



## **Exploring scholarship and scholarly activity in college-based Higher Education**

**Part 2. The Survey Report. The role of research, scholarship, scholarly activity and CPD in supporting the delivery of college based Higher Education.**

## **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to the many college staff who took part in our survey of scholarly activity arrangements. This primary research, enriched by a subsequent series of telephone interviews, has added to the understanding of the context in which scholarly activity takes place and the challenges facing practitioners.

A number of professional bodies also provided information about their approach to scholarly activity. This enabled us to compare definitions and expectations between those concerned with Prescribed and Non-Prescribed Higher Education and added to our information base.

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## Introduction

The Part 1 paper in this three-stage project highlighted the need to explore the nature and usefulness of the definitions of scholarly activity that are currently in place within college-based Higher Education. It also brought to the fore the importance of considering the extent of strategic engagement with scholarly activity and its application within institutions. It suggested the need to explore the drivers and barriers to the strategic development of HE, the effect of these on policy and practice, and the impact of scholarly activity on teaching and learning. Paper 1 also referred to the strategies and practice that have worked to support the delivery of college-based HE and provided recommendations for future action on the part of colleges and national organisations alike. Here in Part 2 we set out the results of a survey that was undertaken to explore the issues which emerged from Part 1.

### 1. Research Methodology

The enquiry took place across April – May 2013 and was made up of four stages: an on-line survey, a set of voluntary interviews undertaken with college representatives who had been responsible for completing the survey and a discussion with professional body representatives around their expectations with regards to the scholarly activity that they expect from staff who teach their higher-level qualifications. A Focus Group will scrutinize and review the initial research findings and advise on the content of Part 3, which will offer examples of scholarly activity in practice.

A wide range of colleges contributed to the on-line survey. Liaison with senior staff in the Association of Colleges, the 157 Group and the HEA enabled the research to include colleges other than those in membership of the Mixed Economy Group. A total of 257 FE colleges offer Higher Education courses in England<sup>1</sup> and the survey was of interest to many staff, including teachers in three Australian colleges and one institution in New Zealand. (Their responses broadly paralleled those of their UK colleagues but were not included in the analysis.) English respondents included specialist Art and Design and Land Based colleges. Once duplicate or largely incomplete responses were eliminated, 60 colleges (about 23% of all those offering HE) provided the core data from which our findings are drawn. Where duplicate responses were received from colleges, the return provided by the most senior member of staff was selected for inclusion.

The questionnaire was designed to enable the collation of background information about each institution in terms of the size and nature of its Higher Education provision, embracing both Prescribed and Non-prescribed HE and both Full and Part-Time study modes. It set out to investigate the way in which colleges defined scholarly activity, embedded such activity within strategic planning documents or college policies, and then implemented it. Impact (as opposed to follow-up) measures were of particular interest.

Twenty five interviews were undertaken after completion of the survey, involving participants from colleges of various sizes and with a range of provision and practices. These were drawn from respondents who had indicated a willingness to take part in a

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<sup>1</sup> AoC Key facts 2012

telephone interview once the formal survey had closed. The discussions provided an opportunity for participants to share further details about their approach to scholarly activity and each one normally lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Interview transcripts were then coded and a thematic analysis undertaken. Where themes emerged, investigative analysis was then reapplied to the complete data set as provided by the survey responses. Whilst most interviewees appeared more familiar with Prescribed HE than Non-Prescribed, all had a broad sense of how their institution met the need for higher education/higher level skills in their geographical areas and the expectations of employers, QAA, partner HEIs, etc. that accompanied this.

Representatives from six professional bodies contributed their views on scholarly activity in terms of their expectations with regards to staff teaching their higher level qualifications and the annual professional updating (CPD) expected of their members. This served to support the wider perspective on the nature of scholarly activity across all forms of Higher Education.

## **2. Findings from the Enquiry**

### **(a) The nature and size of provision**

The data provided by the survey respondents illustrated wide variations in terms of the scope, nature and size of HE provision delivered in the FE sector. It included some of those new to the sector as well as more established providers.

Whilst the highly-variable combinations of Full and Part Time, Prescribed and Non-Prescribed provision make absolute comparison of provision difficult, the number of Full Time students at each institution appears to be a key driver for establishing the status of HE provision within the largely FE environment of most colleges. The survey records 25 colleges with more than 500 Full Time Higher Education students (regarded as a large volume of HE provision), 10 colleges with between 301 and 500 Full Time students (medium volume), and 25 colleges with 200 or fewer Full Time students (a small volume of provision).

This illustrates the increasingly diverse nature of HE in FE in terms of size and nature of provision.

### **(b) Defining Scholarly Activity**

As noted above, the survey results suggest an association between the number of Full Time HE students and the approach taken to scholarly activity. Colleges which indicated that they provided a definition of scholarly activity were more likely to be found in the medium/large volume provider categories: the use of an HE Strategy to further embed such a definition, or indeed to provide an implicit definition was predominant only where there were larger numbers of Full Time students. [Table 1]

| <b>Provision</b>  | <b>Number of colleges</b> | <b>Percentage providing a definition of Scholarly Activity</b> | <b>Percentage defining Scholarly Activity within HE Strategy</b> |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| Small : < 300     | 25                        | 40%  | 36%  |
| Medium: 301 - 500 | 10                        | 60%  | 40%  |
| Large: >500       | 25                        | 80%  | 76%  |
| Total             | 60                        | 60%  | 53%  |

Table 1. Volume of FT HE students and definition of scholarly activity

However, only 35 of the 60 colleges have a definition of scholarly activity. Of these, 7 use a definition provided by a partner HEI. Those who do not have one reported that they are under no pressure to develop a definition by partner universities. (In some cases it was suggested that the HEI saw scholarly activity as being the element that they brought to the partnership.)

This proportion is broadly unchanged from the earlier MEG study of 2010<sup>2</sup>, when half of the responding colleges had evolved a definition of scholarly activity. The remaining half reported that this was not regarded as a necessity by either the college senior management teams or the partner universities. However, all 2013 respondents (as in 2010) considered it to be central to the delivery of high quality HE. As we will explore later, this raises the question of how, without a clear definition as a starting point, an activity perceived as a determining feature of HE can be nurtured and developed, and its impact on teaching and learning assessed.

It can be inferred that HE strategies do not appear to have survived as a free-standing, on-going planning and delivery mechanism beyond the first few years of being a HEFCE requirement. The majority of colleges reported that scholarly activity is embedded in other strategies (most usually the staff development policy) and/or other policy documents. [Fig. 1]. Two of the smaller providers advised that there was no definition, embedded or otherwise of scholarly activity, whilst a further six colleges with small provision did not provide a response to the question. This current analysis therefore suggests that scholarly activity is seen as being part of staff development policy in the majority of responding institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Scholarly activity in higher education delivered in further education: a study by the Mixed Economy Group

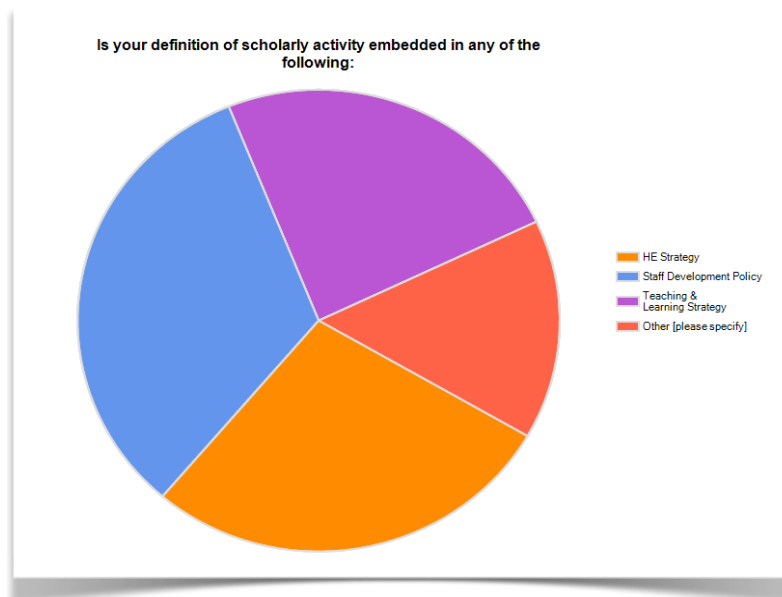


Figure 1. Location of definition of scholarly activity

A range of definitions emerged from amongst the colleges which have evolved a description of scholarly activity. There is probably a broad consensus that scholarly activity has to involve something new, either by creating new knowledge or applying new knowledge to an existing situation. One respondent, asked to distinguish between CPD and scholarly activity, commented that:

*“There has to be a big element of self-development, rather than having to do it as a license to practice. If they have to do it, it isn’t scholarly activity. The activity must add something new, it must come out of a “what if...?” moment. That’s the breakpoint from ordinary updating.”*

One college was specific about what was and what was not included in their definition: asked to define scholarly activity, it offered:

*“...a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared. ....We exclude routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques, and we also exclude the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research. However, we include the development of teaching materials where these embody original research, and where these might be applicable to HE institutions beyond the College.”*

Some colleges offered clear published definitions that distinguished scholarly activity “Activity which develops or promotes staff expertise in their discipline” from research: “Original enquiry into a matter of academic or professional interest resulting in publication in peer referenced journals, etc.”

Others provided lists of activities which were viewed as scholarly activity, of which the following is typical:

| Type of Scholarly Activity   | Examples of Activities  |
|--|---|
| Curriculum development   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>designing/reviewing HE courses and/or modules</li> </ul>   |
| Conference/seminar attendance  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College HE Conference</li> <li>HE in FE or pedagogic conference/seminar</li> <li>subject conference/seminar</li> </ul>   |
| Conference participation - delivering a presentation or workshop at a conference     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the College HE Conference</li> <li>HE in FE or pedagogic conference/seminar</li> <li>Subject conference/seminar</li> </ul>   |
| Consultancy and professional practice  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>practising professional that relates to area of teaching (e.g. counsellor, artist, veterinary nurse, website designer)</li> <li>film or music production</li> <li>participation in professional body meeting (e.g. RCVS)</li> </ul>                        |
| Exhibition of work   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exhibit of art or jewellery at gallery or museum.</li> </ul>   |
| Subject updating   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reading journals, etc</li> <li>peer review of journal article</li> </ul>   |
| Training   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>training provided by awarding body on curriculum developments or quality methods</li> <li>training by equipment supplier on use of new/updated equipment</li> <li>College-based training on pedagogic developments or sharing of good practice.</li> </ul> |
| Research - investigation and reporting of specified question                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effect of feed on horse racing performance?</li> <li>what is the best way to peer review HE lessons?</li> </ul>  |
| Action research - using work/practice to investigate and report a specified question | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can the provision of generic feedback improve students' future assignment work?</li> <li>is multiple choice questioning a valid HE assessment method?</li> </ul>   |
| Industry/Employer liaison  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gaining knowledge (and specific examples) of latest industry advances, techniques or methods through industry visits, etc.</li> <li>industry secondment</li> <li>recorded discussion with employer around specific topic</li> </ul>                        |
| Publication  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>publishing research findings in a peer-reviewed journal or appropriate internet site</li> <li>authoring a book, chapter or other publication</li> </ul>  |
| Personal and professional development  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working towards teaching qualifications or higher level qualifications</li> <li>management training</li> </ul>   |
| External verification/examining  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>being an external examiner for other HE provider</li> </ul>  |

More generally, a particular development has been the move away from an understanding of the term “scholarly activity” as only having an emphasis on research and intellectual updating:

*“The college has put the emphasis back to Scholarship from Research in order to challenge assertions made by academics from HEIs, on validation Panels, that staff*



*at the college were not engaged in activities that underpinned their teaching. The move was a positive one towards the term scholarship (away from the excluding concept research) and was designed to embrace, include and celebrate the work that colleagues are engaged in, rather than collude with ideas that it was something of less value and worth.”*

Some colleges made reference to the definitions supplied by Boyer (1990) who defined scholarly activity as encompassing

- The scholarship of discovery: includes original research that advances knowledge;
- The scholarship of integration: involves synthesis of information across disciplines, across topics within a discipline, or across time;
- The scholarship of application (also later called the scholarship of engagement): goes beyond the service duties of a faculty member to those within or outside the university and involves the rigour and application of disciplinary expertise with results that can be shared with and/or evaluated by peers;
- The scholarship of teaching and learning: the systematic study of teaching and learning processes. It requires a format that will allow public sharing and the opportunity for application and evaluation by others.

However, few colleges cited Boyer as the starting point in their deliberations about scholarly activity. In all cases, the approach to this matter appears to have evolved from an analysis of current circumstances and current resources, rather than a deliberate move to mould a college policy to an academic construct. Publications from national agencies, such as the QAA and the HEFCE, indicate an embracing of this wider understanding of scholarly activity. (See QAA 2013<sup>3</sup>, HEFCE 2009<sup>4</sup>) In parallel, a significant number of colleges have reported a more strategic engagement with the nature of scholarship, in particular with activities which could be referred to as the scholarship of application. However, this is more a case of parallel evolution than the focused application of Boyer’s proposition.

Conversely, a number of respondents suggested that it was not necessary to have a written definition or statement about scholarly activity as long as policies and practice allow and encourage scholarly activity to take place. Others made the point (previously noted in the 2010 report) that it is virtually impossible to ascribe a direct link between scholarly activity, quality of curriculum and student success rates.

*“The impact of scholarly activity on TLA is often very weak, which undermines the case for it.”*

*“Measuring the impact of staff doing scholarly activity is almost impossible because of the subjective nature of the activities”*

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<sup>3</sup> Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: Expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding powers and for Taught degree-awarding powers.

<sup>4</sup> Supporting higher education in further education colleges: Policy, practice and prospects. HEFCE 2009/05:

However, where colleges are on the journey towards a formal process of quality review or applying for FDAP or TDAP they acknowledged that QAA expectations assume that there is such a link and that formal processes are in place and activities are logged.

More pragmatically, it was noted by some colleges that in a difficult financial environment, not having formal scholarly activity policies and procedures can suggest that the resources needed to deliver them are unnecessary. A number of colleges are actively setting about writing policies to justify and secure what is currently established (in terms of contractual teaching hours, scholarly activity budgets and allocations) and to provide a case to establish a budget/provide remission/secure opportunities for scholarly activity.

All of the interview respondents were upbeat about scholarly activity, seeing it as something which was intrinsic to being an HE teacher. Despite pressures on time and budgets, at no stage did any respondent suggest that staff could not or would not make time to undertake scholarly activity.

The earlier report (King & Widdowson, 2010) suggested three categories of scholarship:

- Category 1 - Scholarly activity as research, intellectual updating, academic development;
- Category 2 - a broader context of keeping up to date with the curriculum, industrial secondment;
- Category 3 - scholarly activity that meets the strategic aims of the organisation (for example, the improvement of learning and teaching).

The definitions of scholarly activity emerging from the enquiry undertaken in 2013 suggest continued alignment with Categories 2 and 3 (King & Widdowson, 2010) as institutions continue to develop their curriculum and seek improvements in learning and teaching. There is, however, some greater emphasis on a definition of scholarly activity that accords with national guidance (QAA, 2013; HEA, 2012) as colleges prepare for reviews (IQR/HER), look to achieve FDAP/TDAP and/or work to engage with the HEA's UKPSF.

Alternatively, it could be said that there are three pragmatic drivers for the continued survival of scholarly activity in the setting of an FE college – an external imperative directed by QAA, an operational reality developed by practitioners such as those working in MEG colleges, and a more philosophical view which aspires to apply Boyer's approach to an HE in FE setting.

### (c) Forms of Scholarly Activity

The survey sought to establish whether the opportunities for teaching staff to undertake scholarly activity within a college differed according to their role. The researchers wanted to find out if there was a distinction that applied to those teaching on HE programmes (whether Full Time or as a subset of their timetable) and those

who only taught Further Education. The responses indicated that teachers of all types of provision have the opportunity to undertake scholarly activity albeit that the nature and extent of that activity was variable [Fig. 2]. The only distinguishing feature to emerge was the lack of involvement by FE staff in curriculum design (a possibly not-unexpected result) or publication. In 40 colleges, staff who teach Non-Prescribed HE are also encouraged to undertake scholarly activity, suggesting that most colleges involved in the survey adopted a whole-college approach to scholarly activity. Sixteen colleges advised that staff were involved in activities not listed in the survey, citing examples such as engagement with journals, attendance at conferences and exhibition work as further types of scholarly activity.

The survey did not specifically explore the position of PT staff who were still active in their original profession. However, two specialist Art and Design colleges took part in our survey and the interviews which followed. In both cases the majority of staff employed in the colleges are Part Time and actively pursuing professional careers in the creative arts. Both respondents made the point that their students gained significantly from the on-going professional development of their tutors, many of whom were recognised as experts in their fields. In both colleges the development of scholarly activity amongst teaching staff was regarded as a priority. This was partly to raise their profile in a competitive HE environment but also to illustrate that current professional practice could of itself be developmental and lead to new techniques and new ways of teaching and learning.

Further work is needed to look at the contribution made by PT staff to scholarly activity within their colleges. Many are still active in their original subject and are thus continually updating curriculum content as a matter of course. The perspective of PT teaching staff may therefore be different from that of their FT colleagues.

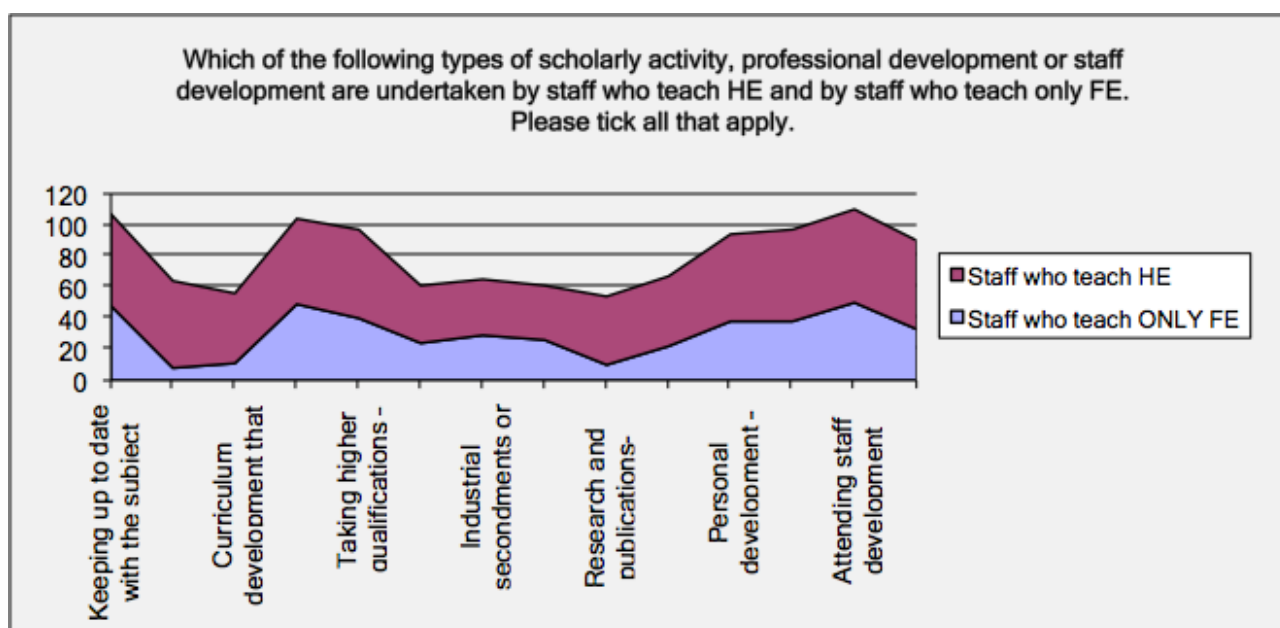


Figure 2. Scholarly Activity as undertaken by FE and HE staff.

Further examples of scholarly activity were gathered during the interviews, highlighting engagement with 'live briefs' or similar industry based projects (often with the involvement of students), action research, collaborative work with staff at the partner university and project work funded by LSIS, JISC or the HEA.

Whilst many colleges were able to illustrate a definition of scholarly activity by reference to a menu of high-level activities, nearly 50% of respondents quoted a general list which ranged from current updating to action research. As we will see later, this tendency to blur the normal expectations of a teaching professional with activity that might be regarded as CPD as opposed to higher-level work is unhelpful to the argument for an established and, more importantly, distinctive, culture of HE in FE.

#### (d) External support/drivers for Scholarly Activity

Some 57% of respondents are engaged in scholarly activity with the support of one of their partner HEIs or with professional associations such as HEA, IfL etc, a survey statistic that broadly aligned with that reported during interviews (12/25). Six respondents also made reference to support available through engaging with LSIS and a further 4 underlined the importance of teacher education/training in supporting scholarly activity. There were also 5 reports of colleges seeking support for projects from JISC. Four large providers of Higher Education, seeking or having gained awarding powers, reported a wider awareness of the bidding processes, and reported the benefits of engaging with multiple agencies. However, the nature of this engagement and its relationship to the college definition of scholarly activity is unclear.

The value of institutional and individual engagement with the HEA emerged from the interviews, with 4 interviewees describing the recent move to institutional membership of the Academy. Four colleges for whom FDAP was a key priority indicated a more established relationship with the work of the HEA, describing the way in which their college was working to support staff engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework. Indeed, the greatest driver for strategic recognition of scholarly activity was reported as being the guidance from and compliance with the requirements of the QAA. Ten of the interviewees highlighted the importance of scholarly activity in relation to an application for Taught/Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP/FDAP) or the impact of their preparations for and experience of IQER or HER.

#### (e) College Structural support for Scholarly Activity

The nature of institutional support for the development of scholarly activity was explored through interviews undertaken with more than a third of the total survey respondents. Seven out of 25 college representatives referred to the value associated with the support of senior college managers and three interviewees underlined the importance of support received from their Governing Body. In each case the strategic drive from the college leadership was perceived as a main driver of very positive engagement with scholarly activity.

Research participants also reported the implicit support of the senior management team through the provision of institutional enabling or directing structures, including HE policy developments. Examples of structural support were indicated in the survey [Fig. 4] and this picture was supplemented by mechanisms reported by interviewees. These included:

- funding for higher level qualifications either through HE staff development budgets or through an internal system for research bids;
- formal provision of secondment opportunities/unpaid research leave or days for scholarly activity;
- establishment of support from or collaborative work with the partner HEI(s);
- formalised support for industry engagement;
- the development of a SA Handbook;
- the development of an HE community/ethos/practitioner group;
- the establishment of a HE staffing review group to link policy initiatives.

Despite the positive impact reported through engagement with such institutional initiatives and structures, the majority of participants (48 colleges) reported that most teachers undertake scholarly activity outside of formal working hours. This is not unexpected – and may also be true for much of the research undertaken in some post-92 universities and University Colleges. In a college setting it may also reflect the difficulty in obtaining blocks of free time (as opposed to an hour or so here and there) in which to undertake further study.

Only 9 colleges reported that HE staff are paid at a higher rate than their FE colleagues and are expected to undertake scholarly activity as a result. 13 referred to arrangements with a partner HEI whereby the university enabled staff to undertake scholarly activity – presumably through reduced cost or free access to Masters or Ph.D. programmes or other research activities and conferences, but the nature and extent of these arrangements was generally unspecified.

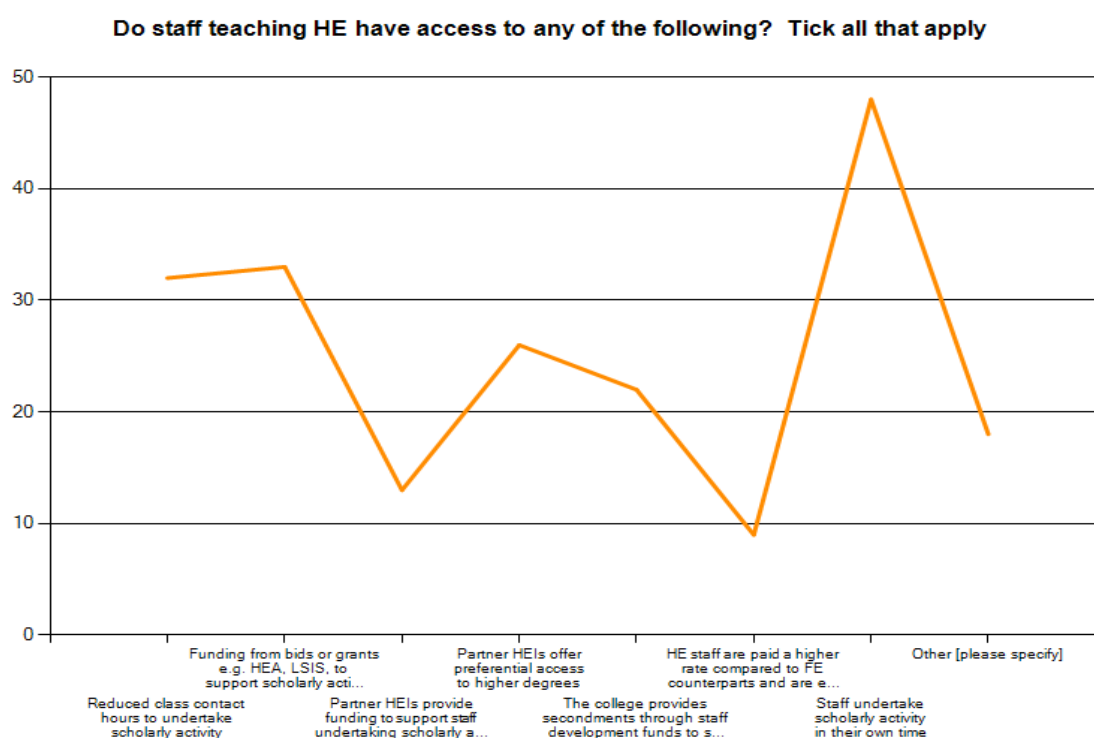


Figure 4. Forms of support for scholarly activity

(f) Barriers to engagement with scholarly activity

Participants were asked to consider the issues that prevented staff from undertaking scholarly activity or which made such activity problematic [Fig. 5]. The lack of dedicated annualised allocations of time to support individuals undertaking scholarly activity (reduced contact time or more flexible holiday arrangements, for example) is regarded as a key issue. The great majority of respondents noted the tension between the demands of the standard FE teaching contract with its classroom focus, and the expectations surrounding the development of an HE culture. This leads to a proliferation of activity being undertaken outside formal working hours which is either not recorded at all by the institution or not measured in terms of its impact on teaching and learning.

*“....even with a reduction in teaching hours, the high baseline of 828 hours does not encourage uptake of scholarly activity during teaching semesters. Much is undertaken under the radar during non-teaching periods”*

This is explored in more in the next section. Other comments were also of interest and will be addressed further in Part 3, which will focus on examples of current practice in scholarly activity. Several respondents made the point that not all HE teaching staff are interested in scholarly activity. They enjoy teaching and are skilled practitioners but do not necessarily see themselves as academics. As one interviewee noted:

*“I do not think that someone who is research active is necessarily a better teacher of HE than someone who is up to date in their subject area and uses research informed*

*teaching practices for their students. It is a myth that good HE teachers need to be research active, it is much more important that staff are up to date with their reading in their subject area and understand the importance of teaching research skills to students.”*

Several interviewees made the point that many teaching staff do not feel confident about undertaking scholarly activity. Some may lack the application needed to sustain this whilst teaching for 800 hours a year. Respondents supported the concept of a “Good Practice” Guide, but also referred to the need for a means of developing a community of practice that somehow supported the development of scholarly activity undertaken in an FE setting. The impression gained from respondents was that partner universities are not seen as being closely involved in the development of scholarly activity: whilst there has been friction in the past over the perceived lack of “HE-ness” of FE staff delivering partner programmes, it appears that little has been done to promote the development of these attributes by the universities who challenge HE in FE staff during annual review meetings.

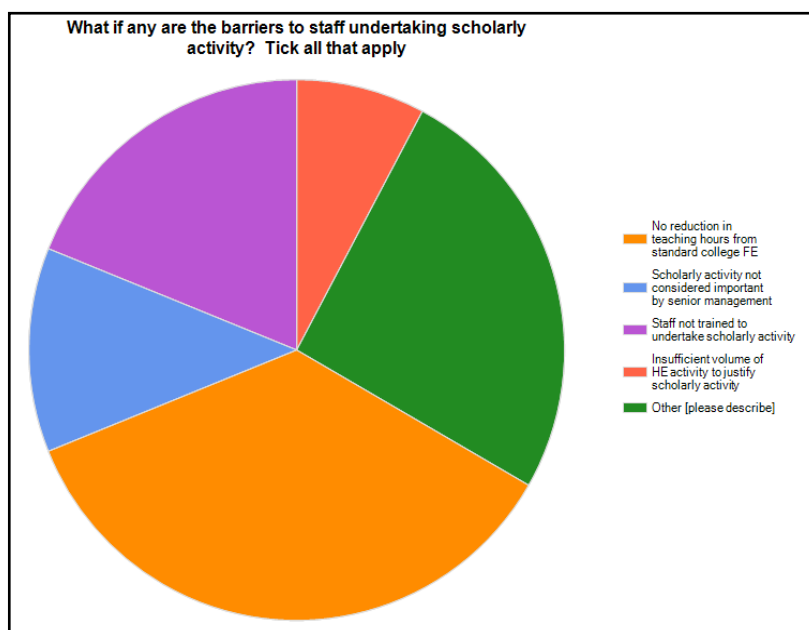


Figure 5. Barriers to scholarly activity

#### (g) Teaching Hours

The allocation of teaching hours to staff teaching at higher level varied considerably across the colleges participating in interviews. However, a number of caveats apply to the numbers of hours, not least the predominance of staff teaching across the spectrum of further and higher education programmes. Participants employed by small or medium providers of HE indicated that contractual (and actual) expectations of contact time fell in the range of 800 to 850 hours, providing an average expectation of 821 annualised teaching hours. Large volume providers of HE suggested that teaching hours fell in the range 621 – 864, recording an average expectation of 766 teaching hours per year. However, these numbers must not be taken at face value as

many hide a range of institutional responses to the external and operational drivers behind scholarly activity.

There are often mechanisms within staff development activity, for example, which compensate and create a difference for HE teaching staff. These include special HE events where a complete day or in many case more than one day is dedicated to HE matters. Many have recorded close involvement with external speakers, the Higher Education Academy and other bodies who have supported their HE staff development. The involvement of partner HEI's with these events is notably low key.

Whilst survey data indicated that 55% of colleges support reduced contact for their HE practitioners, 82% indicated that staff continue to undertake scholarly activity in their own time. This infers that for 27% of providers the reductions in teaching commitment is inadequate to support the levels or quantity of scholarly activity deemed appropriate to the teaching and learning situation (whether by the college or by the member of staff), or to the professional development of staff. In practice, there may never be enough free time to carry out scholarly activity, however benign the view taken by the college managers. Institutional requirements for fitness for purpose may be at variance with the individual's concern to ensure that they project what is perceived to be the expected professional image of an HE lecturer to university partners and/or to give the time that they would want to give to a personal interest in a particular subject area. Others, as is noted below, argue that it is impossible to find the time required to mark undergraduate essays and undertake scholarly activity within the constraints of an FE contract.

A small minority of participants provided different contracts and pay scales for teachers teaching only on HE programmes. Such providers also reported the specialist nature of their provision and/or the physical separation of the HE provision from FE activity.

The University and College Union has also taken an interest in scholarly activity undertaken by those teaching HE in FE colleges. In a paper published in September 2013<sup>5</sup> the union noted that most of this work was undertaken out of hours but acknowledged that there was no simple solution for staff working to a standard FE contract. Their research found that in many colleges there was a degree of flexibility around the interpretation of the standard contract that recognised the demands of teaching HE students and also the expectations of the QAA.

*"The vast majority of respondents felt that is clear that there are a range of informal arrangements within their institutions which are not transparent, Similarly, whilst many respondents stated that their organisations did not give explicit time allocations for scholarly activity, some tutors described sympathetic managers with whom they were able to work out individual agreements."*

UCU reports the potential hostility of those teaching on FE courses to any negotiations for different terms for those teaching at higher levels. Many FE staff,

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<sup>5</sup> Scholarly activity in HE in FE – towards a better practice model. UCU 2013



such as those who teach students with learning difficulties or disabilities, for example, would argue that they have an equal need for a reduced teaching load. Referring to the blurred lines between CPD, professional updating and scholarly activity, UCU notes, *“responses also suggested a strong sense that managers often conflate scholarly activity with CPD which is typically generic and college provided”*.

(h) The nature of scholarly activity

In both the survey and the interviews, some participants reported a lack of understanding on the part of senior managers about the nature of scholarly activity. This was perceived as a barrier in terms of staff perceptions and actions. As examples of this, respondents mentioned situations where staff did not have a clear, shared definition of scholarly activity, or where their own perception was that scholarly activity was equated to formal research. A lack of admin support also created difficulties: several interviewees who had previously taught in universities made the point that if HE was about teaching, admin and research, the teaching and admin components of college-based HE were far higher than was the case in HEIs. This imbalance meant that scholarly activity inevitably took place in the teacher's own time.

*“Staff at Colleges in charge of programmes have a much greater admin load than their counterparts at University. Less admin time could lead to more scholarly activity”*

The need to submit a bid (internal or otherwise) for funding or time allocations could provide a barrier, despite being intended as a supporting mechanism. Many staff saw the time involved in preparing the bid as a call on time that they did not have. In some cases, lack of experience in writing bids may also contribute to this burden.

(i) Recording the evidence and impact of scholarly activity

As noted previously, there is a large variation in delivery hours in the range 500-848 hours per annum and very mixed practice in the sector with regards to remitted hours or compulsory staff development activity. Where there is remitted time or robust staff development opportunities, scholarly activity is taking place. However, the recording and impact measurement of scholarly activity is mixed and emerged as the least-developed element of this survey. In this respect, little appears to have changed since the earlier 2010 survey.

*“The College is currently working on a scholarly activity policy. At present activity is not formally assessed or reported on. A great deal of practitioner led activity takes place but the College has not previously categorized it as scholarly activity. A staff development event is planned for the summer to produce some working definitions as a basis for the policy.”*

Amongst the more novel practices recorded are the use of Wiki's and Facebook pages to not only document scholarly activity but to provide real interaction and reflection. Both Online solutions provide a history line such that activity can be

recorded and output related directly to individual courses. Assuming the right level of oversight/moderation, this may be a useful approach.

With respect to the status of HE within an institution, responses suggest that where HE matters are reported separately from FE to the SMT and Governing Body, the status and hence institutional support for HE activity is much stronger and more proactive. As noted earlier, a document which appears to have gone into disuse in a number of colleges is the HE Strategy, possibly undermining the importance of HE activity unless this embedded by other means in other policies.

Colleges which have established an HE Conference describe the planning and running of these events as being very worthwhile. Not only is it recognised as securing a high profile for HE activity in the college but it also provides a platform for external speakers and, through workshops, realistic opportunities for scholarly activity and research. The recording of this is most often through traditional media (quite often made available to the public) or the more innovative methods described previously. Student involvement is underdeveloped in this context but a few respondents describe students who are undertaking teacher training and Bachelor degree programmes being able to present their research and take part at such conferences.

During the survey and subsequent interviews, participants reported a wide range of instruments and situations designed to enable institutional or professional evaluation of the amount of scholarly activity undertaken and its subsequent impact. This assumes a definition of scholarly activity - where no definition is reported or published, it remains unclear how any institution can form a view of the quantity or level of scholarly activity undertaken by individuals. Similar difficulties exist in recording the impact of scholarly activity where it is not clear what activity has been undertaken. The third issue arises where staff undertake much of their scholarly activity outside their formal working hours and thus the activity remains unseen and/or unrecorded and unmeasured.

Participants reported the mechanisms through which managers could reflect upon scholarly activity that was formally supported by the college. [Fig. 6]. Further mechanisms included: the recording of scholarly activity through social media, as referred to above; the evidencing of activity through the production of journal articles, external conference presentations or newsletters; through inclusion in validation documents, periodic reviews and reflective reports; sharing good practice at internal college events. Many referred to comments by external examiners, seeing these as a means of validating staff scholarly activity.

However, the existence of these mechanisms, although suggesting that a range of individuals at a range of levels in the college might be interested in scholarly activity, does not automatically mean that measures exist to analyse the impact of that activity. Nor do they differentiate between continued professional development and scholarly activity or take account of the scholarly activity undertaken outside the remit of the formal policies and procedures.

Impact can be defined as the reportable, quantifiable *difference, or potential difference*, that a project or program makes to people's lives. It reports benefits to society as a whole. Within college-based HE, the emphasis is on the benefit to the students rather than institutional or personal gain. Any assessment of the impact of scholarly activity will therefore want to include what was undertaken, the difference that has occurred as a result of the activity, the benefits to students and why this is important.

Whilst some colleges may well be taking this approach, responses from some interviewees suggested that impact was often measured in terms of a report or as a quantified description (meetings attended, presentations made, etc.) Descriptions of what has been done or of the funding sources used also provide context but not impact. What is needed – but which our survey found lacking – were references to processes which revealed

- Knowledge gained and how that knowledge is applied.
- Behaviour or attitude changes.
- Practice or situations changes.
- Results of those behaviour, attitude, practice or situation changes<sup>6</sup>

**How is the impact of scholarly activity on teaching and learning measured or reported?**  
Please tick all that apply.

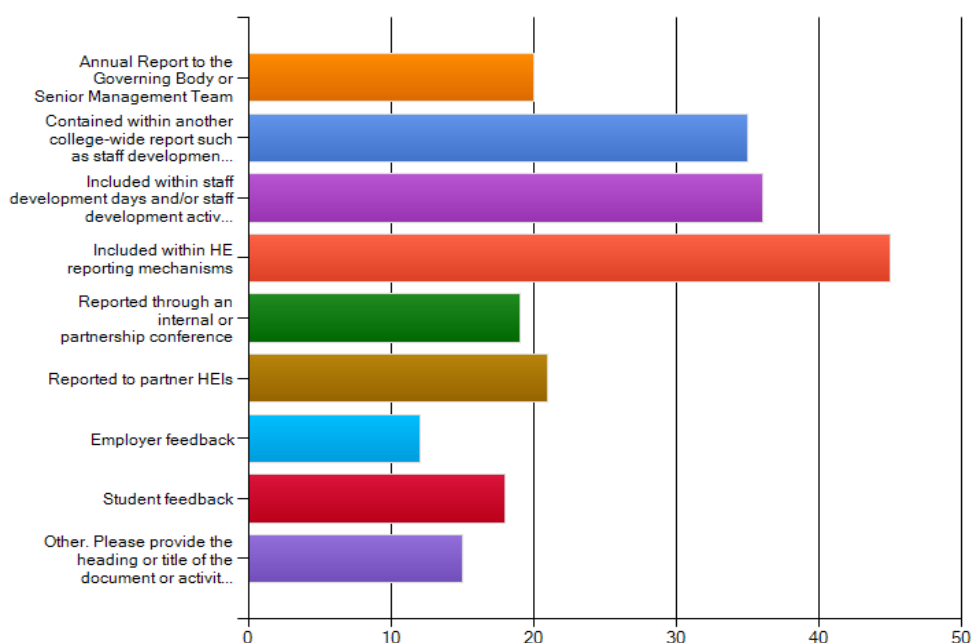


Figure 6. Impact measurement.

### 3. Developments in Scholarly Activity

Participants were asked to consider the ways in which their college had developed its engagement with scholarly activity over the previous five years. [Fig.7] The feedback

<sup>6</sup> i:/EARS/whatisimpact.wpd

from participants suggests that there has been forward movement in terms of support for and recognition of scholarly activity within colleges.

*“An audit of activity has been conducted, and has proved revealing both in terms of the activities undertaken and the attitudes of departments and individual staff to the policies implemented at that time; which again has led to the change in support currently being developed.”*

Over half the 60 respondents indicated that their college had put into place a new approach to scholarly activity. In the survey, 30% of participants indicated that senior management support for scholarly activity was the feature that had impacted most positively on improving the perceptions and actions of teachers within their colleges. Secondary drivers were reported as being ‘external drivers’ and ‘structural change within colleges’; both of which were perceived to have an impact on strategic drives initiated by the senior management team. It was clear from the responses received that the process of application for FDAP or TDAP had galvanized previously neutral senior management teams into developing mechanisms which promoted scholarly activity. These included funding sources and mentoring schemes for teaching staff, as well as a review of teaching contracts.

A surprisingly small number of respondents cited financial constraints as a barrier to college engagement with scholarly activity. They considered that the economic climate had a significant impact on current and future teaching hours and on the amount of funding available to support scholarly activity and continuous professional development. However, fewer than 20% of respondents cited financial issues, and only three of the sixty participants actually brought this to fore through subsequent comments.

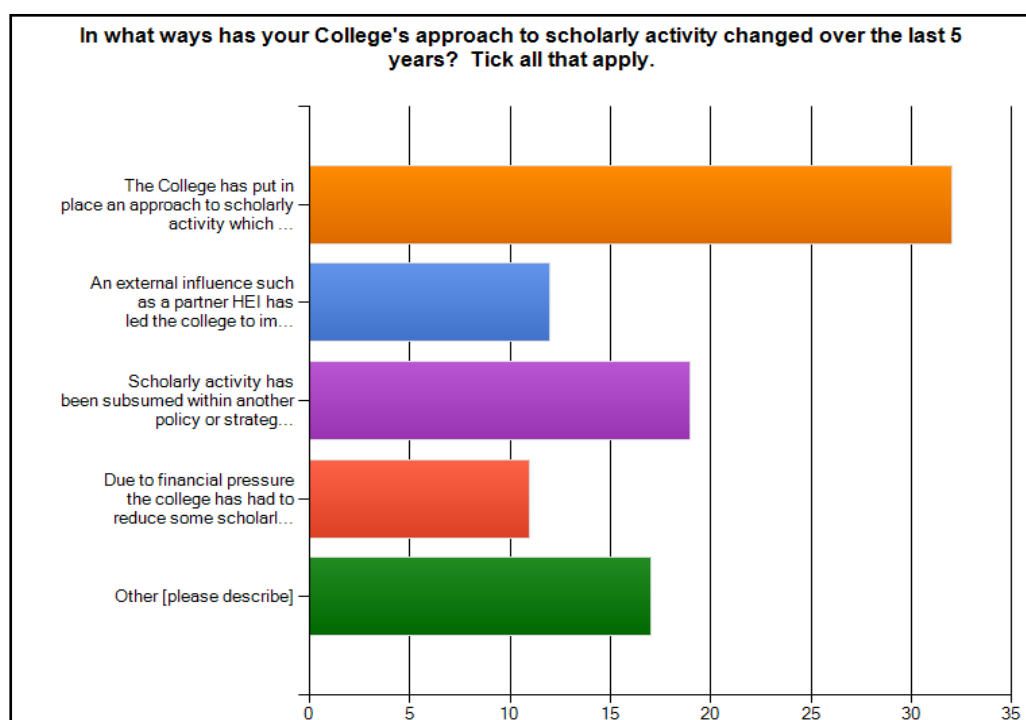


Figure 7. Changes to the approach to scholarly activity

## **4. Comment and Discussion**

Three broad themes emerged from the research findings. These are:

### **(i) Changes in the way colleges define scholarly activity**

The definitions of scholarly activity provided by the majority of participants, when compared with those presented by King and Widdowson (2010), indicate an evolving recognition of the value of a range of academic and vocational practices within college based higher education. However, in some areas little has changed over the past three years.

The on-going need for greater consideration of the potential difference between the continued professional development long embraced by the FE sector and an approach that could be more appropriately considered as scholarly activity was brought into significantly sharper focus by the introduction of the IQER in 2006 and FDAP in 2007. These radically altered the debate, as did the QAA Guidance Note of 2013<sup>7</sup>

The process of IQER review and subsequent QAA reports offered a means of learning about what other colleges were doing – ie the experience of college-based peers, rather than university partners. Colleges applying for FDAP also raised concerns as to the definition and application of scholarly activity as a part of that process. It could be proposed that a national system of review and scrutiny has driven the recognition and validation of scholarly practice as adopted within college based HE, leading to further formalisation and adoption of such practice. FDAP prompted a debate about what characterizes scholarly activity in a vocational context. HE staff in colleges are now more likely to be involved in scholarly activity as a result.

However, not all institutions clearly demarcate CPD from scholarly activity or have a description of what scholarly activity entails for FE as opposed to HE staff. A further issue arising from the lack of a clear definition of scholarly activity is that of measurability. If scholarly activity is deemed to have an impact on the learning experience of students studying at higher level, it would seem appropriate that such activity is targeted, measurable and suitably evaluated. It is therefore not a wholly independent activity, as in universities, but an institutional one. This purpose can only be realised where there is a clear definition of scholarly activity in each college – or indeed, each university. Impact measures are also needed, and will ideally be shared by all HE programmes within the college.

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<sup>7</sup> Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: Expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding powers and for Taught degree-awarding powers. QAA.

## **(ii) Strategic engagement with scholarly activity**

The way in which colleges chose to formalise their understanding of scholarly activity was reported as being variable, ranging from adoption in the college's HE Strategy to inclusion within broader college policies. Not all colleges reported a separate HE strategy.

The greater tendency of larger providers of higher level study to define scholarly activity in the context of the HE strategy suggests recognition of the strategic (and financial) importance of their status as HE and FE providers. Spelling out the principles of scholarship and the way in which the college promotes this in a high-level strategic document suggests the support of senior management, as well as a wider awareness within the college of the importance of such activity. This is particularly true when HE is dispersed amongst the subject departments.

Where scholarly activity is defined within a college strategy for Higher Education and the actions supporting the strategy are also set out, colleges are able to refute the accusations of managerialism purported by Feather (2012)<sup>8</sup>. Effective strategic alignment of HE with other policies serves to illustrate the drivers relevant to the college and its HE provision, as well as promoting support structures and minimising barriers to high quality HE.

## **(iii) Drivers, enablers and barriers to engagement with scholarly activity**

The findings from the enquiry highlight the imperatives of the journey towards the attainment of awarding powers; partnerships; validation and the process of review (by QAA, or through professional bodies) as drivers of scholarly activity amongst HE staff.

Further to these external drivers, respondents reported the benefits of the leadership provided through Governing Body and senior management support and the effectiveness of structures that align to frame the processes to drive forward scholarly activity.

Support for scholarly activity has been derived from membership of the HE Academy (and increased awareness of the UK Professional Standards Framework) and through engagement with the bidding processes available through the Academy, LSIS and JISC.

The main barrier to engagement with scholarly activity is predominantly a lack of time. The variability of the annualised teaching hours allocated to staff teaching on higher education programmes is complicated by contracts, management guidelines, and the differing teaching years across the HE and FE boundaries. Where staff are given remission for teaching at a higher level, the expectation that they will meet their reduced annualised teaching load, across a shorter academic year, may mean

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<sup>8</sup> See Paper 1. Feather, D., 2011. Culture of HE in FE – exclave or enclave? Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 16(1), pp.15-30.

that their weekly teaching timetable remains as that of a colleague teaching FE. This issue was reported by UCU (2013, p1) who wrote that “*one third of colleges expected staff to undertake scholarly activity in their own time*”.

Levels of skill with regard to scholarly activity also vary considerably, as does the concept of good practice. Consideration should thus be given to means of collaboration; working with agencies such as the Education and Training Foundation, the HE Academy or JISC suggest a way forward, as does greater sharing of experience within membership groups such as MEG, AoC, Landex, etc.

A number of respondents also indicated that administrative workloads were a significant barrier to engagement with scholarly activity. Colleges may wish to consider the significance of this.

The importance of a necessary minimum critical mass of HE also emerged from the survey. Several respondents from colleges with low volumes of HE made the point that as this was a very minor component of the overall college offer, it was difficult to make the case for scholarly activity amongst those who taught both HE and FE. This raises a number of strategic issues for colleges with small numbers of HE students, and questions current national approaches to HE delivery. Colleges with medium to large volumes of HE are more able to develop an HE ethos and community amongst their teaching staff.

## **5. Conclusions**

These survey findings will contribute directly to the next stage of our research, which is the development of a Practice Guide supporting scholarly activity. As noted earlier in this report, a separate and future piece of research is needed to look at the relationship between staff who teach HE on a PT basis and their contribution to scholarly activity within their institutions. Similarly, scholarly activity undertaken by those teaching Non-Prescribed HE is also worthy of future attention, being largely delivered within the subject departments and much more closely linked to the expectations of professional bodies.

The Practice Guide will take account of the views of our 60 survey respondents. It will consider the following questions:

From the teacher's viewpoint:

- How can staff develop and maintain the three roles which characterise the HE in FE teacher – the current teaching professional, the former industry professional who is still current, and the individual who is pursuing scholarly activity in their own time? How can this tripartite identity be nurtured and celebrated?
- How can colleges help staff, particularly those entering teaching who are already qualified and experienced in another profession, to undertake scholarly activity?
- How can colleges build staff confidence about undertaking scholarly activity?
- Do college managers understand (and harness) the various motivations for undertaking scholarly activity? This ranges from regulatory requirements to professional development to a personal drive to learn more about their subject.

- Will college managers support HE teachers to teach their students how to undertake research and possibly engage with them on their “research”?
- The relatively small number of HE teaching staff in each college can lead to a sense of isolation, with each teacher evolving their own approach to teaching and to scholarly activity. Is the development of a community of practice a way forward? How does this happen?
- How can senior management support for scholarly activity be embedded in the college culture and in college policies?
- Who or what defines scholarly activity?

From the college perspective:

- Is a critical mass of HE necessary before scholarly activity can thrive?
- Should colleges regard the sole purpose of scholarly activity as being the continuous improvement of teaching and learning? Is it more than this?
- How can scholarly activity be captured, evaluated and recorded?
- Can colleges gain an enhanced reputation as a result of higher-level work with industry based on the scholarly activity of its staff? What arrangements must be in place in order to promote and sustain this?
- Is there a need for a formal framework for scholarly activity in college-based HE? Would this foster the distinctiveness of this type of scholarship as well as show how to do it and how to measure its impact?
- Is there a need for a community of HE in FE practitioners? The HE staff in a college are often few in number and can feel isolated from their HE peers in other colleges. They may also teach a mixture of HE and FE courses. Would the establishment of such a community help to grow the identity of the teacher as the tripartite professional?
- Should colleges reach out to external academics, either teachers working in colleges with more established HE provision or in partner universities, to advise on this process? How would this be funded?
- How might colleges which offer HE gain access to other external sources of funding for scholarly activity? Are partnerships with businesses and universities feasible?
- Is Higher Level Skills Transfer, rather than Knowledge Transfer, a route forward for college-based HE?
- How can colleges help HE teaching staff to locate Invitations To Tender or more traditional academic research opportunities and then also write persuasive funding bids?
- Can colleges provide more administrative support for HE teaching staff, in order to have more time for curriculum-related tasks, including scholarly activity?