford & Cherwell Valley	976	319	1295	N

*Includes students jointly enrolled with another institution.

Source: F05 ILR data for Learner, 2005/06; HEFCE (2007a)

147 However, the same trend is apparent, though somewhat less emphatically, even when we look at the largest enrollers by FTEs at Level 4.

Table 14: The 25 largest FECs at Level 4, by FTEs

Rank	Provider no.	College name	FEC reg	HEI reg	Total	MEG
1	107059	Suffolk College	3030	0	3030	Y
2	108311	Bradford College	2607	36	2642	Y
3	107111	Newcastle College	2130	63	2192	Y
4	106749	Blackburn College ELIHE	1587	12	1599	Y
5	108529	Blackpool and the Fylde	1541	15	1556	Y
6	106490	Cornwall College	209	1218	1427	N
7	107121	South Tyneside College	1223	96	1319	N
8	108661	New College Durham	1170	98	1268	Y
9	105156	City of Bristol College	708	535	1243	N
10	106947	City College Norwich	116	1062	1178	N
11	108514	Kingston College	207	898	1105	N
12	106924	Myerscough College	216	875	1091	Y
13	106586	Hartpury College	3	1073	1076	Y
14	108521	Havering College	983	47	1030	Y
15	106448	Warwickshire College	945	22	967	Y
16	106564	Colchester Institute	95	868	963	Y
17	106569	SE Essex College of Arts & Technology	46	907	953	N
18	106532	Bournemouth & Poole College of FE	185	753	938	N
19	106863	Stockport College	885	28	913	Y
20	107538	Somerset College of Arts & Technology	175	729	904	N
21	105714	Croydon College	879	16	895	Y
22	111553	MANCAT	788	74	862	N
23	107785	Wigan and Leigh College	756	102	858	Y
24	106655	Worcester College of Technology	630	221	851	Y
25	108501	Northbrook College	836	6	842	Y

Note: Some of the HEI franchised students are only partially franchised to the delivering FECs.
Source: F05 ILR data for Learner, 2005/06; HEFCE (2007a)

148 The clear implication is that the MEG is not fully representative of all the major providers of education at Level 4 and above in the FE sector: of the 15 colleges with the largest numbers of learners at Level 4 and above in 2005/06, seven were not members; and of the 15 with the highest FTEs, five were not members.

149 Major providers at this level outside the MEG include:

- Cornwall College;
- Manchester College of Arts and Technology;
- City of Bristol College;
- South Tyneside College;
- Kingston College;
- City College Norwich.

150 All of these have more than 1,500 learners at Level 4 and above and more than 800 FTEs.

Individual college profiles and case studies

151 Both anecdotal evidence and the evidence of more detailed analyses of individual colleges strongly suggest a remarkably high degree of heterogeneity among FECs. This applies to management ethos, the profile of the higher-level provision, and the profile of learners attending the institution.

‘...the FE sector is not homogenous – there are lots of individual approaches at individual colleges, so it’s difficult to generalise.’

152 Colleges broadly reflect their local populations in terms of ethnic profiles. However, analyses using individualised learner record (ILR) data from individual colleges suggest that ethnic and gender profiles vary dramatically from course to course. These variations can only partly be explained by the ethnic profile of the neighbourhood surrounding the institution.

153 For example, at Bradford College, Law is dominated by learners of Asian-Pakistani origin; the single largest group taking a Masters in International Business is Chinese; and the primary school teaching certificate is dominated

by women learners of white ethnic background.

- 154 This suggests some important questions for the agenda of widening participation: should the aim be to increase participation by minority or under-represented groups by aiming for representative populations on all courses, or should involvement be boosted by providing more courses with a strong appeal to particular minority groups?
- 155 Considerable additional insight into the sector and its diversity can be gained by taking a selection of colleges as case studies.

Manchester College of Arts and Technology

Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT) is, in terms of learner enrolments, one of the country's largest providers of courses at Level 4 and above.

It has an exceptional offer of distance-learning aims, focused particularly strongly on professional qualifications – notably those provided by the CIPD and ILEX. This reflects a long-standing interest in the use of information and computer technology to promote flexible learning, and a strong tradition of employer engagement.

Employer engagement is formally incorporated as one of the 'segments' that the college uses to organise the strategic development of its provision. MANCAT also works extensively with other local HE providers in the Greater Manchester area, through the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA). This helps to ensure that course offerings do not result in unnecessary duplication, and enables providers to develop co-ordinated strategies for meeting regional skills needs.

MANCAT has also co-operated with its partners in targeting new resources at undeveloped areas, especially in North Manchester, where participation is particularly low. Although HE-level provision is available across the college's sites, support services have been focused in the new North Manchester site, which has especially targeted higher-level subjects. The college's philosophy is to develop those areas where there is demand and where it has the resources – mostly staff expertise – to meet that demand with high-quality provision.

Milton Keynes College

Milton Keynes College is one of the smaller providers of higher-level education, with approximately 290 FTEs at higher level in 2005/06. The most important areas of provision are higher-level business courses, accounting, and teaching certificates (primarily staff development for its own FE teachers). In general, its pattern of directly funded provision conforms remarkably closely to the most popular courses nationally. It also has a number of franchised aims, mostly from the University of Bedfordshire.

The college is situated in an area that is recognised to have low participation in higher education, and the college's current strategy is focused on expanding its offering at this level. In preparation for doing this, it has undertaken two substantial surveys, one focused on potential learners and the other on skills needs among local employers. It works in close partnership with local HE providers, in order to ensure that its offer does not result in unnecessary duplication, but also to facilitate the offering of degrees from the major universities in the region – such as the University of Bedfordshire and the University of Northampton. It also plays an active role in engaging with its market, and has developed an HE strategy forum, with representatives from the college, the South East Development Agency (SEDA) and the local community.

The college is now preparing to broaden its provision much further in a new, purpose-built University Centre, funded by SEDA. This will have particularly strong facilities for art and design-related fields, where the college's provision is expected to grow significantly. It is launching a major marketing campaign targeted at the local market, to encourage take-up of the courses that the new resource will make available.

Although the college is primarily focused on the local market, it is certainly not averse to the idea of developing an increasingly regional – and even national – market. However, the lack of student accommodation is a significant impediment to broadening its scope.

Norwich City College

Norwich is unusual among large providers, in that almost all of its higher-level provision consists of franchised aims. These are almost entirely from one university – the University of East Anglia. The college's target market is very much local, with 94 per cent of learners coming from Norfolk and the rest from Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. Its focus has, therefore, been on meeting local needs – vocational courses to meet demand from local employers, and other courses designed to fill gaps in local provision, such as foundation degrees in healthcare for para-professionals. Other examples include foundation degrees for prison officers developed with Norwich Prison, and a course in finance with the backing of Norwich Union, Marsh and Virgin Money.

The college has placed particular emphasis on developing progression paths within the college from Level 3. Four or five years ago, 90 per cent of higher-level learners came from outside the college; now 30 per cent progress from lower-level courses. Attention has also been paid to ensuring that foundation degrees can be topped up to Honours level through further study at local universities. A large proportion of learners seem to be taking advantage of this possibility.

Numbers of learners have been stable in recent years – in part because of generous bursary arrangements – and will remain so while FE funding is being reorganised. However, a period of growth is planned for 2009/10, with a special focus on the needs

- 156 These three examples give only a small sense of the immense variety of FE colleges in terms of approach, offerings, size and balance of directly and indirectly funded provision. As Parry, Davies and Williams (2004) found, the sector is characterised by remarkable diversity in almost all key variables:

[T]he higher education located in the further education sector retains a diversity and complexity all of its own. The nature of its provision defies easy generalisation... (p. 8).

Quality and Style of Provision

157 Survey data and anecdotal evidence, though patchy, suggest that further education colleges (FECs) offer learners and employers high levels of accessibility. A series of small focus groups mediated by Parry, Davies and Williams (2004, p. 38) found that 89 per cent of FEC learners identified themselves as local, as opposed to 57 per cent of learners at higher education institutions (HEIs) (p. 21). The benefits of FECs' geographical coverage and accessibility seem to be widely recognised.

'The strengths of the FE sector are its coverage, its reach and its commitment.'

'Their geographical situation means that they are well able to cope with training needs across the whole of the UK.'

158 In addition, many of those contacted for the present research – both within and outside the FE sector – emphasised the exceptional commitment of staff in FECs to supporting and developing their students. Most respondents spoke highly of the care, commitment and competence that characterises FE-sector teachers and lecturers. They are regarded as approachable and strongly concerned with learners' personal, as well as their academic, development.

'I would say that what is special about FE is that very often students have grown up with us, they feel more comfortable, more confident, in a place they're familiar with. I'm not at all averse to the idea of universities as towers of strength intellectually and in terms of research, but they do tend to have a sink-or-swim approach. That is a crude way of putting it but I think it has some reality. Whereas we are more able to target provision at people who otherwise wouldn't take part in higher education, and we can target resources at students to sustain them through the system.'

‘We always make sure to timetable enough hours for staff–student contact – we always ensure that there are enough learning hours timetabled to meet student needs. This would be more hours than would be the case in a university. Also we have local teachers and this makes things more familiar and approachable.’

‘Certainly, a lot of course co-ordinators tell me that they are in it because this is a really good course and employers want the skills it gives, so that people who take it can go on to have good careers. This is obviously anecdotal, but it seems that there is an altruistic motivation – this is on an individual level rather than college level – but this does seem to be one of the characteristics of the FE sector.’

- 159 There is particular focus on maintaining high contact hours between students and teachers.
- 160 This kind of anecdotal evidence is backed up by more exhaustive analysis of comparative delivery of the same courses in FECs and HEIs. This found that contact hours were much greater, and class sizes smaller, in FECs (HEFCE, 1998; 2000).
- 161 Such evidence adds substance to the claim that FECs consciously concern themselves with supporting learners to do their best, and that this constitutes a distinctive part of their mission and ethos. The focus on generous contact time is of especial significance, given the evidence that teaching and learning quality is the single most important determinant of student satisfaction (HEFCE, 2006c).
- 162 The combination of accessible locations and learner focus is almost certainly a major factor in making FECs the first choice for learners who would otherwise find it difficult to access higher education for social, cultural or economic reasons.
- 163 Most of the FE providers we talked to had a strong ethical and personal commitment to widening access. In several cases, they actively pursued research to identify areas of low participation, and then targeted those with resources, marketing and courses. Some providers also carried out survey and

research work to identify the best ways of penetrating those areas.

- 164 One college, for example, took the decision to construct a new site in an area that was chosen because it had some of the lowest participation rates in the country. In addition, computing courses were targeted at this particular market, since research had shown that there was particular interest in that.

'Our new HE site is in an area...which, according to ward and census data, had the poorest participation rates of anywhere, so we decided we could do something about that. We offered courses in IT because we knew there was a demand, and built up a number of foundation degrees in ICT, and targeted these at those wards and had very good take-up.'

- 165 'HE in FE' is, therefore, playing an important role in widening participation.
- 166 No less significant is the high priority the college respondents assigned to engaging with local economic and employer priorities. Most colleges had active, formal channels for engaging with employers and regional development agencies. There was a strong focus on identifying and responding to unmet demand for higher-level courses. However, there was also some frustration – especially from one very large and innovative provider – at the extreme slowness of the processes needed to put together course offerings and secure funding support for them.
- 167 In terms of quality of provision, most respondents felt that FECs provided a good-quality experience for their learners, underpinned by high levels of staff commitment. However, some professional bodies were concerned that senior management in colleges did not always provide the best framework to enable teachers to do their jobs. There was felt to be a lack of willingness on the part of some principals to allow staff to focus on their own area, and a tendency to try to make full use of staff resources for teaching – even if this was outside a teacher's area of expertise – rather than to improve the delivery, marketing or accessibility of individual teachers' core course areas. It was felt that this drove away some of the best teachers in the sector.
- 168 Other concerns voiced by the representatives of professional bodies largely focused on the reluctance of college principals and management teams to

adapt to more entrepreneurial models of delivery. This was serving to exacerbate the consequences of the prioritisation of Levels 2 and 3 for funding, and often led to the unnecessary withdrawal of higher-level professional provision (see above, paragraphs 92 to 103).

169 The overall sense was that colleges were highly focused on their target markets – both learners and employers – but that, in some cases, managers failed to take full advantage of their greatest asset – their highly dedicated teaching staff – and remained too wedded to the public-subsidy model for running their institutions.

Outcomes and Progression

- 170 There is little evidence available for a comprehensive analysis of outcomes. This is because the LSC does not systematically collect destination data, and because there is currently no common reference number used for collecting learner data that can help track progress between providers within the FE sector, and still less between the FE and HE sectors.

Table 15: Completion status for aims, 2002/03–2005/06

Year	Completed	Continuing	Transferred	Withdrawn	Total
2002/03	80,100 (53.5%)	48,325 (32.3%)	2,252 (1.5%)	19,035 (12.7%)	149,712 (100%)
2003/04	85,977 (54.7%)	49,541 (31.5%)	2,458 (1.6%)	19,084 (12.2%)	157,060 (100%)
2004/05	83,957 (55.5%)	47,350 (31.3%)	2,757 (1.8%)	17,230 (11.4%)	151,294 (100%)
2005/06	82,548 (55.4%)	47,692 (32.0%)	3,004 (2.0%)	15,716 (10.6%)	148,960 (100%)

Source: F05 ILR data for Aims, filtered for live aims using I_live_b

- 171 The most encouraging statistic here is the small but steady decline in the proportion of candidates withdrawing from their aims, as well as the slightly improved completion rates over the last few years.
- 172 This impression of gradual improvement is further reinforced by analysis of success rates for the completed aims. This has increased dramatically, with the proportion of students achieving their aims having substantially increased and the proportion failing having more than halved between 2002/03 and 2005/06.

Table 16: Outcomes for completed aims

Year	Aim achieved	Partial achievement	No achievement	Not known	Total
2002/03	53,595 (66.9%)	4,946 (6.2%)	16,852 (21.0%)	4,707 (5.9%)	80,100 (100%)
2003/04	58,927 (68.5%)	4,848 (5.6%)	17,833 (20.7%)	4,369 (5.2%)	85,977 (100%)
2004/05	61,213 (72.9%)	4,326 (5.2%)	14,480 (17.2%)	3,398 (4.7%)	83,957 (100%)
2005/06	63,654 (77.1%)	3,608 (4.4%)	12,272 (14.9%)	3,014 (3.6%)	82,548 (100%)

Source: F05 ILR data for Aims, filtered for live aims using *I_live_b*

- 173 The learning aims recorded in individualised learner record (ILR) data can be further broken down to yield the corresponding rates for those aims directly funded by HEFCE and also those funded by the LSC or through learner tuition fees. Because these figures are based on ILR data only, the HEFCE figures do not include indirectly funded 'franchised' aims.
- 174 For the most recent year for which a complete set of data was available, 2005/06, 74.4 per cent of completed LSC-funded aims were achieved, 5.6 per cent partially achieved, 17 per cent failed, and 3.0 per cent were not yet known.
- 175 Among HEFCE-funded aims, the success rate rose to 84.9 per cent, with a further 2.9 per cent partially achieved, 8.3 per cent failed and 3.9 per cent not yet known.
- 176 It should be noted that achievement rates remain significantly worse for members of ethnic minorities than for those of a white ethnic background, and for those from disadvantaged areas relative to those not from disadvantaged areas.

Table 17: Outcomes for completed aims by learner background: Ethnicity and disadvantaged areas

Group	Aim achieved	Partial achievement	No achievement	Not known	Total
White British	78.4%	4.3%	14.2%	3.3%	100%
Ethnic minority	72.3%	5.0%	17.6%	5.1%	100%
From disadvantaged area	73.7%	4.5%	16.7%	5.1%	100%
Not from disadvantaged area	78.0%	4.3%	14.4%	3.3%	100%

Conclusions

- 177 In spite of the difficulties with the data, there are some broad and well-evidenced conclusions that can be drawn about the contribution FE makes to the delivery of qualifications at Level 4 and above.
- 178 The first, and most obvious, is the important contribution that the FE sector makes to the total quantity of education at Level 4 and above that is delivered in the public sector. This contribution is focused on two areas. The first is providing alternative routes into 'traditional' higher education for those unable, because of finances, location or low prior educational attainment, to access universities. The second is providing good-quality professional courses and continuing professional development, mostly to working adult learners.
- 179 The analysis presented here suggests that, even after some downward pressure on numbers in the FE sector as a whole, numbers of higher-level learners have held up well. On a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis, it seems that further education colleges (FECs) provide around 8 per cent of all HE delivered in England. Even more significantly, on a learner headcount basis, this figure increases to some 11 per cent, indicating that one higher-level learner in nine is educated in an FE-sector provider.
- 180 Although concerns were voiced by some professional bodies about the standard of some libraries, on the whole the perception, in both FECs themselves and among the professional bodies, was that the resources available in FECs were of high quality and far better than those likely to be accessible through private training providers.
- 181 In general, outcomes and achievements within the FE sector are good and are improving steadily. Achievement on HEFCE-funded courses is especially good – something that reflects well on the ability of FECs to deliver 'traditional' HE to a high standard.
- 182 FE not only makes a quantitatively and qualitatively important contribution to higher-level provision, but it makes an especially significant contribution to access. This is reinforced on the institutional front by a conscious decision by most providers to target resources at learner support, most notably

- through high levels of class contact hours and extensive opportunities for learners to contact their lecturers and tutors. Locality and accessibility, both geographical and psychological, are major attractions of FECs.
- 183 There is compelling evidence that higher-level courses in FECs have a far higher representation of people from disadvantaged areas than courses in higher education institutions (HEIs). This evidence is borne out by comparisons between the profiles of foundation degree learners in FECs and HEIs.
- 184 However, anecdotal evidence suggests that some areas of higher-level provision need attention. The most important of these relate to funding priorities and, in particular, the unintended consequences of focusing Public Service Agreement targets and funding on learners without a 'full' Level 2 or Level 3 qualification.
- 185 Almost all the people approached felt that this had led to increased pressure on discretionary, non-prescribed higher-level education. The result is that many professional bodies are 'losing' FEC providers for their awards, with significant implications for the availability and accessibility of their courses.
- 186 While the professional bodies recognise the need to reduce/contain public subsidy for professional qualifications, they do feel that the suddenness, unpredictability and inconsistency of funding choices present huge problems.
- 187 Colleges therefore need more support to make the change from a public-funding model to an entrepreneurial one. This was felt to be a matter of urgency, particularly by those professional bodies with the largest enrolments.
- 188 But this is only one aspect of broader difficulties in co-ordinating approaches to funding across the divide between the two funding bodies, the LSC and HEFCE. The two funding bodies have recognised these challenges are now working collaboratively to resolve them. The funding bodies have developed a joint framework for collaborative working on higher-level vocational learning and skills (HLVLS). This provides an excellent opportunity to harmonise policy, procedures and priorities across the funding boundary,

and is potentially of huge benefit for both colleges and learners working at the interface between the HE and FE sectors.

189 In general, then, FECs can clearly be shown to have a major role to play in the delivery of courses at Level 4 and above, and especially in engaging disadvantaged learners. However, there are serious concerns about the impact of funding changes on the delivery of professional qualifications. These remain a major strength of the FE portfolio, and there are real fears that current funding pressures may cause an irreversible decline in their availability, with deleterious consequences for accessibility and social mobility. These issues are a priority for consideration within the joint HLVLS agenda.

Recommendations

190 The current research, and therefore its effectiveness, has been impeded in various respects by the lack of co-ordinated data from the LSC and HEFCE. Future work – both for strategic purposes and for illustrative research work like the present study – would be facilitated and improved if the following recommendation is carried forward.

Recommendation 1: Steps should be taken to harmonise data collection and analysis by the LSC and HEFCE. The introduction of the unique learner identifier will enable outcomes and progression, and the true extent of HE activity in further education colleges (FECs) to be tracked accurately. It might even be advantageous if all data collection and analysis were concentrated in a single organisation responsible to both the LSC and HEFCE.

191 Professional bodies are a critically important contributor to the higher-level landscape. They are already deeply engaged with the FE sector, and not just at the higher levels. However, they currently feel that they are not sufficiently well informed of changes to funding arrangements, at both national and local levels, that impinge on their course offerings. In addition, several feel that, with appropriate support from the LSC, they could play a valuable role in helping colleges to move towards offering professional courses as full-cost provision when public subsidy is withdrawn. This would have considerable benefits for the FE sector, as well as for learners and businesses; and, beyond the limits of higher-level professional qualifications, would also be valuable preparation for the forthcoming move towards a more demand-led educational system.

Recommendation 2: The LSC should attempt to co-operate more closely with the professional bodies. In particular, it should give earlier warning of changes to funding policies that are likely to impinge on non-prescribed provision at both national and local level. In addition, it should consider supporting those professional bodies willing to help colleges move from a public-subsidy to a more entrepreneurial model of offering full-cost provision. The entrepreneurial model is an important lever in the move towards transforming the FE system to meet demand.

192 It seems evident that the funding model at the higher level is somewhat disjointed and that a lower priority is given to higher-level courses as a result of the focus on Level 2 priorities. However, the Leitch review and the drive for world-class skills and workforce performance demand much of the higher levels. This leads to our next recommendation.

Recommendation 3: There should be continued collaboration with HEFCE in order to support the delivery of the Leitch aspiration for provision at Level 4 and above. In particular, there should be further exploration of the possibility of identifying higher-level skills as a priority for the LSC. This would help prevent the current widely perceived tendency for the Level 2 and Level 3 entitlements to dominate funding decisions, and help protect vulnerable professional qualifications until the full benefits of the Joint Progression Strategy collaborative programme of work on higher-level skills filter through.

193 The LSC and HEFCE are already collaborating on resolving the difficulties produced by the division of responsibilities for higher-level qualifications through their higher-level vocational learning and skills (HLVLS) agenda.

Recommendation 4: The collaborative work with HEFCE should continue within the framework of the HLVLS agenda, and the progress made so far in developing a joint agenda for HLVLS should be built on. Moves should be made to harmonise the funding policies of the LSC and HEFCE for higher-level provision, so as to ensure that there is a seamless transition at the interface between the higher and the further education sectors for both colleges and learners.

Annex A – Professional Bodies and Their Main Characteristics

Definitions

- 1 There are many types of **professional bodies**, including associations, governing bodies, institutes, and also employer bodies and trade unions.
- 2 **Regulatory bodies**, on the other hand, control and regulate entry into, and progression through, a specific occupation. They are usually, but not always, statutory.
- 3 Regulatory and professional bodies can both have educational and/or training roles.

Purposes

- 4 The primary function of regulatory bodies is to protect the public. Unlike professional bodies, they are usually established on the basis of legal mandate. However, like professional bodies, which have an education and training role, regulatory bodies issue standards and/or codes of conduct (as approved codes of practice or ACoPs) that are similar in effect to a legal mandate. (Wherever possible, regulations set out goals and general principles, while details are placed in codes and guidance. For example, approved codes of practice within health and safety set out ways of achieving standards.) The requirements set out by a regulatory body set out the standards an individual must be able to demonstrate, in order to practise in the given area or sector.
- 5 In addition to this, regulatory bodies also monitor the activities of firms and individuals, to ensure that they are adhering to any specific legislation relating to their given profession or occupation. This is particularly the case in circumstances where there are explicit health and safety reasons for the legislation, for example a driver's working hours.
- 6 Although the range of such bodies extends from the Health and Safety Executive to organisations that regulate the health and the social care professions, not every sector has a regulatory body.

- 7 The main purpose of professional bodies is, like regulatory bodies, to safeguard public interest; but they primarily represent the interests of their members, who can achieve, on set criteria, professional accreditation. More and more professional bodies are including further criteria for members' continuous professional development in their given field. Membership of a professional body is, in the main, voluntary, but occasionally it is mandatory.
- 8 It is not known exactly how many professional bodies there are. One of the main reasons for this is that there are many different interpretations of what constitutes a 'professional body'.
- 9 Unlike many other countries, the United Kingdom has no legal definition of a 'profession', and the term has come to be loaded with historical and status connotations. Today, professional bodies consist of all the traditional organisations linked to the major professions, such as medicine and law, accountancy and architecture, but also those that style themselves 'professional'. In essence, any body that regulates an occupational group – whether nurses or airline pilots, web designers or lawyers – is now able to meet the broadest definitions of a professional body.
- 10 Another reason for being unable to pin down the exact number of professional bodies is that new organisations, with apparently similar purposes, are constantly being set up. These organisations include:
 - **associations** – examples of which include the Association of Business Executives, the British Association of Landscape Industries, and the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists;
 - **governing bodies** – such as for sports, including the Amateur Swimming Association, the Football Association or the Jockey Club;
 - **societies** – such as the Society of Environmental Engineers, the Royal Horticultural Society or the Market Research Society;

- **trade associations** – representing whole industries or sectors, such as the Electrical Contractors Association or the British Printing Industries Federation;
 - **trades unions** – representing individuals in a sector or across sectors, such as Amicus or Unison.
- 11 For further information on the terminology (such as ‘institute’ or ‘association’) used in the names of professional bodies, see paragraphs 19 and 20 below.
- 12 The work undertaken by professional bodies often links closely to that carried out by sector skills councils (SSCs). This commonality of purpose includes a role in education and training, through offering a range of qualifications, making use of a set of standards and enabling progression and continuing professional development. Some professional bodies also work with SSCs on developing qualifications (e.g. specialised diplomas) and sector qualification strategies.
- 13 **Professional standards** usually outline the professional (i.e. technical, behavioural and ethical) principles that a practitioner in a given occupation is expected to demonstrate in order to remain a member of a professional body.
- 14 They differ from National Occupational Standards (NOS), which outline the skills and knowledge an individual requires in order to perform a job role.
- 15 The differences are not always immediately apparent, but users often associate professional bodies with professional standards, and SSCs with NOS. Visually, they can be distinguished by their different phrasing and presentational format.

Categorisation

- 16 Arguably, there are three main categories encompassing the roles and responsibilities of regulatory and professional bodies:

- **standards for a licence to practise:** complete regulation of an entire occupational area, maintaining a register of practitioners (membership being legally required) and having powers to de-register people under certain circumstances;
- **de facto control – standards but no licence:** occupational regulation, but with no statutory power to create and maintain a register of practitioners through compulsory registration (though, in effect and for various reasons, regulation exists);
- **standards are voluntary, except in membership:** in this third category, standards are only a practising requirement for members of the body, and do not apply to everyone seeking to work in that occupation.

Qualifications

- 17 Some occupations, for statutory or regulatory reasons, require an individual to attain a series of defined qualifications and undertake a period of practical training, in order to receive professional status.
- 18 Many occupations do not have a statutory basis or a regulatory requirement for a qualification. However, more and more frequently some 'proof of competence' is required for an individual or business to meet contractual obligations, or even a statutory obligation. So, for example, businesses that handle/offer food and drink do not require their employees to have a food safety-related qualification; however, if, on inspection, the business is found to be failing in food-safety matters, then the employer could, ultimately, be at risk of losing the business.

Terminology

- 19 The following words imply business pre-eminence or representative or authoritative status:
- **association, federation or society** – if it wishes to use one of these words, a company would normally be **limited by guarantee**. Each member should have one vote, and the constitution should contain a non-profit distribution clause. This provides for any profits to be used

to further the objectives of the company, and not to be paid to the members as dividends;

- **authority, board or council** – if it wants to use any of these words, a company should seek advice from Companies House (or similar);
- **institute or institution** – approval for the use of these words is normally given only to those organisations that are carrying out research at the highest level, or to professional bodies of the highest standing. They will need to show that there is a need for the proposed institute, and that it has appropriate regulations or examination standards. They will need evidence of support from other representative and independent bodies.

20 The following words imply specific objectives or functions:

- **charter or chartered** – names that include these words will be refused if they unjustifiably give the impression that the company has a Royal Charter. If the words are used to qualify a profession, advice will be sought from the appropriate governing body before any consideration of whether to give approval.
- **register or registered** – every application for the use of these words is considered on its merits. Generally, advice is sought from the appropriate governing body, if names that include these words are linked with a professional qualification. The name will not be registered if it unjustifiably implies a connection with HM Government or a local authority. If such a connection actually exists, the name may be allowed if the appropriate body supports the application.

Annex B – References

The following are sources specifically referenced in the text.

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HEFCE (2006b) *Provision of higher education study by location 2004–05*, HEFCE report 2006/29, available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_29/

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HEFCE (2007a) *Students Registered at One Institution but Taught by Another 2005–06*, HEFCE report 2007/07, available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2007/07_07/07_07.pdf

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Annex C – HE in FE Thematic Bibliography

This bibliography does not aim for exhaustiveness, but rather gives an overview of relevant documentation identified during research for the present study.

The political and strategic framework

Central government

White Papers

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(especially Chapter 5, 5.24 on funding arrangements)

DfES (2003) *21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential*, at

www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/21st%20Century%20Skills.pdf

DfES (2005) *Skills: Getting on in Business, Getting on in Work*, at

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DfES (2005) *14–19 Education and Skills*, at

www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills/pdfs/14-19WhitePaper.pdf

DfES (2006) *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*, at

www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm67/6768/6768.pdf

DfES (2007) *Raising Skills, Improving Life chances*, update at

www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/uploads/documents/FEWP_OneYearOn_web2.pdf

Reviews

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Foster, Sir Andrew (2004) *Bureaucracy Review Group for Further Education and Training, Annual Report*, at www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/uploads/documents/2004BRGFIRSTAnnReport2-40-68.pdf

Foster, Sir Andrew (2005) *Realising the Potential: A review of the future role of further education colleges*, at www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/uploads/documents/REALISING06.pdf

Leitch, Lord (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*, at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/6/4/leitch_finalreport051206.pdf

Funding documents

Grant letter to the LSC, 2006–07 (sets targets, highlights challenges for the HE in FE sector).

General documents

A large number of relevant documents are available at

www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/index.cfm?DocCategoryID=4&useaction=library.list

DfES (2002) *Success for All*, at www.globalgateway.org.uk/pdf/PZ-Success-2002.pdf (the initial vision statement for the reform of FE and HE).

DfES (2007) Briefing paper on changes to institutional arrangements in central government, at www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/uploads/documents/August07QAbriefforFE.doc

DfES/LSC (2007) *Delivering World-class Skills in a Demand-led System*, at <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/nat-deliveringworldclassskills-jan07.pdf>

QIA (2007) *Pursuing Excellence: the National Improvement Strategy for the further education system*, at www.qia.org.uk/pursuingexcellence/pdf/qiaPublication.pdf

LSC national

LSC (2005) *agenda for change: The prospectus*, at <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/LSC/2005/quality/reshaping/agenda-for-change-prospectus.pdf>

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HEFCE

HEFCE (1998) *Funding higher education in further education colleges*, Report 98/59, at www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/1998/98_59.htm

HEFCE (1999) *Widening participation: special funding programme 1998–99: Outcome of bids*, Report 99/07, at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/1999/99_07.htm

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HEFCE (2003) *Centres for excellence in teaching and learning: Formal consultation*, at www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2003/03_36.htm

HEFCE (2006) *Consultation on Higher Education in Further Education Colleges*, Report 2006/48, at www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/reports/he0015.pdf

HEFCE (2006) *Strategic Plan*, Report 2006/13, at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_13/ (esp. paragraph 92).

HEFCE (2006) *Review of Higher Education in Further Education Colleges*, at www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/reports/he0017.pdf (introductory document for the current review of HE in FE).

HEFCE research reports

Field, J. (2002) *Links between Further and Higher Education: a contextual report*. Bristol: HEFCE.

HEFCE (2006) *Higher Education in Further Education: Students Survey 2006–07*, Report 06/37, at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_37/

Thomas, E., Quinn, J., Slack, K. and Williams, S. (2001) *Widening Participation: Evaluation of the collaboration between higher education institutions and further education colleges to increase participation in higher education*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Background Information

Fundamental basic resources

FE/HE Practitioner Group Report on Mixed Economy Institutions (2004), at www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/reports/he0016.pdf (very useful background on development of MEIs and the cultural and political tensions at work involving HEFCE and the LSC; also very valuable discussions on the incompleteness of the available statistics on FE in HE on p. 19).

HEA (2007) *Directory of HE in FE in England 2007*, at www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/institutions/HEinFEDirectoryAug2007.pdf (this includes all HE in FE contacts at all FECs). See also www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/institutions/heinfe

Norfolk County Council/Norfolk Learning Partnership (2006) *An Employers' Guide to Qualifications*, at www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/reports/rs0506.pdf (very useful overview of qualifications, including tabulated breakdowns of all the basic qualification types, and suggestions for finding further information).

On FE in HE specifically, the following four reports from the LSDA are excellent:

Parry, G., Davies, P. and Williams, J. (2003) *Dimensions of Difference. Education in the learning and skills sector*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency, at www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/reports/he0008.pdf (fundamental basic information, including important statistics – very valuable).

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FE/HE Practitioner Group Report on Mixed Economy Institutions (July 2004), at www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/reports/he0016.pdf (a useful background on development of MEIs and the cultural and political tensions at work).

KPMG (2003) *Models of HE/FE Mixed Economy Provision*, at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR458.pdf (a small sample study by KPMG of mixed economy institutions, jointly funded by DfES, HEFCE and LSC; very useful – packed with information on the FE/HE interface, well put together and careful to state its own limitations; also useful information on the challenges involved in getting statistical information on FE students in the HE sector).

Memorandum submitted by the Mixed Economy Group of Colleges to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Skills, at www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmeduski/425/3022608.htm (a response to the 2003 Future of Higher Education White Paper, it includes an interesting call for funding arrangements with HEFCE and the LSC to remain broadly the same, re 5.24 of White Paper).

Non-prescribed HE

See publications on the web page

www.lseducation.org.uk/research/centres/RCFTeachLearnCurricQual/programmes.aspx

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The 'HE ethos' and quality assurance

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Widdowson, John (2003) HE in FE and scholarly activity: A discussion paper. HEFCE 2003/15, at www.theresearchcentre.co.uk/reports/he0012.pdf (useful distinction between 'scholarly activity' and 'research' in HE in FE context).

Access to HE

www.accesstohe.ac.uk/ (a good starting point for information).

HEFCE (2006) *Pathways to Higher Education: Access Courses*, at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2006/06_16/06_16.pdf

QAA (2006) Key Statistics, available at www.qaa.ac.uk/access/statistics/2006/key_stats_2006.asp (shows significant advantages of Access to HE courses in terms of attracting women, ethnic minorities (especially those who are currently under-represented) into HE; a full archive of statistics can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/access/statistics/default.asp).

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Accessibility/minority groups

The major synthesis of research in this field was produced for HEFCE in 2006. There is a comprehensive annotated bibliography current to 2006 identifying some 1,200 pieces of research relevant to these topics. It is downloadable from

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The review that came out of it is:

Gorard, S. And Smith, E. (2006) *Review of widening participation research: Addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*, at **www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/RDreports/2006/rd13_06/barriers.pdf**

The discussion paper that came out of that is:

Watson, Sir David (2006) *How to think about widening participation in UK higher education: Discussion paper for HEFCE by David Watson, Institute of Education, University of London*, at **www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/RDreports/2006/rd13_06/think.pdf** (excellent quote for our purposes on page 5, in the context of discussion of increasing social division related to participation/non-participation in HE ‘We are doing less well in immediate post-compulsory education, and this is where the fork in the road between the engaged and the disengaged appears to be.’).

Finally, see also the HEFCE review based on statistics showing decreased participation:

HEFCE (2006) *Widening participation: A review*, at www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/aimhigh/WPfinalreview.pdf

Additional material

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Costs

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guide to funding sources for NQF non-prescribed higher level professional courses).

Vocational education

Little, B., Connor, H., Lebeau, Y., Pierce, D., Sinclair, E., Thomas, L. and Yarrow, K. (2003) *Vocational Higher Education: Does it meet employers' needs?* London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

Regional Studies

HEFCE (2005) *Options for Higher Education in Herefordshire, Powys and Shropshire*, at (www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2005/rd07_05/) (some interesting statistics on p. ii about desire for local HE provision).

Statistics

These present considerable difficulties because of the division of record keeping between the LSC and HESA, and the different standards used by the two agencies. The most important basic data is:

HEFCE (2007) *Students registered at one institution but taught by another 2005–06: Tables of franchised students*, at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2007/07_07/ and http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2007/07_07/07_07.pdf and previous years' editions of the same report (HEFCE reports 00/55, 01/70, 2002/51, 2004/02, 2004/36 and 2006/05) – with the warning that data definitions and methods change, thus limiting the degree to which they can be used for time-series studies: duplicates have been removed **only** for the latest figures.

HEFCE (2007) *Provision of higher education study by location 2005–06*, at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2007/07_21/ and previous years' editions of the same report (HEFCE reports 2005/22, 2006/29).

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Summary

www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/RDreports/2006/rd22_06/rd22_06.pdf

Response and survey methodology

www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/RDreports/2006/rd22_06/Responsereport.pdf

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Full report

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